

At the Service of Others

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Raymond studied French and German Linguistics and Literature. In 1996 he moved to Germany to complete his studies in Linguistics. Afterwards, he was admitted into the International College “Sedes Sapientiae” as a seminarian from the diocese of Awka. He has completed studies in Philosophy at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross and is currently studying Theology.

My presentation centres on the importance of knowing oneself to be a child of God and the light provided by the teachings of Blessed Josemaría to see the priesthood as a path of service to all humanity.

The youth have often been accused of being too idealistic, of harbouring unrealistic expectations and aiming at unrealisable goals. Perhaps, put this way, I exaggerate a bit. It is nonetheless something commonly believed. This desire to make the world (society, culture, everything) better is common to the youth of all times. You only have to take a look at history to acknowledge the fact that the youth have always been the proximate cause of major societal or political changes, some of which, I must add, have unfortunately not always been positively channelled. It is here I come to the main point of my presentation, which refers to the theme of the workshop: Acquiring Civic Responsibility. I shall draw a lot on my own personal experiences.

Awareness of one’s social responsibilities is something that to a large extent depends on the personal formation a person has received. Today with the mass media and a more all-encompassing education, the youth are incredibly aware of what is going on around them. This refers to both developing and developed countries. The problem is: What do we, the youth, make of this? What part do we have to play? Can we do anything to make things better? If so, how are we to set about this? Depending on the social background and formation they’ve received, many of the youth I’ve known have given different answers to these and similar questions.

One of the best known summaries of the teaching of Blessed Josemaría is: Sanctification of one’s work; of self through one’s work; of others through one’s

work. This is something very concrete. This clarity and concreteness about how to live a holy life, putting it within the reach of the ordinary man was a source of joy to me. As a young boy, I shared and still share the ideal common to all youth. And here I saw a way to make a reality of that which I most desired. The joy and peace stemming from the discovery of the true sense of my life filled me with deep happiness and peace. I knew why I needed to study; why I had to take interest in the lot of those around me; in fact, I came to realise what constituted the *basic motivation* behind what I did everyday — *my divine filiation*. Difficulties arise certainly in everyday life, but when one knows why it is worthwhile making the effort, one does not give up. All this is something I've found replicated in different but fundamentally the same ways, in the lives of many youths who one way or another have come to know the teachings of Blessed Josemaría.

As I mentioned earlier, all youth harbour in themselves the desire to be of use, to better the world around them. But this desire is facing in the present time many challenges that threaten to eliminate its noble expression. I intend to present only two important (in my opinion) difficulties the youth are facing and show how in my experience, the specific teaching of Blessed Josemaría has offered an answer to these to many youths I know.

In many third world countries, due to the blatant existential difficulties that face the youth on a daily basis, they are not lacking so much in motivation as in the right channelling of it. For instance, someone who cheats in exams knows he or she needs to have good results but does not apply the right means to achieving this aim. This ambition can be rightly directed. Or again, engaging in public activities, putting oneself in the forefront for personal gain. There arises the important question: How can the youth be helped to make their ambition a noble one? It does not suffice to offer purely human and rational justifications. Something more is needed to eradicate the self-seeking and selfish motivations that threaten to drown the deep interior noble ideals that they carry within themselves.

Some youths have at times asked the following questions: Why should I be the one to bear responsibility towards others? Why shouldn't others do it for a change? The society has the responsibility to provide others and me with basic necessities of all sorts; and the so-called 'It-is-none-of-my-business' syndrome. This is prevalent amongst youth today, especially in well-to-do countries where the social infrastructure is stable and efficient. Dealing with these, I've noticed that their greatest problem is finding a tangible reason that can justify the effort to contribute something to their immediate society (family, friends, school, work etc.) and the motivation and interior strength to persevere in their undertaking to develop their talents, when they can apparently live a mediocre but basically care-free life on social security. Not finding satisfactory answers to this they give in to indifference or act for purely utilitarian motives. But since this goes against their

deepest sentiments, they lack joy, peace and the authentic freedom that comes with being consistent with one's own self (i.e. lacking in interior unity). They then search for self-fulfilment in many unfortunate and negative activities.

In Blessed Josemaría's teachings we see that his main message goes to the heart of all these problems, some of which were mentioned above. On the one hand, it does not suffice to encourage youth to take note of what is going wrong in the society where they are, or to take initiatives in acting for the benefit of those around them with a sense of responsibility. There has to be an interior motivation strong enough to overcome the inevitable obstacles that they will encounter. Blessed Escrivá de Balaguer always repeated that for the apostolate, and in this case, taking seriously one's civil responsibilities, a life of intimate union with Our Lord is indispensable. In all the anecdotes recounted above, resounds the aspiration [...] "make the foundation of my personality, my identification with you [...]" of Blessed Josemaría in his sermon on the Epiphany in *Christ is Passing By*¹. Only in living this identification with Christ acquired through the sacraments (when one knows oneself to be a child of God, and lives this experience on a daily basis), can the youth be motivated to take on themselves responsibilities of a civic nature and maintain the right intentions behind these. Only thus can they persevere in such undertakings, find the fulfilment of those ideals that fill their hearts, and experience the deep joy of being able to contribute to the good of the society around them, in this world that belongs to their Father in Heaven.

¹ Cfr. *Christ is Passing By*, 31.