

# **One Like Us on the Way to Sainthood**

I met Dora in 1995, when domestic work was far from my life and even farther from my mind. Dora and I happened to coincide on two occasions in particular in a period of about two months time. This however was enough for me to realize how she was, how she lived, for whom and why she had spent her days giving of herself to the full. There was no need for long explanations to grasp the meaning of her existence. Dora knew the meaning of her life and the path to achieve it to the full.

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People like this attract others. They don't need to demonstrate anything, nor show that they are better or worse than others. Nor do they need to justify what they are doing with their life because it's precisely their life that speaks for itself. But there is something that demonstrates why the life of such a person — in this case, that of Dora del Hoyo\* — has left its mark on the lives of so many people. I'll start with how it has affected my own.

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When I speak of "household work," I'm referring to caring for a family home, the place where people can relax and rejuvenate, doing so with professional outlook.

While little appreciated today, this is the task to which Dora dedicated herself, not as a hobby or as a pastime but as what it is: professional work. Dora didn't feel herself to be inferior, because she wasn't less than anyone, nor did she consider herself a victim, because having been able to choose other possibilities in life, she preferred to work at making a home of the place

in which she found herself in each moment.

There are those who triumph in life by being good athletes or by writing a book. There are those who go places for having discovered something that revolutionized an industry or technology... but there are also people who triumph for the mere fact of knowing how to be present where they are needed. They show in this way that they have been successful with the profound meaning their lives hold.

That's why Dora, when she arrived to work as a domestic employee in the first residence of Opus Dei in 1943, while she considered leaving due to the amount of work to be done (they were about 100 residents), a serious lack of resources (the situation of post-war Spain) as well as a lack of experience on the part of those directing the residence, she did not

leave because on her interior scale what weighed more was the possibility of helping with her know-how those whom she saw facing such difficulties. But Dora not only chose to be, at that time, in the right place. In this task, she also discovered a call from God. And from that point onward, up until her death on January 10, 2004, she sought to be in the place where she was most needed. Knowing how to be where one is needed seems to me something indispensable for making sense of one's life.

I like to value the life of this woman who took responsibility for the well-being of her family and - with her example - many other families as well. She did her work like any other normal person: washing clothes, she ironed especially well; she would cook while she was cleaning the kitchen, drying cutlery and putting them away as best she could, and,

when she thought it was necessary, she would stay working at night without anyone asking her to.

For her, there was a constant incentive to improve the quality of her work, as an expression of her affection for her family. Dora always went ahead without making a big fuss. She knew the state-of-the-art machines and which installations were the most apt for the different tasks. That's why her opinion was a valuable one. Indeed, hers was the first opinion to take into account when trying to improve domestic working conditions, although she had not worked in a major hotel chain, nor had she done a Masters in Cuisine.

What comes to mind are words of St. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer: *"It does not matter what type of work we do, provided it is honest. Which is more important, being a professor at*

*the Sorbonne or doing housework? When, referring to the cleaners who work at the University of Navarra, I say that I don't know if their work is equally or even more important than that of the Board of Governors, I am not joking. I am simply repeating what I have always thought. The task of one of these women, who comes with joy and does everything for love, can be heroic, not at all humdrum, and certainly more effective than that of a great researcher whose only ambition is to see himself in print. I'll make the point: which is better? It depends on the love and sacrifice you put into your work. But do it self-sacrificingly, happily, cheerfully, willingly – otherwise it would be better not to do it at all."*

Was St. Josemaria thinking of Dora perhaps when he said these words? Could it be that the very normality of her life – and of what she did each day – is precisely what makes it

heroic? Dora knew the meaning of her life but even more than that, she had discovered the path by which to achieve it to the full - her professional work. And with her, many other people. Myself included.

*\* Mons. Javier Echevarría, bishop prelate of Opus Dei, presided over the beginning of the canonical process over the life and virtues of Dora del Hoyo. The act was celebrated in the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, in Rome on June 18, 2012. Dora del Hoyo was born in de Huérgano (León, Spain), in 1914. After finishing her primary education, she began working in domestic work, something that she carried out with professionalism and passion up until a few weeks before her death on January 10, 2004.*

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