

'Guadalupe had the ability to see virtues in us'

Chela Torres said attending the Mass felt like a dream.

On May 18, Torres and her fellow Opus Dei members gathered to watch her old friend and mentor, Guadalupe Ortiz, beatified in Madrid, Spain.

"It was like I knew everyone there," Torres said. "It felt like one big family was gathered."

Today, Torres lives out her vocation in Toronto, doing many of the daily tasks of hospitality at a student residence near the University of Toronto.

In many ways, her work is ordinary but she believes it is through sanctifying it that it becomes vital to the students and their success. This is something Ortiz had taught her as a teenager.

"I will always remember her cheerfulness and the cheerfulness she did her work with. She always had a smile on her face," said Torres.

Guadalupe Ortiz de Landázuri Fernández de Heredia was one of the first women to join St. Josemaria Escriva and Opus Dei in 1944 as a lay numerary at 27 years old. Ortiz died on July 16, 1975.

In 1950, St. Escriva suggested she go to Mexico where she could begin apostolic work for Opus Dei. There, she founded a training centre for young women, where Torres and Ortiz would eventually meet.



Chela Torres recalls her friendship, and the life lessons, taught by her mentor Bl. Guadalupe Ortiz.Katherine Szojka, Special to Grandin Media

At 15, Torres was in a situation not uncommon for young women in Mexico at the time. School was no longer an option for her, travelling alone was practically unheard of, and it looked like her only two options would be marriage or religious life. But God had other plans for her.

“When I was growing up there was the attitude that if you wanted to be holy you joined a religious order,” said Torres. “There was not an understanding of secular institutions and holiness-was-for-everyone yet.”

Torres’ journey to Ortiz and Opus Dei began when a family friend was visiting Rome.

“My family had a friend who was a priest, and when he went to Rome he went to say the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square with the pope and he heard a woman speaking Spanish behind him,” said Torres.

“The woman happened to be Guadalupe and he told her about me. She then told him about a training program she had set up in Mexico City.”

It was several hours away from her home but she was drawn to the story of Opus Dei and the woman her family friend told her about.

At the time, young women never travelled alone, so Ortiz had arranged for

Torres to travel with several other women. When she missed the meet-up time at the bus station, she thought that she missed her chance.

But Ortiz did not forget her. Torres received a letter from Ortiz a few weeks later and arrangements were made for the trip to the centre.

“Guadalupe (Ortiz) had the quality of not forgetting souls, and she didn’t forget me,” she said.

Once at the centre, Torres was trained in domestic duties, as well as educated and formed further in doctrine and prayer. Torres did her daily tasks alongside other women every day. Despite only being 15 at the time, Torres felt at home and realized she had discovered her vocation.

“I was young and afraid and it was the first time I had left my family,” said Torres, “But Guadalupe (Ortiz) was always cheerful and it made me forget I was afraid. I was happy there.”

One lesson that Torres continues to carry today is a saying that St. Escriva had taught Ortiz and then her. He said the donkey carrying Jesus did not see who he was carrying, neither does a donkey pulling the millstone see the outcome of his work, but nonetheless, his work is indispensable.

“I learned that when people see virtues in us, you know, it is not us but God’s grace working through us, and Guadalupe had that ability,” said Torres.

– Katherine Szojka, 18, is a Grade 12 student at St. Gabriel Online School in St. Albert and a Youth Speak News columnist. This column was originally published by The Catholic Register.