Romana is the bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei. These pages reprint documents of the Holy See directed to the entire Church, as well as those referring specifically to Opus Dei. It also provides news about the activities of the Prelate and the Prelature in the service of the Church and the local dioceses. Brief articles are included about some of the apostolic initiatives fostered by faithful of the Prelature within their profession and in society at large in their endeavor to infuse a Christian spirit into the secular sphere.

The contents of the bulletin do not provide an entire picture of Opus Dei’s activities, since the Prelature’s fundamental apostolate is that which its faithful carry out personally, guided by the Christian formation and spiritual assistance they receive from the Prelature. This apostolate takes place in the context of each person’s professional, social, and family setting, and its variety and creativity naturally cannot be reduced to a set of statistics.

Romana’s publication fulfills an express desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá. In choosing the title Romana for the future bulletin, St. Josemaría wished to emphasize the catholic and universal character of Opus Dei’s pastoral mission.
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EDITORIAL
A Sowing of Peace

For the centennial of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo (March 11, 1914 — March 11, 2014) and his approaching beatification (in Madrid, September 27), many people throughout the world have spoken about the life of this exemplary pastor, described by those who knew him as a man of peace who spread peace.

The peace of Bishop del Portillo, the peace that Christians have and spread, is the result of a battle, as St. Josemaría often said, “of the intimate ascetical struggle which each Christian must keep up against everything in his life which does not belong to God. He is called to overcome pride, sensuality, selfishness, superficiality and meanness of heart. It is useless to call for exterior calm if there is no calm in men’s consciences, in the center of their souls.”[1] To sow peace, Christians need to strive to transform sin and selfishness into realities of love and of service, and thus help all men and women rediscover the deep meaning of the treasure of freedom.

For peace to endure, it also needs the support of a justice enlivened by the love that flows from Christ’s heart. Those who know themselves to be children of God discover “brothers and sisters” in other men and women. As Pope Frances recently said: “True brotherhood among people presupposes and demands a transcendent Fatherhood.”[2]

“The future Blessed Alvaro del Portillo had deep in his heart a longing for peace in the world,” stressed Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, the vicar general of Opus Dei, during the conference entitled Vir fidelis multum laudabitur, held in Rome on the occasion of the centennial of Alvaro del Portillo, which we are reporting on in this issue. Msgr. Ocáriz recalled what St. Josemaría’s successor said to the faithful of Opus Dei: “If you do apostolate, there will be more and more souls who follow Christ, the Prince of Peace. And Christ’s kingdom will spread in the world and the world will have pax Christi in regno Christi: peace for the poor, and for the rich. And if we are better Christians, aware of our obligation to do apostolate, social justice will come about, and non-Christians, drawn by our example, will realize that besides justice, charity is also needed, which reaches much further; it is the oil that anoints and gives warmth to everything, because if one is charitable in a dry and cold way, it is not the charity of Christ.”[3]
But more than by his preaching, Bishop del Portillo showed by his deeds that it is possible to sow a peace grounded on charity and justice. Thanks to his stimulus and encouragement, dozens of social initiatives have sprung up throughout the world. We could mention here, as an example, Monkole Hospital in Kinshasa, Congo; the Siramá Center for the Professional Training of Women, in San Salvador, El Salvador; and the Banilad Center for Professional Development, in Cebu City, the Philippines.

As his beatification approaches, we ask God to continue granting the Church pastors to the measure of his own heart. Then Christians will have the joy of spreading the peace of Christ in the most varied circumstances of daily life: *veritatem facientes in caritate* (*Eph* 4:15), proclaiming the truth in charity.


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Holy See

- The Roman Pontiff
- The Roman Curia
Homily at the Celebration of Palm Sunday, St. Peter’s Square (April 13, 2014)

This week begins with the festive procession with olive branches: the entire populace welcomes Jesus. The children and young people sing, praising Jesus.

But this week continues in the mystery of Jesus’ death and his resurrection. We have just listened to the Passion of our Lord. We might well ask ourselves just one question: Who am I? Who am I, before my Lord? Who am I, before Jesus who enters Jerusalem amid the enthusiasm of the crowd? Am I ready to express my joy, to praise him? Or do I stand back? Who am I, before the suffering Jesus?

We have just heard many, many names. The group of leaders, some priests, the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, who had decided to kill Jesus. They were waiting for the chance to arrest him. Am I like one of them?

We have also heard another name: Judas. Thirty pieces of silver. Am I like Judas? We have heard other names too: the disciples who understand nothing, who fell asleep while the Lord was suffering. Has my life fallen asleep? Or am I like the disciples, who did not realize what it was to betray Jesus? Or like that other disciple, who wanted to settle everything with a sword? Am I like them? Am I like Judas, who feigns loved and then kisses the Master in order to hand him over, to betray him? Am I a traitor? Am I like those people in power who hastily summon a tribunal and seek false witnesses: am I like them? And when I do these things, if I do them, do I think that in this way I am saving the people?

Am I like Pilate? When I see that the situation is difficult, do I wash my hands and dodge my responsibility, allowing people to be condemned — or condemning them myself?

Am I like that crowd which was not sure whether they were at a religious meeting, a trial or a circus, and then chose Barabbas? For them it was all the same: it was more entertaining to humiliate Jesus.
Am I like the soldiers who strike the Lord, spit on him, insult him, who find entertainment in humiliating him?

Am I like the Cyrenean, who was returning from work, weary, yet was good enough to help the Lord carry his cross?

Am I like those who walked by the cross and mocked Jesus: “He was so courageous! Let him come down from the cross and then we will believe in him!”. Mocking Jesus.…

Am I like those fearless women, and like the mother of Jesus, who were there, and who suffered in silence?

Am I like Joseph, the hidden disciple, who lovingly carries the body of Jesus to give it burial?

Am I like the two Marys, who remained at the Tomb, weeping and praying?

Am I like those leaders who went the next day to Pilate and said, “Look, this man said that he was going to rise again. We cannot let another fraud take place!”, and who block life, who block the tomb, in order to maintain doctrine, lest life come forth?

Where is my heart? Which of these persons am I like? May this question remain with us throughout the entire week.

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Address at the Ecumenical Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the meeting of Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem, Israel (May 25, 2014)

Your Holiness,

Dear Brother Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Basilica, which all Christians regard with the deepest veneration, my pilgrimage in the company of my beloved brother in Christ, His Holiness Bartholomaios, now reaches its culmination. We are making this pilgrimage in the footsteps of our venerable predecessors, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, who, with courage and docility to the Holy Spirit, made possible, fifty years ago, in this holy city of Jerusalem, an historic meeting between the Bishop of Rome and the Patriarch of Constantinople. I cordially greet all of you who are present. In a special way I express my heartfelt gratitude to those who have made this moment possible: His Beatitude Theophilos, who has welcomed us so graciously, His Beatitude Nourhan Manoogian and Father Pierbattista Pizzaballa.

It is an extraordinary grace to be gathered here in prayer. The empty tomb, that new garden grave where Joseph of Arimathea had reverently placed Jesus' body, is the place from which the proclamation of the resurrection begins: “Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead’” (Mt 28:5-7). This proclamation, confirmed by the testimony of those to whom the risen Lord appeared, is the heart of the Christian message, faithfully passed down from generation to generation, as the Apostle Paul, from the very beginning, bears witness: “I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4). This is the basis of the faith which unites us, whereby together we profess that Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Father and our sole Lord, “suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried; he descended into hell; on the third day he rose again from the dead” (Apostles’ Creed). Each of us, everyone baptized in Christ, has spiritually risen from this tomb, for in baptism all of us truly became members of the body of the One who is the Firstborn of all creation; we were buried together with him, so as to be raised up with him and to walk in newness of life (cf. Rom 6:4).
Let us receive the special grace of this moment. We pause in reverent silence before this empty tomb in order to rediscover the grandeur of our Christian vocation: we are men and women of resurrection, and not of death. From this place we learn how to live our lives, the trials of our Churches and of the whole world, in the light of Easter morning. Every injury, every one of our pains and sorrows, has been borne on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd who offered himself in sacrifice and thereby opened the way to eternal life. His open wounds are like the cleft through which the torrent of his mercy is poured out upon the world. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the basis of our hope, which is this: Christòs anesti! Let us not deprive the world of the joyful message of the resurrection! And let us not be deaf to the powerful summons to unity which rings out from this very place, in the words of the One who, risen from the dead, calls all of us “my brothers” (cf. Mt 28:10; Jn 20:17).

Clearly we cannot deny the divisions which continue to exist among us, the disciples of Jesus: this sacred place makes us even more painfully aware of how tragic they are. And yet, fifty years after the embrace of those two venerable Fathers, we realize with gratitude and renewed amazement how it was possible, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, to take truly significant steps towards unity. We know that much distance still needs to be travelled before we attain that fullness of communion which can also be expressed by sharing the same Eucharistic table, something we ardently desire; yet our disagreements must not frighten us and paralyze our progress. We need to believe that, just as the stone before the tomb was cast aside, so too every obstacle to our full communion will also be removed. This will be a grace of resurrection, of which we can have a foretaste even today. Every time we ask forgiveness of one another for our sins against other Christians and every time we find the courage to grant and receive such forgiveness, we experience the resurrection! Every time we put behind us our longstanding prejudices and find the courage to build new fraternal relationships, we confess that Christ is truly risen! Every time we reflect on the future of the Church in the light of her vocation to unity, the dawn of Easter breaks forth! Here I reiterate the hope already expressed by my predecessors for a continued dialogue with all our brothers and sisters in Christ, aimed at finding a means of exercising the specific ministry of the Bishop of Rome which, in fidelity to his mission, can be open to a new situation and can be,
in the present context, a service of love and of communion acknowledged by all (cf. John Paul II, Ut Unum Sint, 95-96).

Standing as pilgrims in these holy places, we also remember in our prayers the entire Middle East, so frequently and lamentably marked by acts of violence and conflict. Nor do we forget in our prayers the many other men and women who in various parts of our world are suffering from war, poverty and hunger, as well as the many Christians who are persecuted for their faith in the risen Lord. When Christians of different confessions suffer together, side by side, and assist one another with fraternal charity, there is born an ecumenism of suffering, an ecumenism of blood, which proves particularly powerful not only for those situations in which it occurs, but also, by virtue of the communion of the saints, for the whole Church as well. Those who kill, persecute Christians out of hatred, do not ask if they are Orthodox or Catholics: they are Christians. The blood of Christians is the same.

Your Holiness, beloved brother, dear brothers and sisters all, let us put aside the misgivings we have inherited from the past and open our hearts to the working of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love (cf. Rom 5:5), in order to hasten together towards that blessed day when our full communion will be restored. In making this journey, we feel ourselves sustained by the prayer which Jesus himself, in this city, on the eve of his passion, death and resurrection, offered to the Father for his disciples. It is a prayer which we ourselves in humility never tire to make our own: “that they may all be one… that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21). And when disunity makes us pessimistic, distrusting, fearful, let us all commend ourselves to the protection of the Holy Mother of God. When there is spiritual turmoil in the Christian soul, it is only by seeking refuge under her mantle that we can find peace. May the Holy Mother of God help us on this journey.

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Torna ai contenuti

Homily at the Holy Chrism Mass St. Peter’s Basilica (April 17, 2014)
Dear Brother Priests,

In the eternal “today” of Holy Thursday, when Christ showed his love for us to the end (cf. Jn 13:1), we recall the happy day of the institution of the priesthood, as well as the day of our own priestly ordination. The Lord anointed us in Christ with the oil of gladness, and this anointing invites us to accept and appreciate this great gift: the gladness, the joy of being a priest. Priestly joy is a priceless treasure, not only for the priest himself but for the entire faithful people of God: that faithful people from which he is called to be anointed and which he, in turn, is sent to anoint.

Anointed with the oil of gladness so as to anoint others with the oil of gladness. Priestly joy has its source in the Father’s love, and the Lord wishes the joy of this Love to be “ours” and to be “complete” (Jn 15:11). I like to reflect on joy by contemplating Our Lady, for Mary, the “Mother of the living Gospel, is a wellspring of joy for God’s little ones” (Evangelii Gaudium, 288). I do not think it is an exaggeration to say that priest is very little indeed: the incomparable grandeur of the gift granted us for the ministry sets us among the least of men. The priest is the poorest of men unless Jesus enriches him by his poverty, the most useless of servants unless Jesus calls him his friend, the most ignorant of men unless Jesus patiently teaches him as he did Peter, the frailest of Christians unless the Good Shepherd strengthens him in the midst of the flock. No one is more “little” than a priest left to his own devices; and so our prayer of protection against every snare of the Evil One is the prayer of our Mother: I am a priest because he has regarded my littleness (cf. Lk 1:48). And in that littleness we find our joy. Joy in our littleness!

For me, there are three significant features of our priestly joy. It is a joy which anoints us (not one which “greases” us, making us unctuous, sumptuous, and presumptuous), it is a joy which is imperishable and it is a missionary joy which spreads and attracts, starting backwards—with those farthest away from us.

A joy which anoints us. In a word: it has penetrated deep within our hearts, it has shaped them and strengthened them sacramentally. The signs of the ordination liturgy speak to us of the Church's maternal desire to pass on and share with others all that the Lord has given us: the laying on of hands, the anointing with sacred chrism, the clothing with sacred
vestments, the first consecration which immediately follows... Grace fills us to the brim and overflows, fully, abundantly and entirely in each priest. We are anointed down to our very bones... and our joy, which wells up from deep within, is the echo of this anointing.

An imperishable joy. The fullness of the Gift, which no one can take away or increase, is an unfailing source of joy: an imperishable joy which the Lord has promised no one can take from us (Jn 16:22). It can lie dormant, or be clogged by sin or by life’s troubles, yet deep down it remains intact, like the embers of a burnt log beneath the ashes, and it can always be renewed. Paul’s exhortation to Timothy remains ever timely: I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands (cf. 2 Tim 1:6).

A missionary joy. I would like especially to share with you and to stress this third feature: priestly joy is deeply bound up with God’s holy and faithful people, for it is an eminently missionary joy. Our anointing is meant for anointing God’s holy and faithful people: for baptizing and confirming them, healing and sanctifying them, blessing, comforting and evangelizing them.

And since this joy is one which only springs up when the shepherd is in the midst of his flock (for even in the silence of his prayer, the shepherd who worships the Father is with his sheep), it is a “guarded joy”, watched over by the flock itself. Even in those gloomy moments when everything looks dark and a feeling of isolation takes hold of us, in those moments of listlessness and boredom which at times overcome us in our priestly life (and which I too have experienced), even in those moments God’s people are able to “guard” that joy; they are able to protect you, to embrace you and to help you open your heart to find renewed joy.

A “guarded joy”: one guarded by the flock but also guarded by three sisters who surround it, tend it and defend it: sister poverty, sister fidelity and sister obedience.

The joy of priests is a joy which is sister to poverty. The priest is poor in terms of purely human joy. He has given up so much! And because he is poor, he, who gives so much to others, has to seek his joy from the Lord and from God’s faithful people. He doesn’t need to try to create it for
himself. We know that our people are very generous in thanking priests for their slightest blessing and especially for the sacraments. Many people, in speaking of the crisis of priestly identity, fail to realize that identity presupposes belonging. There is no identity — and consequently joy of life — without an active and unwavering sense of belonging to God’s faithful people (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, 268). The priest who tries to find his priestly identity by soul-searching and introspection may well encounter nothing more than “exit” signs, signs that say: exit from yourself, exit to seek God in adoration, go out and give your people what was entrusted to you, for your people will make you feel and taste who you are, what your name is, what your identity is, and they will make you rejoice in that hundredfold which the Lord has promised to those who serve him. Unless you “exit” from yourself, the oil grows rancid and the anointing cannot be fruitful. Going out from ourselves presupposes self-denial; it means poverty.

Priestly joy is a joy which is sister to fidelity. Not primarily in the sense that we are all “immaculate” (would that by God’s grace we were!), for we are sinners, but in the sense of an ever renewed fidelity to the one Bride, to the Church. Here fruitfulness is key. The spiritual children which the Lord gives each priest, the children he has baptized, the families he has blessed and helped on their way, the sick he has comforted, the young people he catechizes and helps to grow, the poor he assists... all these are the “Bride” whom he rejoices to treat as his supreme and only love and to whom he is constantly faithful. It is the living Church, with a first name and a last name, which the priest shepherds in his parish or in the mission entrusted to him. That mission brings him joy whenever he is faithful to it, whenever he does all that he has to do and lets go of everything that he has to let go of, as long as he stands firm amid the flock which the Lord has entrusted to him: Feed my sheep (cf. *Jn* 21:16,17).

Priestly joy is a joy which is sister to obedience. An obedience to the Church in the hierarchy which gives us, as it were, not simply the external framework for our obedience: the parish to which I am sent, my ministerial assignments, my particular work ... but also union with God the Father, the source of all fatherhood. It is likewise an obedience to the Church in service: in availability and readiness to serve everyone, always and as best I can, following the example of “Our Lady of Promptness” (cf. *Lk* 1:39, *meta
spoudes), who hastens to serve Elizabeth her kinswoman and is concerned for the kitchen of Cana when the wine runs out. The availability of her priests makes the Church a house with open doors, a refuge for sinners, a home for people living on the streets, a place of loving care for the sick, a camp for the young, a classroom for catechizing children about to make their First Communion... Wherever God's people have desires or needs, there is the priest, who knows how to listen (ob-audire) and feels a loving mandate from Christ who sends him to relieve that need with mercy or to encourage those good desires with resourceful charity.

All who are called should know that genuine and complete joy does exist in this world: it is the joy of being taken from the people we love and then being sent back to them as dispensers of the gifts and counsels of Jesus, the one Good Shepherd who, with deep compassion for all the little ones and the outcasts of this earth, wearied and oppressed like sheep without a shepherd, wants to associate many others to his ministry, so as himself to remain with us and to work, in the person of his priests, for the good of his people.

On this Holy Thursday, I ask the Lord Jesus to enable many young people to discover that burning zeal which joy kindles in our hearts as soon as we have the stroke of boldness needed to respond willingly to his call.

On this Holy Thursday, I ask the Lord Jesus to preserve the joy sparkling in the eyes of the recently ordained who go forth to devour the world, to spend themselves fully in the midst of God's faithful people, rejoicing as they prepare their first homily, their first Mass, their first Baptism, their first confession... It is the joy of being able to share with wonder, and for the first time as God's anointed, the treasure of the Gospel and to feel the faithful people anointing you again and in yet another way: by their requests, by bowing their heads for your blessing, by taking your hands, by bringing you their children, by pleading for their sick... Preserve, Lord, in your young priests the joy of going forth, of doing everything as if for the first time, the joy of spending their lives fully for you.

On this Thursday of the priesthood, I ask the Lord Jesus to confirm the priestly joy of those who have already ministered for some years. The joy which, without leaving their eyes, is also found on the shoulders of those who bear the burden of the ministry, those priests who, having experienced
the labors of the apostolate, gather their strength and rearm themselves: “get a second wind”, as the athletes say. Lord, preserve the depth, wisdom and maturity of the joy felt by these older priests. May they be able to pray with Nehemiah: “the joy of the Lord is my strength” (cf. Neh 8:10).

Finally, on this Thursday of the priesthood, I ask the Lord Jesus to make better known the joy of elderly priests, whether healthy or infirm. It is the joy of the Cross, which springs from the knowledge that we possess an imperishable treasure in perishable earthen vessels. May these priests find happiness wherever they are; may they experience already, in the passage of the years, a taste of eternity (Guardini). May they know, Lord, the joy of handing on the torch, the joy of seeing new generations of their spiritual children, and of hailing the promises from afar, smiling and at peace, in that hope which does not disappoint.

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Torna ai contenuti

Homily at the Holy Mass in Manger Square, Bethlehem, Palestine (May 25, 2014)

“This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12).

What a great grace it is to celebrate the Eucharist in the place where Jesus was born! I thank God and I thank all of you who have welcomed me on my pilgrimage: President Mahmoud Abbas and the other civil authorities; Patriarch Fouad Twal and the other bishops and ordinaries of the Holy Land, the priests, the good Franciscans, the consecrated persons and all those who labor to keep faith, hope and love alive in these lands; the faithful who have come from Gaza and Galilee, and the immigrants from Asia and Africa. Thank you for your welcome!

The Child Jesus, born in Bethlehem, is the sign given by God to those who awaited salvation, and he remains forever the sign of God’s tenderness and presence in our world. The angel announces to the shepherds: “This will be a sign for you: you will find a child....”
Today too, children are a sign. They are a sign of hope, a sign of life, but also a “diagnostic” sign, a marker indicating the health of families, society and the entire world. Wherever children are accepted, loved, cared for and protected, the family is healthy, society is more healthy and the world is more human. Here we can think of the work carried out by the Ephpheta Paul VI institute for hearing and speech impaired Palestinian children: it is a very real sign of God’s goodness. It is a clear sign that society is healthier.

To us, the men and women of the twenty-first century, God today also says: “This will be a sign for you,” look for the child…

The Child of Bethlehem is frail, like all newborn children. He cannot speak and yet he is the Word made flesh who came to transform the hearts and lives of all men and women. This Child, like every other child, is vulnerable; he needs to be accepted and protected. Today too, children need to be welcomed and defended, from the moment of their conception.

Sadly, in this world, with all its highly developed technology, great numbers of children continue to live in inhuman situations, on the fringes of society, in the peripheries of great cities and in the countryside. All too many children continue to be exploited, maltreated, enslaved, prey to violence and illicit trafficking. Still too many children live in exile, as refugees, at times lost at sea, particularly in the waters of the Mediterranean. Today, in acknowledging this, we feel shame before God, before God who became a child.

And we have to ask ourselves: Who are we, as we stand before the Child Jesus? Who are we, standing as we stand before today’s children? Are we like Mary and Joseph, who welcomed Jesus and care for him with the love of a father and a mother? Or are we like Herod, who wanted to eliminate him? Are we like the shepherds, who went in haste to kneel before him in worship and offer him their humble gifts? Or are we indifferent? Are we perhaps people who use fine and pious words, yet exploit pictures of poor children in order to make money? Are we ready to be there for children, to “waste time” with them? Are we ready to listen to them, to care for them, to pray for them and with them? Or do we ignore them because we are too caught up in our own affairs?
“This will be a sign for us: you will find a child….” Perhaps that little boy or girl is crying. He is crying because he is hungry, because she is cold, because he or she wants to be picked up and held in our arms… Today too, children are crying, they are crying a lot, and their crying challenges us. In a world which daily discards tons of food and medicine there are children, hungry and suffering from easily curable diseases, who cry out in vain. In an age which insists on the protection of minors, there is a flourishing trade in weapons which end up in the hands of child-soldiers, there is a ready market for goods produced by the slave labor of small children. Their cry is stifled: the cry of these children is stifled! They must fight, they must work, they cannot cry! But their mothers cry for them, as modern-day Rachels: they weep for their children, and they refuse to be consoled (cf. Mt 2:18).

“This will be a sign for you”: you will find a child. The Child Jesus, born in Bethlehem, every child who is born and grows up in every part of our world, is a diagnostic sign indicating the state of health of our families, our communities, our nation. Such a frank and honest diagnosis can lead us to a new kind of lifestyle where our relationships are no longer marked by conflict, oppression and consumerism, but fraternity, forgiveness and reconciliation, solidarity and love.

Mary, Mother of Jesus,
you who accepted, teach us how to accept;
you who adored, teach us how to adore;
you who followed, teach us how to follow. Amen.

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Homily at the Canonization of the Blesseds John XXIII and John Paul II, St. Peter’s Square (April 27, 2014)

At the heart of this Sunday, which concludes the Octave of Easter and which Saint John Paul II wished to dedicate to Divine Mercy, are the
glorious wounds of the risen Jesus.

He had already shown those wounds when he first appeared to the Apostles on the very evening of that day following the Sabbath, the day of the resurrection. But, as we have heard, Thomas was not there that evening, and when the others told him that they had seen the Lord, he replied that unless he himself saw and touched those wounds, he would not believe. A week later, Jesus appeared once more to the disciples gathered in the Upper Room. Thomas was also present; Jesus turned to him and told him to touch his wounds. Whereupon that man, so straightforward and accustomed to testing everything personally, knelt before Jesus with the words: “My Lord and my God!” (Jn 20:28).

The wounds of Jesus are a scandal, a stumbling block for faith, yet they are also the test of faith. That is why on the body of the risen Christ the wounds never pass away: they remain, for those wounds are the enduring sign of God’s love for us. They are essential for believing in God. Not for believing that God exists, but for believing that God is love, mercy and faithfulness. Saint Peter, quoting Isaiah, writes to Christians: “by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24, cf. Is 53:5).

Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II were not afraid to look upon the wounds of Jesus, to touch his torn hands and his pierced side. They were not ashamed of the flesh of Christ, they were not scandalized by him, by his cross; they did not despise the flesh of their brother (cf. Is 58:7), because they saw Jesus in every person who suffers and struggles. These were two men of courage, filled with the parrhesia of the Holy Spirit, and they bore witness before the Church and the world to God’s goodness and mercy.

They were priests, and bishops and popes of the twentieth century. They lived through the tragic events of that century, but they were not overwhelmed by them. For them, God was more powerful; faith was more powerful—faith in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of man and the Lord of history; the mercy of God, shown by those five wounds, was more powerful; and more powerful too was the closeness of Mary our Mother.

In these two men, who looked upon the wounds of Christ and bore witness to his mercy, there dwelt a living hope and an indescribable and
glorious joy (1 Pet 1:3:8). The hope and the joy which the risen Christ bestows on his disciples, the hope and the joy which nothing and no one can take from them. The hope and joy of Easter, forged in the crucible of self-denial, self-emptying, utter identification with sinners, even to the point of disgust at the bitterness of that chalice. Such were the hope and the joy which these two holy popes had received as a gift from the risen Lord and which they in turn bestowed in abundance upon the People of God, meriting our eternal gratitude.

This hope and this joy were palpable in the earliest community of believers, in Jerusalem, as we have heard in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 2:42-47). It was a community which lived the heart of the Gospel, love and mercy, in simplicity and fraternity.

This is also the image of the Church which the Second Vatican Council set before us. John XXIII and John Paul II cooperated with the Holy Spirit in renewing and updating the Church in keeping with her pristine features, those features which the saints have given her throughout the centuries. Let us not forget that it is the saints who give direction and growth to the Church. In convening the Council, Saint John XXIII showed an exquisite openness to the Holy Spirit. He let himself be led and he was for the Church a pastor, a servant-leader, guided by the Holy Spirit. This was his great service to the Church; for this reason I like to think of him as the pope of openness to the Holy Spirit.

In his own service to the People of God, Saint John Paul II was the Pope of the family. He himself once said that he wanted to be remembered as the Pope of the family. I am particularly happy to point this out as we are in the process of journeying with families towards the Synod on the family. It is surely a journey which, from his place in heaven, he guides and sustains.

May these two new saints and shepherds of God’s people intercede for the Church, so that during this two-year journey toward the Synod she may be open to the Holy Spirit in pastoral service to the family. May both of them teach us not to be scandalized by the wounds of Christ and to enter ever more deeply into the mystery of divine mercy, which always hopes and always forgives, because it always loves.
Homily at a Penitential Service St. Peter’s Basilica, (March 28, 2014)

During the time of Lent, the Church, in the name of God, renews her appeal to repentance. It is the call to change one’s life. Conversion is not the question of a moment or a time of the year, it is an undertaking that lasts one’s entire lifetime. Who among us can presume not to be a sinner? No one. We are all sinners. The Apostle John writes: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 Jn 1:8-9). And that is what is happening during this celebration and throughout this day of penance. The Word of God that we heard introduces us to two essential elements of Christian life.

The first: putting on the new nature. The new man, “created after the likeness of God” (Eph 4:24), is born in Baptism, when one receives the very life of God, which renders us his children and incorporates us into Christ and his Church. This new life permits us to look at reality with different eyes, without being distracted by things that don’t matter and cannot last long, from things that perish with time. For this we are called to abandon the behavior of sin and fix our gaze on what is essential. “A man is more precious for what he is than for what he has” (Gaudium et spes, no. 35). This is the difference between life deformed by sin and life illumined by grace. From the heart of the person renewed in the likeness of God comes good behavior: to speak always the truth and avoid all deceit; not to steal, but rather to share all you have with others, especially those in need; not to give in to anger, resentment and revenge, but to be meek, magnanimous and ready to forgive; not to gossip which ruins the good name of people, but to look more at the good side of everyone. It is a matter of clothing oneself in the new man, with these new attitudes.

The second element: abiding in love. The love of Jesus Christ lasts forever, it has no end because it is the very life of God. This love conquers
sin and gives the strength to rise and begin again, for through forgiveness the heart is renewed and rejuvenated. We all know it: our Father never tires of loving and his eyes never grow weary of watching the road to his home to see if the son who left and was lost is returning. We can speak of God’s hope: our Father expects us always, he doesn’t just leave the door open to us, but he awaits us. He is engaged in the waiting for his children. And this Father also does not tire of loving the other son who, though staying at home with him the whole time, does not share in his mercy, in his compassion. God is not only at the origin of love, but in Jesus Christ he calls us to imitate his own way of loving: “as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (Jn 13:34). To the extent to which Christians live this love, they become credible disciples of Christ to the world. Love cannot bear being locked up in itself. By its nature it is open, it spreads and bears fruit, it always kindles new love.

Dear brothers and sisters, after this celebration, many of you will be made missionaries to offer to others the experience of reconciliation with God. “24 hours for the Lord” is an initiative to which many dioceses have adhered in every part of the world. To the many you will meet, you can communicate the joy of receiving the forgiveness of the Father and of rediscovering full friendship with him. And you will tell them that our Father expects us, our Father forgives us, and furthermore that he rejoices. If you go to him with your whole life, even with the many sins, instead of reproaching you, he will rejoice: this is our Father. This you must say, say it to many people, today. Whoever experiences divine mercy, is impelled to be an architect of mercy among the least and the poor. In these “littlest brothers” Jesus awaits us (cf. Mt 25:40); let us receive mercy and let us give mercy! Let us go to the encounter and let us celebrate Easter in the joy of God!

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Torna ai contenuti

“Has Christ been divided?” (1 Cor 1:13). The urgent appeal which Saint Paul makes at the beginning of his First Letter to the Corinthians, and which has been proclaimed at this evening’s liturgy, was chosen by a group of our fellow Christians in Canada as the theme for our meditation during this year’s Week of Prayer.

The apostle was grieved to learn that the Christians of Corinth had split into different factions. Some claimed: “I belong to Paul”; while others claimed: “I belong to Apollos” or “I belong to Cephas,” and others yet claimed: “I belong to Christ” (cf. v. 12). Paul could not even praise those who claimed to belong to Christ, since they were using the name of the one Savior to set themselves apart from their other brothers and sisters within the community. In other words, the particular experience of each individual, or an attachment to certain significant persons in the community, had become a yardstick for judging the faith of others.

Amid this divisiveness, Paul appeals to the Christians of Corinth “by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” to be in agreement, so that divisions will not reign among them, but rather a perfect union of mind and purpose (cf. v. 10). The communion for which the Apostle pleads, however, cannot be the fruit of human strategies. Perfect union among brothers and sisters can only come from looking to the mind and heart of Christ (cf. Phil 2:5). This evening, as we gather here in prayer, may we realize that Christ, who cannot be divided, wants to draw us to himself, to the sentiments of his heart, to his complete and confident surrender into the hands of the Father, to his radical self-emptying for love of humanity. Christ alone can be the principle, the cause and the driving force behind our unity.

As we find ourselves in his presence, we realize all the more that we may not regard divisions in the Church as something natural, inevitable in any form of human association. Our divisions wound Christ’s body, they impair the witness which we are called to give to him before the world. The Second Vatican Council’s Decree on Ecumenism, appealing to the text of...
Saint Paul which we have reflected on, significantly states: “Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only. However, many Christian communities present themselves to people as the true inheritance of Jesus Christ; all indeed profess to be followers of the Lord but they differ in outlook and go their different ways, as if Christ were divided.” And the Council continues: “Such division openly contradicts the will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and damages the sacred cause of preaching the Gospel to every creature” (Unitatis Redintegratio, 1). We have all been damaged by these divisions. None of us wishes to become a cause of scandal. And so we are all journeying together, fraternally, on the road towards unity, bringing about unity even as we walk; that unity comes from the Holy Spirit and brings us something unique which only the Holy Spirit can do, that is, reconciling our differences. The Lord waits for us all, accompanies us all, and is with us all on this path of unity.

Christ, dear friends, cannot be divided! This conviction must sustain and encourage us to persevere with humility and trust on the way to the restoration of full visible unity among all believers in Christ. Tonight I think of the work of two great Popes: Blessed John XXIII and Blessed John Paul II. In the course of their own lives, both came to realize the urgency of the cause of unity and, once elected Bishops of Rome, they guided the entire Catholic flock decisively on the paths of ecumenism. Pope John blazed new trails which earlier would have been almost unthinkable. Pope John Paul held up ecumenical dialogue as an ordinary and indispensable aspect of the life of each Particular Church. With them, I think too of Pope Paul VI, another great promoter of dialogue; in these very days we are commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of his historic embrace with the Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople.

The work of these, my predecessors, enabled ecumenical dialogue to become an essential dimension of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome, so that today the Petrine ministry cannot be fully understood without this openness to dialogue with all believers in Christ. We can say also that the journey of ecumenism has allowed us to come to a deeper understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter, and we must be confident that it will continue to do so in the future. As we look with gratitude to the progress which the Lord has enabled us to make, and without ignoring the
difficulties which ecumenical dialogue is presently experiencing, let us all pray that we may put on the mind of Christ and thus progress towards the unity which he wills. And to journey together is already to be making unity!

In this climate of prayer for the gift of unity, I address a cordial and fraternal greeting to His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios, the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch, and to His Grace David Moxon, the representative in Rome of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and to all the representatives of the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities gathered here this evening. With these two brothers representing everyone, we have prayed at the Tomb of Paul and have said to one another: “Let us pray that he will help us on this path, on this path of unity and of love, as we advance towards unity”. Unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey. If we do not walk together, if we do not pray for one another, if we do not collaborate in the many ways that we can in this world for the People of God, then unity will not come about! But it will happen on this journey, in each step we take. And it is not we who are doing this, but rather the Holy Spirit, who sees our goodwill.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us ask the Lord Jesus, who has made us living members of his body, to keep us deeply united to him, to help us overcome our conflicts, our divisions and our self-seeking; and let us remember that unity is always better than conflict! And so may he help us to be united to one another by one force, by the power of love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts (cf. Rom 5:5). Amen.

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Invocation for Peace with the Presidents of Israel and Palestine, the Vatican Gardens (June 8, 2014)

Lord God of peace, hear our prayer!

We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our
conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried… But our efforts have been in vain.

Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: “Never again war!”; “With war everything is lost.” Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace.

Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, you created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace, our trepidation into confident trust, and our quarreling into forgiveness.

Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words “division,” “hatred,” and “war” be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be “brother,” and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom,

Peace, Salaam! Amen

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The Roman Curia

Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary
This is an English translation of the Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary granting indulgences to the cooperators of Opus Dei, ecclesiastical assistants and priests with a Letter of Fraternity (April 28, 2014).

Apostolic Penitentiary
Prot. N. 34/14/I

HOLY FATHER

Javier Echevrría Rodríguez, Titular Bishop of Cilibia and Prelate of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, respectfully requests that, in addition to the list or summary of Indulgences for the cooperators, ecclesiastical assistants and priests with a letter of Fraternity, which was granted through a rescript from this Penitentiary for seven years on February 13, 1968, and extended forever on February 12, 1975, the same gift of plenary Indulgence be attached to two other feast days, since they are included in the proper calendar of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, approved according to law on November 10, 2012: a) the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of Most Fair Love (February 14); b) the Solemnity of the Holy Guardian Angels, Patrons.

Et Deus, etc.

On the 28th of April 2014

The APOSTOLIC PENITENTIARY, by special mandate of the Holy Father Francis, indicated that it gladly grants this grace according to the petition forever and without the need for sending any Apostolic Letter with the brief form.

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary.

His Eminence Mauro Cardinal Piacenza
Major Penitentiary.

Christopher Nykiel
Regent
PRELATE

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Appointments

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Torna ai contenuti

Activities of the Prelate

Pastoral trips

During the first half of 2014, Bishop Echevarría visited the Asian continent, specifically Sri Lanka, India, Singapore, Taiwan and Korea.

Sri Lanka, from January 15 to 18

The Prelate’s trip to Sri Lanka was his first visit to that country since the beginning of the stable apostolic work of Opus Dei there in 2011. On Wednesday, the 15th, Cardinal Malcolm Ranjith, Archbishop of Colombo, welcomed Bishop Echevarría at the airport in the capital. During successive days the Prelate had the opportunity to meet with the faithful of the Prelature and other people interested in knowing better the message of Opus Dei, with whom he had various gatherings. Besides encouraging them to have a deep prayer life and devout recourse to the sacrament of Penance, the Prelate urged them to pray more for the Pope, priests, and the authorities and citizens of their country.

On Thursday, the 16th, Bishop Echevarría accepted the invitation of Cardinal Ranjith to visit the seat of the Archdiocese and the Benedict XVI Theological Institute, still under construction, in Bolawalana, Negombo. Accompanied by the Cardinal, he also made a brief visit to the cathedral of
Colombo. In addition, that same day he had a get-together with diocesan priests.

Before finishing his pastoral visit, the Prelate made a pilgrimage to the Basilica of Our Lady of Lanka, in Tewate, Ragama. There, accompanied by some faithful of the Prelature, he placed in the hands of our Lady his gratitude for the trip and his prayers for Sri Lanka.

**India, from January 18 to 21**

Bishop Echevarría arrived in New Delhi on Saturday, January 18. Opus Dei began its apostolic work in this country in 1993 under the impetus of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

On Sunday, the 19th, the Prelate visited and blessed the construction work of a future conference center, on the outskirts of New Delhi. Later he was welcomed to India by a number of families and university students.

During his pastoral trip, Bishop Echevarría visited the cathedral of New Delhi to pray there for India and for the needs of the Church. He also had the opportunity to pray before the statue of St. Josemaría venerated in one of the cathedral chapels. He greeted the cathedral’s pastor, Fr. Maria Susai, and the Vicar General of the diocese, Fr. Susai Sebastian.

He also met with the apostolic nuncio in India, Archbishop Salvatore Pennacchio. The pastoral trip ended on Tuesday, March 21st.

**May 14-22 in Singapore,**

**Taiwan, and Korea**

From May 14 to 22, Bishop Echevarría undertook a pastoral visit to Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea. The apostolic work in these countries began in a stable manner in 1982, 1985 and 2009, respectively. In Singapore, the first stop on his trip, the Prelate met with more than a thousand people—faithful of the prelature and friends—in the Raffles City Convention Center. He reminded those present that “the Christian life is a mixture of deep joy and moments of sorrow, which God helps us to overcome with his grace.” Along the same lines, he stressed that the sanctification of daily happenings lies at the heart of Opus Dei’s message, and that each day offers the adventure of following God’s will in everything.
Bishop Echevarría, who had previously visited the country in 2008, had the opportunity to greet Archbishop William Goh of Singapore, Archbishop Leopoldo Girelli, the apostolic nuncio, and Bishop Paul Tan of Malaka-Johor.

The Prelate was in Taiwan from May 18 to 20. Of the island’s 23 million inhabitants, 300,000 profess the Catholic faith, according to official statistics. During his stay Bishop Echevarría visited Archbishop John Hung Shan-chuan. He also had the opportunity to pray the Rosary in the church of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, where since 2007 a painting of St. Josemaría is venerated.

Over 200 people, some of them non-Catholics, attended the get-together with the Prelate in the Taiwanese capital. One person asked a question about how to serve the Church better in Taiwan. “Ask God,” the Prelate said, “to increase our faith, so that we never become discouraged and are filled with confidence, struggling out of love to serve those we meet in our daily life, without distinctions. Although they may not be Catholics, our friends, colleagues at work and neighbors are all children, creatures of the same Creator and Father, who loved us first and loves us madly.”

His pastoral trip ended in Korea, on the 21st and 22nd of May. The apostolic work of Opus Dei began in this country four years ago. Bishop Echevarría had the opportunity to visit the Bishop of Daejon, Most Rev. Lazzaro Heung-sik You, and the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Osvaldo Padilla. Afterwards, he went to the cathedral where he prayed for the country and its people.

In the capital city, Seoul, the Prelate met with faithful of Opus Dei and their friends. In answer to one person’s question, Bishop Echevarría stressed the need to lay aside the words “impossible” and “disappointed” because, although objective difficulties are real, “with faith everything is possible.” At the end of the gathering he received various families and a group of priests. They expressed to him their joy at the upcoming visit of Pope Francis, who will visit this country from August 14 to 18.
Ordinations to the priesthood in Rome  
(May 10, 2014)

On Saturday, May 10, in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene, Bishop Echevarría ordained thirty faithful of the prelature of Opus Dei as priests. After carrying out professional activities for a number of years, the new priests will now serve the Church through their ministry, dedicated to the mission of the Prelature: spreading the universal call to holiness, especially in professional work and ordinary life. In his homily, published in full in this Bulletin, the Prelate reminded the new priests that from now on they will be “ministers of divine mercy, adminsisters of the forgiveness of sins and of the Bread of life.” And he encouraged them to foster the desire that St. Josemaría frequently expressed: “May I see with your eyes, my Christ!”

The new priests come from Africa, North and South America, Asia, and Europe.

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Ordinations to the diaconate in Rome  
(March 1, 2014)

Bishop Javier Echevarría conferred diaconal ordination on two associate faithful of the Prelature: Ignacio Mirón López and Luis Ramón Quesada Bejar. The ceremony took place on Saturday, March 1, in the parish church of St. Josemaría Escrivá, in Rome.

During his homily the Prelate invited those present “to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, and also to receive with great frequency and intensity the sacraments, channels of grace that bring us closer to God; and specifically, for ourselves, Confession and the Eucharist.”

Ignacio Mirón worked as a teacher in the Tajamar school for 16 years. During these years he earned a degree in the Science of Education and wrote various manuals for educators. After this experience gained in
Madrid, he went to Chicago, where he was in charge of the formation of parents and teachers at Midtown Center, a supplementary education center. On returning to Spain he taught for 14 years in the Torrevelo School in Santander, and Los Olmos in Madrid. While preparing for the priesthood he finished a doctoral thesis in Theology.

Luis Ramon Quesada also previously had a long professional career. He worked in the field of business management, both in consulting and financial auditing. He combined his professional obligations with attention to various initiatives for the Christian formation of youth. His professional life took place in several localities in the province of Jaén and in Madrid. In September 2011, he began his licentiate in Theology at the University of Navarra, and subsequently carried out research in the field of spiritual theology related to the work of the Second Vatican Council.

Pastoral Letters

Pastoral Letter of June 1, 2014

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

The Solemnity of Pentecost is approaching next Sunday, and right afterwards the return, also joyful, to ordinary time in the Liturgy. The Church invites us to continue our efforts to carry out our ordinary duties: the setting of our struggle for sanctity. Let us take advantage of the impetus we have received during the preceding weeks. The consideration of Christ’s triumph over sin and death, his resurrection and glorious ascension, and the sending of the Paraclete, has given us new encouragement to raise our eyes to the true goal of our earthly journey: to Heaven. Following a devotion deeply rooted in the Church, St. Josemaría invited us to prepare for the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the Sunday following Pentecost, with a triduum of adoration and thanksgiving, the “Trisagium Angelicum”: tibi
laus, tibi gloria, tibi gratiarum actio in saecula sempiterna, o beata Trinitas! [1]
Praise to you, glory to you, thanksgiving to you, forever and ever, O Most Blessed Trinity!

The eagerness to rejoice fully in God, raising our daily life to the supernatural order, is a mark of souls who take their vocation to holiness seriously. I was a witness to how our beloved Don Alvaro strove to keep closely united to our Lord here below, as a foretaste of the contemplation and eternal love of God in Heaven. Just like St. Josemaría in his final years, he frequently prayed the words from the Psalm: *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram,* [2] *Lord, I will always seek your face.* He used these words to keep God present in the midst of his work and daily tasks.

Hope is a powerful help to direct our thoughts to God in all our occupations. Don Alvaro would look at the Tabernacle or the images of our Lady with great affection and piety. He was deeply grateful for Christ’s real presence in the Eucharist, and for our Lady’s motherly care. His faith gave him a foretaste of the joy of contemplating and rejoicing with God in Heaven, not as we do here on earth, where we can only contemplate him as in a mirror and through obscure images, but face to face.[3] Therefore, although he suffered a lesion in his vertebrae that at times caused severe pain also in his legs, he never failed to make a slow genuflection when he passed before the Tabernacle. He was convinced that those discomforts, offered to God, were another way of honoring him and hoping in him.

We all realize that, although sincerely trying to follow closely in our Lord’s footsteps, we experience our own limitations every day. Our state of health or sickness, the setbacks of each day, our natural concern (which shouldn’t take away our peace) for the people we love, for the needs of the Church and society, are a spur to make acts of hope. St. Josemaría advised us: “renew your decision each morning, with a very determined _Serviam!_, I will serve you, Lord! Renew your resolution not to give in, not to give way to laziness or idleness; to face up to your duties with greater hope and more optimism, convinced that if we are defeated in some small skirmish we can overcome this setback by making a sincere act of love.”[4]

The life of a disciple of Christ is not meant to be a continual negation, nor a repression of the desires for happiness deep in our heart. For as Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “We need the... hopes that keep us going day by
In that same encyclical, he said that “day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life.” These hopes help us to set goals, to keep advancing on our earthly pilgrimage. Frequently, these human plans can absorb everything and not allow room for other hopes. This happens especially with young people and with those who are just beginning to make their way in their professional activity, who may perhaps be blinded by a deceptive “mirage.” But when these aspirations fail, or aren’t fulfilled as one had hoped, Benedict XVI said, “it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain... This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain.”

In the months that remain until September 27, the date of Don Alvaro’s beatification, I would like to frequently consider my predecessor, so loyal to God, who followed faithfully the example and teachings of St. Josemaría, even in his eagerness to attain the happiness of Heaven. On earth he was a happy and optimistic person, because he loved this supernatural virtue of hope, which he beseeched God for each day. With words that I also often heard from our Founder, Don Alvaro used an aspiration very well suited for fostering that outlook, especially when we sense more vividly our own weakness or personal limitations. He would say: Lord, do not trust in me; but I do trust in you. He recommended it also to those listening to him, especially if anyone thought they were unable to correspond to grace, because of the weight of their faults and defects. He encouraged everyone to put their trust in God, while also making use of the human means available to them.

With the certainty that God is always attentive to our needs, we need to consider the Founder of Opus Dei’s energetic words: “We have to get moving, my children, we have to act! With courage, with energy, and with joy in our life, because love casts out fear (see 1 Jn 4:19), with daring, without timidity... You have to flee equally from the attitude of the intrepid person, who sees everything as easy because he thinks he has all the required energy, as from that of the timid and retiring person, who sees insuperable
difficulties in everything, because he thinks he doesn’t have the strength needed.

“But don’t forget that, if one truly wants, everything will go ahead. Deus non denegat gratiam: God does not deny his help to the one who does all that he can.”[8]

I recall an incident from the 1960’s that shows how Don Alvaro would make use of any small event to strengthen his hope. He had asked our Father to write a few words on a small photograph and, owing to his filial insistence, St. Josemaría wrote the following verse from a Psalm: homines et iumenta salvabis, Domine.[9] “Man and beast of burden thou savest, O Lord.” Perhaps this phrase from Scripture came to mind because he had meditated on it frequently, for he saw himself as a little donkey before God. I don’t exclude the possibility that he was thinking of Don Alvaro himself, remembering the affection and strength with which that son of his had helped him bear joyfully the divine burden of Opus Dei. When about to write down the date, Don Alvaro read the words written there and, playing with his own name, remarked: esto abre un portillo a la esperanza. “This provides an opening for hope.” St. Josemaría liked that phrase and quickly and happily added it to the photograph.

In a meditation preached to faithful of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría addressed our Lord with these words: “Jesus, you are my God, my Brother, my Love and my All. How could I fail to trust completely in You? How could my hope not be unbounded? Yes, my sons, we have solid reasons, even material ones, to trust fully in our Father God’s providence. This assurance leads us, once again, to deeply humble ourselves. But our humiliation should be filled with trust and thanksgiving.”[10]

For God has given us many proofs of his predilection, which strengthen our hope. We only need to consider the marvelous sending of his dearly beloved Son into the world, to save us from sin and make us his children; the constant help of the Holy Spirit, who remains and acts in the Church; the means of sanctification (the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance), which he has placed within our reach; the protection of his Mother, who is our Mother; the example of so many people who, by their joyful and self-sacrificing response to our Lord, spur us to look ever more intently to Heaven. As so many Pontiffs and Fathers of the Church assure
us, the saints and blesseds whom we venerate on the altars encourage us in a
special way: an irrefutable proof that truly each and every one of us can also
aspire to holiness.

In this month we celebrate the feast of St. Josemaría, who has shown us
not only the path to reach Heaven through our ordinary occupations, but
also the specific way to follow it. We have ample experience of the
supernatural fruit produced all over the world, on the occasion of the
Masses that are celebrated around the 26th of June, with the conversions of
so many men and women. Let us prepare to personally receive this shower
of grace and to provide help to those who feel the prompting of such a holy
priest to transform their life into a path towards God.

At times, some men and women can seem “impermeable” to this
invitation. Let us not tire of praying for them, treating them with constant
affection. We can apply to ourselves what Pope Francis wrote in his
apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, and which he shows us every day
in his way of approaching everyone: “we are called to be living sources of
water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross,
but it was from the cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself
to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of
hope!”[11] We need, then, “to proclaim and bring God’s salvation into our
world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and
strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely
given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven, and encouraged
to live the good life of the Gospel.”[12]

Hope led Don Alvaro to refuse to be held back by difficulties. From the
moment he joined Opus Dei, in 1935, he carried out a constant and
optimistic apostolate, convinced that God would always help him; and he
persevered in doing so right to the end of his life. No one who passed by his
side, for any reason, left without a prayer from him, some words of interest
for their family or work, some spiritual advice…. He paid no attention to
people’s social rank; he saw only souls that God had put next to him: the
doorman of a building, the warden of a dicastery in the Holy See, the flight
attendant on a plane. He did the same with civil or church authorities, who
might also have been much older or of some importance in society. He was
never held back by false human respect. In those encounters, whether
fortuitous or planned, he always acted with the security that God would assist him, since he had seen the example of how St. Josemaría acted.

In 1972, Fr. José María Hernández Garnica, before dying, wrote down a remembrance in which he mentions his amazement at Don Alvaro’s “daring” (before receiving priestly ordination) in dealing with cardinals and bishops, with government ministers, with local officials. As some of the biographies of Don Alvaro mention, Fr. José Maria once asked him if he didn’t feel a little out of place, insecure, in carrying out these tasks. The response, full of faith in God and trust in the example of our Father, was this: “I think of the miraculous catch of fish and of what St. Peter said: in nomine tuo, laxabo rete. I think of what the Father said and I know that, in obeying him, I am obeying God.”[13]

As the date of his beatification approaches, let us go confidently to Don Alvaro’s intercession, asking him to obtain for us from our Lord this optimistic hope in our apostolic work. A good day to do so is the upcoming June 25th, the 70th anniversary of his priestly ordination, which he received in Madrid together with Fr. José María Hernández Garnica and Fr. Joseph Muzquiz, whose causes of beatification are underway.

On the 14th, if God wills, I will finish another year in my life. Pray for me so that I will follow faithfully the example of these holy pastors of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría and Don Alvaro. Continue praying a lot and every day for the Pope and for the fruit of his recent pastoral trip to the Holy Land, so that our Lord will hear his prayers for peace and for the union of all Christians. And keep very much in mind the apostolic expansion of the Work. A few days ago I was in Singapore, Taiwan and Korea, where I encouraged your sisters and brothers in their marvelous task of bringing Christ’s doctrine, saturated with the spirit of the Work, to the great Asian continent. All the work they are carrying out invites us to accompany them daily through a deeply lived Communion of the Saints. How many millions of people there are awaiting the announcement of the Gospel!

I won’t stop to consider in more detail the anniversary on June 26th, although I think I have an obligation to add: if we want to serve God, let us be closely united to St. Josemaría; let us love him more, and may no day go by, as he wrote in a letter, without telling him “our little worries,” for he is interested in our whole life.
With all my affection, I bless you,
Your Father
+ Javier
Rome, June 1, 2014


Torna ai contenuti

**Homilies**
Homily for the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature

Dear sons about to be ordained. Dear brothers and sisters.

1. Every time I see this crucifix, this question comes to me: Lord, why do you love me so much? Why am I so dear to you? These questions call for a generous response from each of us, because the Lord desires our love. We have recently witnessed the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II. Among our motives for thanksgiving, in the first place we raise our hearts to God for having enriched the Church with new signs of its sanctity. I cannot fail to recall (above all today, at the priestly ordination of deacons of the Prelature) that during his many years of pastoral service in the see of Peter, St. John Paul II ordained to the priesthood a large number of faithful of Opus Dei.

And so we also extend our gratitude to him for having contributed so significantly to prolonging the chain of sacred ministers in Opus Dei; a chain that began in 1944 with the ordination of the first members, among whom was our beloved Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. To both of them, St. John Paul II and the future blessed Alvaro, we direct our thoughts, seeking their intercession so that the new priests, and all bishops, priests and deacons, may walk swiftly along the path of sanctity. Particularly, as good sons and daughters, we renew our resolution to pray a lot for the Holy Father, for his work, his intentions and his collaborators.

We know what the Church and the world hope for from priests: that they bring the Gospel message to the men and women of our time, particularly to those who share our common Christian vocation, preparing them to fruitfully receive the grace of the sacraments. So, my sons, you will be ministers of divine mercy, dispensers of the forgiveness of sins and the Bread of Life. The readings of the Fourth Sunday of Easter, known as Good Shepherd Sunday, speak to us of God’s mercy, towards which we all need to direct our gaze. In a particular way, those of us who have received the priestly ministry look to the Master and the Good Shepherd and, like St. Josemaría, we ask: “may I see with your eyes, my Jesus!”
2. In a recent audience, referring to the sacrament of Holy Orders, Pope Francis recalled St. Paul’s recommendation to Timothy: *stir into flame the gift of God that you have received through the imposition of my hands* (2 Tm 1:6). And he remarked: “When the ministry is not fostered (the ministry of the bishop, the ministry of the priest) through prayer, through listening to the Word of God, through the daily celebration of the Eucharist and also through regularly going to the Sacrament of Penance, the priest inevitably ends up losing sight of the authentic meaning of his own service and the joy which comes from a profound communion with Jesus.”[1]

I want to dwell for a moment on the need for prayer in order to truly become “priests through and through,” as St. Josemaría frequently said. How often I heard him give this advice to priests! Suffice it for now to recall a passage from a homily on the priesthood in which he briefly describes the work of priests: “They have to study theology constantly; they must give spiritual guidance to very many souls, hear many confessions, preach tirelessly and pray a great deal; their hearts must always be focused on the tabernacle, where He who has chosen us to be his own is really present. Their lives are a wonderful self-surrender, full of joy, though like everyone they will meet with difficulties.”[2]

3. Let us have immense confidence in our Lord, supreme Shepherd of the Church (better still, the only Shepherd, since the sacred ministers are only his instruments, chosen by him in order to make himself present and act in the midst of his flock). We are reminded of this by today’s Gospel, in which Jesus presents himself as the Good Shepherd: *he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he walks ahead of them, and the sheep follow him, because they recognize his voice* (Jn 10:3-4).

Rightly then, we can make our own the words of the responsorial psalm: *the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul* (Ps 23 [22]:1-3). Especially in the darker moments that come at times in the course of life, let us go to the One who awaits us in the tabernacle, to share with him the burden that weighs on our souls, the difficulties that perhaps overwhelm us. And we will remain at peace. *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your crook and your staff, they comfort me* (Ps 23 [22]:4).
My dearest sons! In the Work, our Lord has wanted to offer us an outstanding model of a shepherd: St. Josemaría, our beloved Father, who outdid himself in his prodigious dedication to the formation of the priests of Opus Dei. Don Alvaro recalled this in one of the priestly ordinations that God granted him to preside. “I cannot help but recall,” he said, “the unlimited dedication with which our Father cared for the formation of the members of the Prelature who were preparing for our priestly ordination.”[3]

I have personally experienced how St. Josemaría used to ask all of the faithful of the Prelature (and, therefore, also the priests) to revive daily their diligent effort to serve souls, without forgetting the poor and the sick, who are a treasure for the Church and for society. With their help Opus Dei was born.

We are nearing the beatification of Don Alvaro, which will take place in September. I suggest that you turn to him with confidence and that you recall his life of faithful service to God and souls. With his words, I repeat to you: “Don’t ever be frightened by the disproportion between your littleness and the greatness of the mysteries of God of which you will be dispensers. May this disproportion, while impelling you to fight for personal sanctity, always be a motive of wonder and gratitude for God’s goodness.”[4]

4. Before concluding, I want to extend a special greeting to the parents and brothers and sisters of the new priests, and to their relatives and friends here present. Thank the Lord for the gift which he has given you; may this priestly ordination be a stimulus which brings you closer to God. And you, dear sons, never forget all that you owe to the prayer, the education and the good example that you have received in the heart of your families. Keep in mind these words which St. John Paul II addressed to priests:

“The call to pray with families and for families, dear Brothers, concerns each one of you in a very personal way. We owe our life to our parents and we owe them a permanent debt of gratitude. Whether they are still alive or have already passed into eternity, we are united with them by a close bond which time does not destroy. While we owe our vocation to God, a significant role in it is also to be attributed to our parents... Every priest can say of himself: ‘I am indebted to God and to others.’ There are many people who have accompanied us with their thoughts and prayers.”[5]
Let us unite ourselves, then, to the prayer of the Church so that the divine Sower may always sow throughout the whole world, and with an ever-increasing abundance, the call to serve him in the priestly ministry. Let us entrust our petition to Mary in this month dedicated to her, the Mother of all men and women and especially of priests.


Torna ai contenuti

**On the Feast of St. Josemaría, St. Eugene’s Basilica, Rome (June 26, 2014)**

Dear brothers and sisters:

This year the feast of St. Josemaría Escrivá takes place between two solemnities of the liturgical year: Corpus Christi, which we celebrated here in Italy last Sunday, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which we will commemorate tomorrow. This coincidence fills me with special joy. I still recall the piety with which the founder of Opus Dei prepared himself for both of these feasts. On these days, with filial gratitude, he tried to offer to the Blessed Trinity—with greater intensity than usual—acts of adoration, thanksgiving, and reparation for the offenses that we men and women commit, and so many petitions for the Church and for the world. Let us strive to spend these days in the same way. Let us try to enter more deeply into these great mysteries that God has revealed for our salvation.

The example of Bishop del Portillo, whom we remembered yesterday on the seventieth anniversary of his priestly ordination, will also help us. In preparation for his beatification, on the upcoming 27th of September, we can ask him to intercede for us before God, so that our minds and hearts
may be filled with the same sentiments that he, as a good son of God, learned from St. Josemaría and that he fostered throughout his whole life.

In today’s Mass, the passage from Genesis reminds us that God, after creating man, put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it (Gen 2:15). In these words, St. Josemaría saw reflected the doctrine about the sanctification of professional work, seen as a “participation in the creative work of God... And, moreover, since Christ took it into his hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man’s life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies.”[1]

A path in the Church has thus been opened up, above all since the Second Vatican Council. But we should try to spread this marvelous reality that introduces us into the life of God. Let us explicitly ask for the grace to put this teaching into practice with ever greater strength in the circumstances of our life, so that all our professional activities, as well our family responsibilities and our moments of relaxation, may help bring us closer to God, accompanied by many other people.

This aspiration is possible thanks to the Paraclete who, as the letter to the Romans teaches, lives within us through grace and guides us. For we did not receive the spirit of slavery, but rather the spirit of sonship [by which] we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ (Rom 8:15).

Among the practical results that being and knowing ourselves to be children of God should lead to, the Gospel stresses a very important one: the need to forgive offenses.

“What these passages make clear” says the Pope, “is the absolute priority of ‘going forth from ourselves towards our brothers and sisters’ as one of the two great commandments which ground every moral norm and as the clearest sign for discerning spiritual growth in response to God’s completely free gift.”[2]

Therefore an essential characteristic of God’s children is to be always ready to forgive. The Master, from the Cross, implored forgiveness for all those who had handed him over. St. Josemaría and so many other faithful throughout the history of the Church, following in the footsteps of Jesus, have readily forgiven those who attacked them or caused them harm, doing
so without any rancor. The founder of Opus Dei said, with great simplicity and gratitude to God “I did not need to learn to forgive, because God taught me how to love.”[3]

My dear brothers and sisters, today in this liturgy we can make a personal examination, without scruples but with sincerity, striving to discover if any corner of our heart harbors a small resentment against anyone, if we treat some people less well than others. It could seem a small thing, but the resentments, the rancor that we may sometimes have inside us, can turn into worms that destroy and reduce to dust our most genuine affections, those that show most clearly our condition as children of God.

“Let us ask the Lord,” we can implore with words of Pope Francis, “to help us understand the law of love. How good it is to have this law! How much good it does us to love one another, in spite of everything. Yes, in spite of everything!”[4]


Ordination of Two Deacons of the Prelature in the Church of St. Josemaría, Rome (March 1, 2014)

My dear Ignacio and Luis Ramón,

My dear brothers and sisters:

The four Gospels transmit to us a message of joyful hope because they repeat to us that Jesus Christ has come to save us and that, from among us, he has chosen his ministers so that they can remind us of this wonderful
adventure which is the Gospel. Today we can also touch this happiness with the diaconal ordination of these two brothers of ours. Let us take advantage of the occasion to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, and also to receive with great frequency and intensity the sacraments, channels of grace, which bring us close to God; for ourselves, specifically, Confession and the Eucharist.

1. We have all been called by God to form part of the Church. To all of us he has entrusted the task of bringing souls to him. The prophet Jeremiah heard the voice of the Lord that was directed to him with these words; “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations (Jer 1:5).” He tried to avoid this mission, “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth (Ibid., 6).”

The same thing could also happen to us. Our Lord calls us to personal holiness and to the apostolate, but our reaction is often similar to that of the prophet: we make excuses. Pope Francis recalled this at World Youth Day, in Rio de Janeiro, put people on guard against these pretexts. “Some people might think: “I have no particular preparation, how can I go and proclaim the Gospel?”[1] Basically it is a matter of fear; fear of complicating our lives. Our reaction should be what the Pope pointed out: “When we go to proclaim Christ, it is he himself who goes before us and guides us. When he sent his disciples on mission, he promised: “I am with you always” (Mt 28:20). And this is also true for us! Jesus never leaves anyone alone! He always accompanies us.”[2]

This certainty moves us to ask ourselves: Am I really concerned about the people I have beside me? Do I try to help them to get closer to Jesus, with my example, with my prayer, with my word? Do I do whatever is possible to help them to understand how wonderful it is to frequent the sacraments? The beginning of Lent, now imminent, is an invitation to personally ask ourselves these questions.

The Gospel suggests another question to us. “This is my commandment,” says the Lord, “that you love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). With the grace of God we are in condition to fulfill the command of our Lord; that is to say, we can really bring people to Christ and give fruit in service of the Church, of humanity, precisely because Jesus
has invited us to be his friends: “No longer do I call you servants, for the
servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you
friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you”
(Jn 15:15).

These words of Jesus fill us with confidence. In this regard there comes
to memory a consideration of St. Josemaría; the Lord “calls us his friends;
and he is the one who took the first step, because he loved us first. Still, he
does not impose his love — he offers it. He shows it with the clearest
possible sign: ‘Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life
for his friends.’”[3]

Not only has he called us friends, but he has made us, through his spirit,
true sons of God: sons in the Son. It is a new motive for us to put real effort
into living the life of Christ, which is now generously granted to us in the
sacraments, above all—I repeat once more—in Confession and in
Communion. This closeness of Jesus guarantees our apostolic efficacy, the
fruitfulness of our service. “We know well what that means: to contemplate
him, to worship him, to embrace him, in our daily encounter with him in
the Eucharist, in our life of prayer, in our moments of adoration; it means
to recognize him present and to embrace him in those most in need. ‘Being
with’ Christ does not mean isolating ourselves from others. Rather, it is a
‘being with’ in order to go forth and encounter others.”[4]

3. I want to stop now to consider some words of the first letter of St.
Peter, which we heard in the second reading, that spoke to us of fraternal
charity. The prince of the apostles recommends: “above all hold unfailing
your love for one another,... ungrudgingly (1 Pet 4:8-9). This Christian
virtue should be shown—as the Pope frequent reminds us—in words as
well, avoiding defamation, gossip, backbiting, for with words one can kill
the reputation and the honor of one’s neighbor or, at least, reduce the
warmth of family and social relationships, and can create barriers of
misunderstanding or of enmity, etc. Fraternal charity has many fields of
application. St. Josemaría emphasized one especially: more than in “giving,”
charity consists in “understanding.”[5]

Within a few days is the centennial of the birth of the venerable Alvaro
del Portillo, my beloved predecessor at the head of Opus Dei. Many of us
knew and worked with this exemplary father and pastor, and there are
numerous testimonies of others who, after a conversation with him, perhaps quite brief, were filled with joy and with peace. This serenity that he managed to infuse in souls, was a fruit of his ardent love of God, who had learned it in the school of St. Josemaría, the founder of Opus Dei.

We can ask him to intercede for us, so that, in our daily conduct, charity, made up of many small details in ordinary life, might shine forth, which can help a great deal to get closer to people and to bring them to Jesus.

I would like to congratulate the relatives of the new deacons: you, with your lives, have helped these men to follow our Lord in the priesthood. Let us take advantage of this feast to pray even more for the Holy Father, for the bishops, and for the priests and seminarians of the world. We ask this especially of our Lady, on this day, Saturday, which traditionally is dedicated to her.

Praised be Jesus Christ!


[2] Ibid.


At the Mass for the Anniversary of the Death of Venerable Alvaro del Portillo St. Eugene’s Basilica Rome (March 22, 2014)

My dear brothers and sisters:

Always, and today in a special way, I experience a great joy for the grace that God grants us at every moment. Tomorrow, March 23, is the third Sunday of Lent; for this reason we are commemorating a day early the
twentieth anniversary of the transit to heaven of the Venerable Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei. A few days ago we celebrated the centennial of his birth; and we are preparing for his beatification on the coming 27th of September. All these motives help us to live the celebration of the Eucharist keeping in mind the atmosphere of the Last Supper, where our Lord showed us how much he loves us and how much we should love one another.

In the collect of the Mass we direct ourselves to God the Father with the following words: “guide us, we pray, through this present life and bring us to that light in which you dwell.”[1] A petition fulfilled already in don Alvaro. Faithful to the call of the Lord, following the spirit of Opus Dei, he reached that heavenly dwelling place, giving witness that it is truly possible to attain holiness in ordinary life, as the founder of Opus Dei had taught without ceasing.

How beautiful is the parable of the prodigal son that we have just listened to, in part because it can be applied to the life of every person. In fact, wrote John Paul II, “that son, who received from his father the part of his patrimony that corresponded to him and abandoned his home to waste it in a distant land, “living dissolutely,” is in a certain sense the man of every era, beginning with the one who first of all lost the inheritance of grace and of original justice.”[2]

This Gospel passage offers us an occasion to recall some points of the teachings and the example of don Alvaro about divine mercy, and in particular, about the Sacrament of joy, as he used to repeat with respect to Confession, using words of St. Josemaría. During a homily given in this basilica, he encouraged those present thus: “Approach Confession whenever you need to purify yourself from your sins, to reacquire the grace of God, and thus be able to receive the Holy Eucharist.... Go frequently... even if you have no consciousness of grave sin, because in Confession your soul will acquire strength to combat with joy the battles of peace, for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.”[3]

John Paul II, for whose canonization we are preparing with fervent hope, wrote at one time: “It was above all in the confessional that God’s mercy manifested itself.”[4] Pope Francis, from the first moment of his pontificate, has not hesitated to recall the same truth and invite the faithful
to personally ask themselves a few questions. “Dear brothers,” he said in one of his catechetical talks on the sacraments, “as members of the Church are we conscious of the beauty of this gift that God himself offers us? Do we feel the joy of this cure, of this motherly attention that the Church has for us? Do we know how to appreciate it with simplicity and diligence? Let us not forget that God never tires of forgiving us; through the ministry of priests he holds us close in a new embrace and regenerates us and allows us to rise again and resume the journey. For this is our life: to rise again continuously and to resume our journey.”

In the mouth of don Alvaro this affirmation was also very frequent; he never tired of recommending that everyone approach this sacrament with repentance and joy. From his earliest days he had learned to love it, and spoke of his first confession filled with gratitude to God who comes to meet us with joy and with forgiveness. He said that he had felt very happy after having told his faults to the priest. And this happened until the end of his days. I remember the response that he gave when he was asked what was the happiest moment of his life. It was immediate, simple, and profound. “Each time that I go to confession, because God forgives my offenses.”

Let us think about this divine and human marvel: Confession well made is always a moment of peace, of joy—of happiness—that only God can give. We are all invited to experience this in a deeper way as Easter approaches.

The devotion of don Alvaro to the Sacrament of Penance increased even more since he met and lived with St. Josemaría. From that moment on, in his conversations with his friends, relatives, classmates, and simple acquaintances, he touched habitually on this subject, with refinement and delicacy, explaining it and encouraging everyone to appreciate the mystery of a God who forgives. And this disposition to help always led him to dedicate himself to the apostolate, to offer a service to souls.

Let us always try to follow his example and decide to speak like he did of the apostolate of confession: because when one does not seek to live in the environment of grace, it is not possible to follow Jesus closely. This is how he expressed it in writing: “The apostolate of Confession acquires a particular importance. Only when there is an habitual friendship with our Lord—a friendship based on the gift of sanctifying grace—are souls
prepared to perceive the invitation that Jesus directs at everyone: “if anyone wishes to follow me…” (Mt 16:24).

Our Holy Father John Paul II quickly perceived this passion of the priestly heart of don Alvaro, and often commented—even to people who did not belong to Opus Dei—that the faithful of the prelature have received from God the “charism of confession,” that is to say, a special grace to bring souls to this sacrament, to friendship with God. Let us too offer this beautiful legacy that Josemaría has transmitted to us, also by means of the words and example of don Alvaro.

I recall two anecdotes that illustrate well his devotion and his love for this sacrament. On the day after his own priestly ordination, in 1944, his first ministerial act was the administration of Penance to St. Josemaría. The founder of Opus Dei, in fact, wanted to be the first person to receive absolution from his hands.

The second episode goes back to the beginning of the eighties, and it is connected with this church. Among the reasons given to Cardinal Ugo Poletti, then vicar of the Pope for the diocese of Rome, in asking him to commend the pastoral attention of the parish to priests of the prelature, don Alvaro expressed his desire of being able to come once in a while to hear confessions, taking advantage of its closeness to the central headquarters of Opus Dei. His commitments as prelate did not permit this, but he always cultivated this aspiration in his heart.

I wanted to point out this path of forgiveness to remind you that we are called to eternal happiness, where the most Blessed Trinity wants us to live forever; the path of forgiveness leads to the triumph of Easter, that we will celebrate in a few weeks. Let us listen again to the acclamation: Lumen Christi! Deo gratias! Our Lord desires that, illuminated by his grace, and encouraged by his interest for souls, we show to the world the reality that Christus vincit, Christus regnat, for our good. In truth we should be women and men who love and know how to love, living by the Love of God.

Our Lady is the one who is full of grace, the only person never touched by sin. For this reason she shows herself full of compassion towards us her children, who are sinners, and obtains abundant gifts for us from Heaven. Let us go to her, Mater misericordiae, Mother of mercy, so that our Lenten
At the Missa in Coena Domini, Holy Thursday, in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (April 17, 2014)

(Spanish)

1. Con el mismo deseo de que los apóstoles descubriesen su confianza en cada uno, el Señor nos invita a nosotros a participar en ese momento solemne que conmemoramos hoy. Además de instituir la Eucaristía y el sacerdocio, Jesús revela a sus discípulos el carácter salvífico de su pasión y muerte, que afronta con una entrega total, para que nosotros reconozcamos la honda del pecado y nos decidamos a amar a Dios con todos nuestros sentidos y potencias, con todo nuestro ser.

Decía el Papa Francisco en una homilía: “Esta tarde, de nuevo, el Señor distribuye para nosotros el pan que es su Cuerpo, Él se hace don. Y también nosotros experimentamos la "solidaridad de Dios" con el hombre.... Dios se
hace cercano a nosotros, en el sacrificio de la Cruz se abaja entrando en la oscuridad de la muerte para darnos su vida, que vence el mal, el egoísmo y la muerte.”[1]

Jesús, nuestro Dios y nuestro Amor, se nos da como alimento del alma. Se queda en el sagrario para acompañarnos en nuestro caminar terreno, siempre dispuesto a escucharnos, especialmente cuando la senda se torna empinada, cuando los obstáculos amenazan con detener o aminorar nuestra marcha hacia Él. “En la Eucaristía, el Señor nos hace recorrer su camino, el del servicio, el de compartir, el del don, y lo poco que tenemos, lo poco que somos, si se comparte, se convierte en riqueza, porque el poder de Dios, que es el del amor, desciende sobre nuestra pobreza para transformarla.”[2]

Digámosle hoy, cuando conmemoramos su entrega completa por cada uno de nosotros, que deseamos vivir como Él, haciendo de nuestra vida un sacrificio gustoso en favor de las almas.

(French)

2. Considérons des leçons que le Seigneur nous donne lors de la dernière cène. Sa profonde prière est un appel pour les apôtres et pour nous chrétiens du monde entier. Apprenons de lui à prier avec foi, sincérité et confiance. En le contemplant, saint Josémaria disait souvent: Seigneur, apprend-moi à prier, apprend-moi à aimer. Cela pourrait être une demande à répéter fréquemment, en particulier pendant la sainte Messe, et quand nous communions.

Nous devons maintenir un dialogue personnel avec Dieu le Père, Dieu le Fils et Dieu le Saint-Esprit. Cet effort pour converser familièrement avec la Trinité, par l’intercession de la Vierge très sainte, nous aidera à vivre toute notre journée en présence de Dieu, à aimer davantage le trésor de l’Eucharistie, à mieux nous préparer à la confession sacramentelle, à améliorer nos études et notre travail, à nous éloigner décidément de tout ce qui pourrait nous éloigner de Dieu, à être très humains dans nos relations avec les autres, en les regardant comme des enfants de Dieu comme nous.

Si nous désirons vraiment nous conduire en bons chrétiens, nous devons tâcher de réserver du temps, chaque jour et, si il est possible, à heure fixe pour l’oraison mentale et pour l’oraison vocale. Jésus Christ, Dieu parfait et
homme parfait, prie et enseigne aux Douze, à tous les chrétiens, à se comporter ainsi.

(English)

3. Our Lord calls us friends. A true and loyal friend, as he told us, gives of himself in service of others: Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends (Jn 15:13). And Jesus himself opened up that path for us. “The Eucharist,” Pope Francis says, “is the sacrament of communion that brings us out of individualism so that we may follow him together, living out our faith in him. Therefore we should all ask ourselves before the Lord: how do I live the Eucharist? Do I live it anonymously or as a moment of true communion with the Lord, and also with all the brothers and sisters who share this same banquet?”[3]

Jesus does not turn anybody away. He does not discriminate against anyone, nor does he consider himself to be the enemy of those who treat him as an enemy. Saint Josemaría, who so intimately entered into Christ’s life and struggled each and every day to know him better and love him more, often repeated a phrase that can be of great use to us in our daily behavior: I have not had to learn to forgive, because our Lord has taught me to love.

Following Christ’s example, he knew how to love those who treated him poorly, and St. Paul’s hymn to charity filled him joy: love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong... Love bears all things (1 Cor 13:4-7). Always with joy; for that reason, the founder of Opus Dei often suggested: Practice a cheerful charity that is at once kindly and firm, human and supernatural. An affectionate charity, knowing how to welcome everyone with a sincere and habitual smile.[4] And he would point out: Sometimes a smile can be the best proof of a spirit of penance.[5]

(Italian)

4. Consideriamo la fede e l’amore con cui dobbiamo trattare Gesù in questo sacramento dell’Amore. Mi viene in mente un episodio della vita del fondatore dell’Opus Dei risalente all’anno 1974. Si trovava nell’Ecuador e lì ha sofferto il male di montagna con tanta intensità che durante quei giorni non ha potuto celebrare la Santa Messa. Assisteva a quella del futuro beato,
don Alvaro del Portillo, dal quale riceveva la Comunione. In seguito ci commentò che, quando sentiva sulla lingua la piccola particola consacrata, si prodigava in atti di ringraziamento, mentre pensava alla misericordia e alla bontà del Signore, che voleva abitare nella sua anima e nel suo corpo.

Tu sai che l'Eucaristia fa la Chiesa. E questo dono che ci concede il Signore, dovrebbe portarci a pregare per tutto il mondo, anche per le persone che non conoscono Cristo o non mettono in pratica la loro fede. Logicamente, quando ci troviamo così vicini a nostro Signore — non c'è intimità con Lui più grande di quella che abbiamo al momento della Comunione sacramentale — è logico, dicevo, che preghiamo per il Papa e per la Chiesa, per i sacerdoti e i religiosi, per le vocazioni di completa dedizione di sé al servizio di Dio, per l’intero popolo cristiano.

Affinché possiamo trattare con delicatezza nostro Signore, ricorriamo alla Madonna, Madre di Dio e Madre nostra, Donna eucaristica, come è stata chiamata dal Papa Giovanni Paolo II, che tra pochi giorni sarà canonizzato. Chiediamo in modo particolare per i nostri parenti e amici, perché ella li porti a un tratto più permanente d’intimità con suo divino Figlio. Sia lodato Gesù Cristo.


[2] Ibid.


[5] Ibid., no. 149.
1. Siamo arrivati alla notte santa della Pasqua, in cui Gesù Cristo è risorto dalla morte per una vita gloriosa e ci ha aperto le porte del cielo. Nel celebrare questa vigilia, la Chiesa ci incoraggia a vegliare in preghiera. Ammira l’amore e l’impazienza santa delle donne sante. Mentre gli altri dormono o si sono nascosti, loro aspettano vigilanti la prima luce dell’alba per recarsi a trovare Gesù. Da Lui hanno imparato ad amare; e malgrado qualcuna di loro abbia avuto una vita sciagurata, ormai non vogliono staccarsi più dal Signore.

La liturgia odierna è ricca di significato. Mediante il rito del fuoco nuovo, ci rammenta che Dio, nel principio, fece la luce dividendola dalle tenebre; e che Cristo, il Figlio del Dio vivente, che si è fatto uomo per noi, è la Luce vera, quella che illumina ogni uomo (Gv 1, 9). Lasciamoci illuminare da Lui. Accogliamo i suoi insegnamenti e mettiamoli in pratica nella nostra esistenza. Cerchiamo che altre persone conoscano pure Gesù e, abbandonando le tenebre del peccato, possano godere della Luce che non conosce tramonto.

La prima parte della Veglia Pasquale ci reclama questi propositi; propositi che dobbiamo convertire in risposte sincere. La Madonna è rimasta in vigilia di fede e di amore in attesa della risurrezione di Gesù. Ella ci aiuta a voler ricevere con frutto la grazia del suo figlio, che Lui ci elargisce in questa Pasqua dell’anno 2014.

(French)

2. La liturgie de la Parole nous a rappelé les merveilles que Dieu fit pour nous, pour nous libérer du péché et nous introduire dans la vie divine. Le récit de la création, l’histoire d’Abraham et celle de Moïse, la voix des prophètes enfin, illuminent progressivement les divers moments de l’histoire du salut. C’est surtout la miséricorde de Dieu qui se manifeste dans ces textes: Dieu qui ne nous oublie pas, nous, ses enfants. Ces récits soulignent en même temps que Dieu compte sur notre libre coopération: la fidélité d’Abraham, l’obéissance de Moïse, la réponse d’Isaïe à l’appel divin, tout cela nous donne soif d’être loyaux à l’égard de Dieu; nous possédons la certitude qu’Ezéchiel nous communique lorsqu’il annonce que le Seigneur lui-même mettra en nous un cœur nouveau et un esprit nouveau.
C’est cela, le fruit de la passion, de la mort et de la résurrection de Jésus Christ, avec l’envoi de l’Esprit Saint. N’oublions pas que, depuis notre baptême, nous pouvons dire avec saint Paul: Nous avons été ensevelis avec lui (avec le Christ) par le bapteme en sa mort, afin que, comme le Christ est ressuscité des morts par la gloire du Père, nous aussi nous marchions dans une vie nouvelle (Rom 6:4).

Voyons si cette vie nouvelle qui nous a été infusée au bapteme continue d’habiter en notre âme de manièvre habituelle; si nous faisons des efforts afin qu’elle croisse de jour en jour, en ayant fréquemment recours à la prière, au sacrement de Pénitence, et souvent aussi à la Sainte Communion.

(English)

3. Then, with the blessing of the water and the renewal of our baptismal promises, we reach the third moment of the Easter Vigil.

We are asked, in the name of the Church, if we renounce the devil, his works and his false promises. Your answer must be firm: “Yes, I renounce them!” This manifests the decision, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to be faithful to our baptismal commitments. And may the profession of faith in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit—“Yes, I believe!”—fill us with joy and give us a renewed vigor to walk loyally along the pathways of christian life.

Let us pray especially today for the thousands of people—children and adults—who, around the world, will be washed in the waters of baptism. May they be faithful to their christian vocation. And let us also remember the others—friends, relatives, acquaintances—who, while being Christians, are distant from the practice of the faith; not out of bad will in most cases, but rather out of ignorance, carelessness and laziness. Perhaps no one has spoken to them about the wonder of living close to God. Let us strive so that they come to know it through the witness of our words and our life. Starting today, may we decide to be true apostles of Jesus Christ.

(Spanish)

4. En la liturgia eucarística, se actualiza el sacrificio del Calvario. Cada vez que participamos en la Misa nos llenamos de alegría, pero este gozo cobra hoy una fuerza nueva, al comenzar el tiempo pascual. Surr...
Christus vere, alleluia!, exclamamos con la Iglesia. Jesús ha resucitado verdaderamente. Se halla, glorioso, oculto bajo las especies sacramentales. A Él se dirigen nuestra adoración y nuestras acciones de gracias.

¿Cómo poner por obra estos deseos de nuestra alma? Haciendo el propósito de ser, día a día, muy fieles a la vocación cristiana, de corresponder con generosidad a los requerimientos divinos, si el Señor nos hace entender que espera más de nosotros. ¡Más, más, más!, exclamaba san Josemaría, consciente de que en la senda de la vida cristiana nunca se puede decir ¡basta!

Tenemos el ejemplo de don Álvaro del Portillo, sucesor de san Josemaría al frente del Opus Dei. Desde que recibió la llamada específica de Dios a la Obra, su existencia fue un despliegue constante y progresivo de fidelidad, como expone la Santa Sede al proclamar que vivió heroicamente las virtudes cristianas. Acudamos a su ayuda, en estos meses próximos, mientras nos preparamos para su beatificación, el próximo 27 de septiembre.

Con la intercesión de la Santísima Virgen y también con el auxilio de san Josemaría, cuyas sagras relíquias veneramos en esta iglesia prelaticia, estos días de Pascua en Roma, si queremos, dejarán una huella imborrable en nuestras almas. Pidámoslo al Señor para cada una de nosotros. Así sea.

Torna ai contenuti

**Articles and Interviews**

**Interview granted to the weekly Pyung Hwa Sinmun, South Korea (June 1, 2014)**

*Opus Dei is still relatively unknown among the faithful of the Catholic Church of Korea. Could you please give a brief explanation about what the spirit of Opus Dei consists of? What do you hope for from the faithful of Opus Dei in Korea?*
The spirit of Opus Dei consists in trying to seek God—who is a good and merciful Father—in the activities of every day: in our family, in our work, in the occupations that we have in hand. The mission of this prelature of the Catholic Church consists in recalling that we have all been called to be saints: sanctity cannot be reduced to a goal for a privileged class, but for you, or me, for a mother or father of a family, for a young person or an aged one, rich or poor, healthy or sick. In the words of the founder, St. Josemaría Escrivá, it is a matter of a message that is “as old as the Gospel, and like the Gospel new.”

Seeking holiness in work, for example, leads one to finish things well, to be friendly, to know how to serve and to help one’s companions, to arrive punctually, to work with rectitude and, above all, to offer the task of each moment to God, which in this way is turned into a prayer pleasing to our Lord.

In the family, the joyful struggle for holiness demands dedicating time and affection to one’s wife or husband, to the children, to one’s parents, especially to the neediest members of each household. In this way, listening to and loving the others, solving the problems of the other members of the family, we help them to improve and get closer to God.

And in social life, the call to holiness is translated, also, into an invitation to be a good citizen, a good neighbor, fulfilling the obligations proper to this condition: feeling solidarity with those most in need, paying one’s taxes, obeying just laws.

From the faithful of Opus Dei in Korea, I hope that they seek God, that they find him every day in prayer, and that they love him; that they give witness of their faith, with a spirit of service; that they also love their country and their family; that they finish their work well, with fidelity, and that they love the local and the universal Church.

It is not easy to find Christ in a world that is so materialistic and secularized. What are the means that you can suggest to us in order to live as Christians and make him known to others being true witnesses? How can we fill ourselves with the joy of the Gospel that the Pope is proposing to us?

There comes to mind a thought that St. Josemaría left reflected in The Way, and that Pope Francisco has repeated to us in various ways: “these
world crises are crises of saints.” The world and the Church need saints, people who are young in spirit, interested and active in the debates of modern society, who always put before themselves love of God and of others, and not their own interests. For this they need the grace of God, that reaches us above all in the sacraments, especially in the Eucharist and Penance.

Holiness always brings with it joy. To live like good Christians and to make Christ known as true witnesses, we have to transmit joy and optimism. This joy is compatible with one’s daily difficulties and problems. Jesus Christ knows these problems, but he also tells us that we have to walk always joyfully because he has risen. This is something that the martyrs of Korea understood very well, when they gave their life for the greatest ideal possible, love for and union with God, which necessarily results in love and union with others.

Following the teaching of the Pope, I encourage you to read every day one or two scenes of the Gospel. To fill you with the joy of the Sacred Text, the first thing is to know it well, to read it, I insist, meditating on it for a few minutes each day. St. Josemaría recommended following the scenes or the passages “like one more person.” In a word, introducing ourselves into the Gospel scene that we have before our eyes, living it and making it our own, applying his teachings to today’s daily life.

Opus Dei is known as an example of fidelity and collaboration with the Pope and the Church. Pope Francis has said that the center of the Church is Christ. I believe that what he wants to tell us is that the Church does not affirm itself, but what it desires is to propose Christ as the reason for the existence and foundation of the Church. How should the Church of today and the future be so that it does not limit itself to being a conserver of itself, but rather a message of Christ who saves?

As St. Josemaría used to repeat, Opus Dei is a tiny part of the Church. Together with all the other Catholics, we want to follow Christ, well united to the Pope, his vicar on earth. Pope Francis has arrived as another gift of the Holy Spirit. I am moved when he speaks of personal conversion, a key to the renovation of the Church.
Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, the first successor of St. Josemaría, who visited Korea and will be beatified this coming September, insisted that, in order to be faithful of the Church, we need a constant conversion in our personal life. We will renew the Church if we first renew ourselves. A constant path for that conversion pushes us to love the indications of the Pope and—as I recalled earlier—have recourse frequently to the sources of grace, especially to the sacraments of Penance and of the Eucharist: in that way Christ will build up the Church in every faithful Catholic.

Observing the apostolate of Opus Dei we can see that communion with all, especially with the poor is fundamental. Various of the activities of Opus Dei respond to this message. Why is charity with all, especially with the poor, important? How can we grow in this communion with all of the others?

Charity is another name for holiness. Jesus constantly in the Gospel spoke to us of charity with all, including those who can give us nothing in exchange. This requires the sacrifice of overcoming our comfort and, at times, our personal tastes: we have to love those who have nothing and can give us nothing; the poor, the helpless, children, the sick. And also those who do not love us. We have to make the effort to see Christ in the face of all, especially of those who suffer, and treat them as we would want them to treat us if we found ourselves in their situation. That is to say, to treat them as we would treat Jesus himself. We will grow in communion with others when we live true charity, which demands loving others as God loves them and because God loves them.

Korea is the only country in the world that is divided into two. We say that we want peace, but we are not good at reconciliation. What can we do to grow in wisdom to obtain peace and reconciliation above and beyond ideology?

This seems to me to be a very good question, and it prompts me to renew my desire to pray every day for peace in this wonderful land. The specific solutions correspond rather to the civil sphere; nevertheless as a priest and bishop, I will dare to point out that we can all do something more to love and respect our neighbor, to help them to get closer to God and to respect others. The day that we see in the other man our brother in Christ, we have taken a very important step towards reconciliation. Precisely St. John XXIII, recently canonized together with St. John Paul II, in his well-known encyclical Pacem in Terris, spoke of the two pillars of peace being
justice and charity. And both of these rest, in turn, on respect for the dignity of the person. Both in Korea and in the rest of the world to attain peace and reconciliation, one needs to get rid of everything that supposes an offense to the dignity of the person.

Interview granted to “Zenit,” Rome (January 22, 2014)

By H. Sergio Mora

1. Bishop Echevarría, how did you, as Prelate of Opus Dei, react to the news of the upcoming beatification of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo?

As you can well understand, with profound joy and giving thanks to God and to Pope Francis, from whom the decision came to proceed with the beatification of this bishop, who so loved and served the Holy Church. Those who knew him, or have seen the films of his catecheses, usually say that Alvaro del Portillo spread peace and drew people to God. At this moment, I ask him to obtain for us from God the peace of heart which was so much his, and that this celebration may help many people to draw closer to God.

2. Initially the beatification was set to take place in Rome. Why was Madrid chosen finally?

A few months ago, when the news was made known of the future beatification, several options were studied. Preference was given to central places in Rome outside Saint Peter’s Square, which the previous Pontiff decided should be reserved for canonizations presided over by the Holy Father. However, as the number of participants foreseen increased, it was thought that it would be difficult to organize that ceremony in the Eternal City, as we all would have liked, despite the generous willingness of the authorities from the Vicariate of Rome and the municipal government.

3. Where did this idea come from?
The Congregation for the Causes of Saints thought another possibility suitable, which I suggested as Prelate of Opus Dei: to hold it in Madrid, birthplace of the new Blessed; also because the year of his beatification will coincide with the centenary of his birth. The news is being made public today because the Holy See has just stated that the Holy Father accepted that suggestion and established that the beatification will be in Madrid on September 27. This option will also facilitate the participation of many people from Madrid who wish to attend the beatification but who, in the context of the present economic crisis, would have found it difficult to make the trip to Italy.

Madrid is the city where Don Alvaro met Saint Josemaría, joined Opus Dei and received his priestly ordination. For thousands of people from countries all over the world, it will be an opportunity to visit the places related to the birth of Opus Dei, founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928 by Saint Josemaría. Moreover, the numerous faithful and friends of the Prelature who live in Madrid will be happy to assist in welcoming participants from other places. Although this news has been published in some of the media, I must specify that only now have we known of the approval received from the Holy See.

3. And for those who live in Rome or in Italy?

Rome is also the city of Don Alvaro, where he lived the greater part of his life (from 1946 to 1994) and where he worked as shepherd of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

We are studying with the competent authorities the possibility that, during the days following the beatification, Don Alvaro’s body (which rests in the crypt of the prelatic church of our Lady of Peace in Rome) will be taken temporarily to the Basilica of Saint Eugene. Thus that those who so desire, certainly quite a large number of people, will be able to pray before the mortal remains of the new Blessed. Also being organized is the possibility that, on the Wednesday after the beatification, many faithful will have the opportunity to take part in Pope Francis’ Wednesday audience, to show in this way their union with the Roman Pontiff and their filial gratitude for the beatification.
4. What about the collection that has been announced to assist several social initiatives in Africa?

The moment I received news of the future beatification, the desire came to mind that it also be an occasion to help needy people. Specifically, to ask each participant for a small sacrifice, to offer a donation to assist four social services projects in the African continent that arose from the inspiration and direct impulse of Bishop del Portillo. Harambee (an NGO born on the occasion of the canonization of Saint Josemaría) was asked to coordinate this effort. I am sure that, from Heaven, Don Alvaro will look with joy at this “gift,” which seeks to assist African initiatives for education and the fight against poverty.


“We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?” These words by Pope Francis in Evangelii Gaudium (EG) (no. 8) evoke our divinization, the raising-up of our nature that is granted to us as a gift by God. In Christ we discover who we are as human beings, and the greatness of our vocation (see Gaudium et Spes, no. 22). Our encounter with Jesus gives rise to a desire to share our joy with others (see EG no. 3). Pope Francis is inviting us “to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel” (EG no. 20).

The “going forth” to which the Pope is inviting us has traditionally been called “apostolate” and “evangelization” in the Church. This apostolate is characterized by, among other things, absolute respect for freedom, and is totally different from the negative meaning that the word “proselytism” has acquired, chiefly in the twentieth century. This is what the Pope says at no. 15 of Evangelii Gaudium: “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows,
but ‘by attraction.’” Christ’s teaching clearly excludes any approach that does not respect other people’s freedom and personal dignity. God wants to be loved truly, and that implies a free choice. Every vocation is a love story and a meeting of two freedoms: God’s call and the human person’s response.

The key that defines a genuinely Christian attitude is love. The words used by Pope Francis show this clearly: “I invite” (EG nos. 3, 33 and 108), “let me say this” (EG no. 3); he talks about a “brimming heart” (EG no. 5) and encourages us to enter into “this great stream of joy” that is the Christian community; he urges people not to place unnecessary conditions on the reception of Baptism or the Sacrament of Confirmation.

“Entering.” Jesus Christ rebuked the scribes and Pharisees: “you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in” (Mt 23:13). Allowing people to enter, letting them in, inviting them to enter: the force that attracts people is, as St. Josemaría said, “abundance of light,” human friendliness, prayer and personal sacrifice, Christ’s presence in Christians. “True love means going out of oneself, giving oneself” (Christ is Passing By, no. 43). This is the real meaning of Christian apostolate, and the original meaning of the word proselytism as traditionally understood in the Church, stemming from a Hebrew form rendered into Greek. Lacordaire expressed it in a lapidary phrase: “Just as there is no Christian without love, so there is no Christian without proselytism.”

Person-to-person apostolate means spending time with our neighbor, and its strength is nothing other than prayer, charity-filled patience, understanding, friendship, and love for freedom. It means coming out of ourselves to be concerned about others and share with them the truest and most beautiful thing we have: our Christian vocation. Christ’s command “Follow me,” far from exerting force, respects each individual’s freedom. This is shown eloquently—and sadly—in the dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man. And today? Pope Francis says: “At a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many lay people fear that they may be asked to undertake some apostolic work and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time” (EG no. 81).

The light of the Gospel is “luminous and attractive” (EG no. 100), because it is the law of love that invites us to do good (EG nos. 100-101).
On seeing Christians’ good works, our neighbour is led to give glory to God (see Mt 5:16) — to realize and praise God’s boundless love; it is a divine light, not a merely human one. In this sense, apostolate — a holy zeal for souls — consists of bearing witness to the light, as St. John says (John 1:7). It means spreading an abundance of light, without the slightest hint of imposing things upon people but with the utmost respect. And this is so because God only wants love, and so he acts gently — gently and strongly (see Wisdom 8:1). In his Message for the 20th World Day of Prayer for Vocations (February 2, 1983), Blessed John Paul II said, “We should have no fear in proposing the Lord’s call directly to a young or less young person. It is an act of esteem and confidence. It can be a moment of light and grace.” Timidity in this regard could betray a lack of faith and of humility, and is overcome with the light of Christ that each Christian is called to pass on to others.

What light? Pope Benedict XVI said at the end of his first encyclical: “Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 39). In perfect continuity with this message, Pope Francis says in his first encyclical that “The movement of love between Father, Son and Spirit runs through our history, and Christ draws us to himself in order to save us (see John 12:32)” (Lumen Fidei, no. 59).

The polar opposite of the false type of proselytism that does not respect the human person, is apostolate conceived of as attraction. In other words, bringing people, transparently and respectfully, to face the possibility of generous self-dedication, which is exactly what the Pope describes. This apostolate includes witness that is fully aware of the other person’s freedom and dignity, and enables the Christian heart to share in the divine and human love of Jesus. And when it does, that heart is filled with an uncontainable desire to pass on the joy of the Gospel to others.

+ Javier Echevarría

Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei
The Church is preparing for the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II, two Popes who showed great esteem for the Work. What memories do you have of them?

About John XXIII, I remember his exceptional goodness, obvious to everyone; and about John Paul II there comes to mind, above all, his deep spirit of prayer. Pope Roncalli knew and esteemed Opus Dei from before he was named Patriarch of Venice. During a private audience he asked St. Josemaría about the possibility of beginning a social work in Casa Bruciato, a working-class section of Rome. And a few years later the Centro ELIS was born, which offers professional training and formation to many young people with limited means.

Regarding John Paul II, besides the paternal affection he always had towards Don Alvaro (and later towards myself, as prelate of Opus Dei), I have one image deeply engraved on my memory. In 2005, when he could no longer participate physically in the Way of the Cross that is celebrated each year in the Coliseum, he followed the ceremony on television, clinging to a wooden cross. He no longer had strength to speak or to walk, but he embraced Christ crucified with his whole soul.

We have just celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, in which Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo played a significant role. Could you speak about those Conciliar sessions and their future consequences?

Although Don Alvaro worked in various Conciliar commissions with great intensity and dedication, he rarely spoke about this work, partly out of humility and also because of the natural reserve that those types of tasks demand. He only referred from time to time and in a general way to some of the projects entrusted to him. He was especially happy to see the mission of the laity in the Church stressed in the Council’s teachings, and the clear and unequivocal proclamation of the universal call to holiness that Christ
addresses to all the baptized.

Another source of great joy for him were the steps taken during that period to seek unity among Christians. This was one of the great desires he harbored in his heart. He prayed intensely, especially during the octave for Christian unity in the month of January, that our Lord might grant his Church that unity.

You lived close to Don Alvaro for many years. Could you sum up his life in three essential features?

The founder, in one of his letters, called him Saxum, Latin for “rock,” a firm point of support. This expression depicts him very well. He was a rock, a solid help for the founder and for everyone, especially since St. Josemaría's death.

Another characteristic feature was his faithfulness. As a priest and as a bishop he left us as a legacy an unforgettable lesson of loyalty to the Church and to Opus Dei. From 1975 (the year when the founder died) until 1982 (when the Work was erected as a personal prelature), he faithfully transmitted St. Josemaría's spirit. And he continued doing so right until his death in 1994.

A third feature that defined him was peace and joy; he transmitted a deep joy, serenity and peace to those around him.

By a happy coincidence, the announcement of Don Alvaro's beatification arrived together with that of the canonization of John Paul II. A current of profound respect and affection existed between the two. Can you tell us something about this?

They were united by a deep friendship, rooted in faith in Jesus Christ and, on Don Alvaro's part, a clear filiation to the common father in the Church. I recall one day, late in the evening, when John Paul II received him in audience. The Pope was very tired after a hard day of work. Don Alvaro noticed this, but the Pope said that if at that hour of the day he wasn't tired, “it would be a sign he hadn't fulfilled his duty that day.” The Pope’s words moved Don Alvaro deeply and he often made reference to them. I will never forget the day on which Don Alvaro died. John Paul II
came here, to the central seat of Opus Dei, to pray before his body lying in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace.

A year has gone by since the resignation of Benedict XVI and the election of Pope Francis. You are constantly asking people to pray for the Pope. What do you think about Benedict’s decision, and what has impressed you about the gestures, apparently revolutionary, of Pope Francis?

Pope Benedict XVI’s resignation signified, for the whole world, a deep manifestation of humility and of the sense of service that characterizes a true pastor of souls.

As far as Pope Francis is concerned, I think that some of his gestures appear revolutionary precisely because they are genuine and authentic. When people see him, in person or on television, they immediately recognize a true priest, who is interested in everyone’s problems; a priest who listens to you and is always ready to pray. And that is what we are all seeking, what we all want to find in every priest.

St. Josemaría said that Opus Dei wants to serve the Church as the Church wishes to be served. Nevertheless, some people have spoken about an attempt to “curb” the reforms sought by Pope Francis.

Opus Dei does not seek to “curb” anything the Pope wants to promote. And I sincerely think that the idea of “curbing” the Pope, who enjoys the assistance of the Holy Spirit, has never passed through anyone’s head in the Prelature. The Holy Father is providing a very deep apostolic push, which is affecting not only the Church but all humanity.

Besides, certain advances are necessary because, no matter how well organized, human structures always run the risk of not responding to their high mission of spreading the Gospel message throughout the whole world.

What seems especially relevant to me is the impetus the Pope is giving to inspire all the faithful to commit themselves to the task of the new evangelization; also his work to revitalize the organisms available for the service of the Church and the faithful, together with his eagerness to make everyone aware of God’s mercy.

Somewhat like the “apostolic journeys” of St. Josemaría, you have traveled to South America, the Holy Land and India. And in parallel with the Holy Father,
who after World Youth Day in Rio, is preparing to visit Jerusalem and Korea. What is the situation of the Church in those countries? What does it expect of the Work?

In each one of those places I have found very different realities, and at the same time great possibilities of apostolic service to souls. In some places today, although at times it is hard to understand this in Europe, it is not at all easy to be a Christian. There are many Catholics who are persecuted because of their faith, and some encounter great difficulties in evangelizing because of the societies or the governments where they live. Precisely for that reason, their example is especially praiseworthy and an example for all of us.

The challenge confronting every Christian (especially evident in these areas, and also in the West, as Pope Francis has often reminded us) is to bring Christ to everyone, to build bridges of unity, to help resolve so many conflicts, and to spread the true culture of peace the Gospel teaches us.

In which countries will the apostolic work of Opus Dei begin soon?

There are many countries where, despite not having any stable apostolic work, some faithful of Opus Dei are living or traveling to for professional or family reasons. When I have an opportunity to speak with them, they always ask me when the apostolic work will begin there. Undoubtedly the thirst for the Gospel is strong all over the world, so we need to ask God to send workers for his harvest. I am thinking of the possibility of beginning in some countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

‘John XXIII and John Paul II: Two holy Popes, Two Marian saints,’ El Mercurio, Chile (April 24, 2014)

The canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II is a great event for the Church and a sign of hope for the world, because where sanctity flourishes the crises in this world don’t have the final word.
Sanctity provides a solid foundation on which to build the future. In our faith, and in a special way in the saints, we find an answer to the deepest problems of mankind and society, often the result of being distant from God.

We should give thanks to God on seeing that, during recent decades (when so much has been said about the “crises” in economics, culture, politics, society and religion), the Church has been guided by holy people, by saints. Two of the three Roman Pontiffs from these years (John XXIII and John Paul II) will be canonized this Sunday, and the beatification process for the third recent Pope (Paul VI) is now well advanced.

John XXIII is, above all, the Pope who convoked the Second Vatican Council. As Peter’s successor he guided the Church, with a firm and fatherly hand, towards this extraordinary experience of faith and personal and collective renewal. As Guadium et Spes emphasized, the Council strove to speak to the hearts of men and women in today’s world. Pope Roncalli helped place the vocation to holiness at the very core of Christian life. We can go to his intercession today to beseech God that all men and women may take deeply to heart this truth proclaimed by Vatican II: that sanctity is attainable by all Christians, and is not a goal for a few select people.

For mankind as a whole, John XXIII is also the Pope of peace, since during a very tense historical moment he had no hesitation, following the example of his predecessors, to do everything possible to prevent war, using all of his moral and religious authority to make clear the prerequisites for peace and for the safeguarding of the dignity of the human person.

John Paul II was a priest in love with God and mankind, created in the image of God in Christ. Spurred by charity, he convoked the whole Church to the “new evangelization,” while stressing at the same time the role that corresponds to the laity in this task of making God present in the life of people and nations. During the years of his pontificate we have been given new light to grasp more deeply God’s goodness and mercy. His words, his gestures, his writings, his personal self-giving (both in health and in sickness) have been instruments used by the Holy Spirit to draw many people to the sources of grace, and to encourage thousands of young people to say “yes” to Christ’s call to the priesthood, to religious life, to matrimony and to lay apostolic celibacy.
The Polish Pope led us from the second into the third millennium, leaving behind him a rich legacy on the dignity of the human person, the value of human life and the family, service to the poor and needy, the rights of workers, human love and the dignity of women, and about so many other aspects crucial for fostering a life of human dignity.

His writings and words provide us with a body of teachings with enormous potential for the future. I personally am convinced that his social and human message (stemming from his deep spiritual response to God) will become more and more important with the passage of the years.

The canonization of these two great shepherds takes place a few days before we begin May, the month of Mary. This is a feature that unites the two new saints: their deep and tender love for our Lady. John XXIII frequently pointed to our Lady’s “universal motherhood.” Mary is “the common Mother of all men and women, brothers and sisters in Christ, the firstborn Son” (October 12, 1961). In John Paul II, the awareness of the closeness and intercession of our Mother burned strongly in his own spiritual and human journey, and it drew others to discover the “Marian dimension” in the life of all Christ’s disciples. Filiation to our Lady, he said, is “a gift which Christ himself makes personally to every individual” (see Redemptoris Mater, no. 45).

Our Lady holds an important place in the spiritual life of each of the faithful, but also in the building up of the Church as a whole. Therefore, with the upcoming canonization on Sunday, I would like to quote these words from Saint Josemaría Escrivá: “It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the Mystical Body and more united to its visible head, the Pope. That’s why I like to repeat: All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!” (Christ is Passing By, no. 139). It gives me great joy that it has been Pope Francis, also a deeply Marian Pope, who has decided to go ahead with these two canonizations. All three of them have shown us that charity is not a merely human virtue, but that it means bringing Christ to other men and women, which is what Mary did in the service of all mankind.

Soon we will grow accustomed to referring to these two shepherds as Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II. By canonizing them, Pope
Francis, the Vicar of Christ, is helping us to see that, in God’s eyes, Angelo Roncalli and Karol Wojtyla are, above all, two holy persons, a fundamental goal for the life of each man and women. Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II were two priests with great hearts, with a burning love for God and all men and women. Two great saints, united by a tender love for Mary, Mother of God and our Mother.

+ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei

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Interview granted to Archisevilla Digital, Spain (June 20, 2014)

By Ana Capote

*Don Javier, what do you ask of the faithful of the Work in relation to the dioceses?*

I ask that we pull the cart in the same direction as the bishop of the diocese, and that we are ready to learn from others. The fact that a faithful of the diocese is a member of the prelature of Opus Dei has to lead to a closer union, shown in deeds, with the diocesan bishop and the other faithful of that particular Church.

*And more specifically, what do you ask of the faithful of Opus Dei in Seville?*

I ask that the men and women in Seville who are faithful of Opus Dei pray for vocations to the diocesan priesthood, for the catechists and educators, for the holiness of the families in Seville, and for the other intentions of their beloved Archbishop Juan José Basenji. Also I encourage them to increase every day their apostolic zeal, so that the Church in Seville may obtain abundant fruit from the prelature’s work of evangelization in this land. We give thanks to God that the Work’s apostolic efforts, by God’s grace, are giving rise to many Christian marriages, as well as vocations to the priesthood, religious life, and lay celibacy.
Moreover, as Sevillians, I would also ask that they help transmit to the whole Church the joy and the deep love for our Lady that is so characteristic of this land.

You were a witness to John Paul II’s love for Seville. Could you share any memory about this?

The Pope was in Seville twice. I recall, among other things, his joy at being able to beatify Sister Angela of the Cross there, whom he later proclaimed a saint in a ceremony that took place years later, in 2003, in Madrid. St. John Paul loved Seville a lot and the love of the Sevillians for the Pope has been made visible in the statue of the new saint now installed next to the Archbishop’s residence.

With his canonization still quite recent, what features would you highlight in the new saint?

St. John Paul II was a priest, a bishop, and a Pope closely united to Christ’s mother, at whose feet he put his pastoral service, under the motto Totus Tuus. He summoned the Church to a new evangelization and he led by his example. The Holy Spirit made use of his words, gestures, writings, and self-giving, to bring millions of men and women to the sources of grace, and to dedication to God in the priesthood, in the religious life, in marriage and in lay apostolic celibacy. He led us into the third millennium, leaving us an imposing legacy on human life and the family, care for the poor and the most needy, the rights of workers, the dignity of women, and so many other points that are central to furthering the good of all mankind.

And what about John XXIII?

St. John XXIII is the Pope who convoked the Second Vatican Council, an expression of faith and renewal in the Church that sought to speak to the hearts of the men and women of our era. Pope Roncalli was a sower of peace. Amid very tense historical circumstance, he did all he could to prevent war. Following the example of his predecessors, he left us a rich teaching on the requirements for peace and human dignity. He was a “father” who was very likeable, with a deep devotion to our Lady.

What image do you retain from your first meeting with Pope Francis?
The image of a father who receives you with great cordiality and simplicity, and who encourages you in the mission of evangelization. Specifically I have engraved on my memory his great interest in spreading the Sacrament of Penance. Pope Francis is another gift of the Holy Spirit to his Church. His zeal to closely accompany everyone (healthy or sick, rich or poor) is a stimulus for all Christians to strive to bring Christ’s love and mercy to the furthest corner of the earth.

What thoughts come to mind when we mention St. Josemaría Escrivá?

An extraordinary gratitude and a great desire to imitate his joyful and dedicated life, filled with zeal for souls. I could speak to you for hours about St. Josemaría. But I will limit myself here to emphasizing a very typical attitude of his, which I had the grace of witnessing directly: his capacity to imitate Christ on the Cross, with his arms wide open to everyone. He opened his priestly heart to those on the left, in the center, and on the right; to the poor and the rich, to the healthy and the sick; to everyone without exception. He had the openness of Christ, the going out to find souls, about which Pope Francis speaks so often.

And Alvaro del Portillo?

In thinking of Alvaro del Portillo, I especially remember his permanent smile, his kindness and constant faithfulness, his spirit of service. Many of the people in contact with him (from ecclesiastics in the Holy See to farm workers he met in a village near Rome) told me that “Don Alvaro transmitted peace.” As we prepare now for his beatification, I am going to his intercession, asking him to “infect” us with a deep Christian peace of soul; with his loyalty to God, to the Church, and to the Pope; and with his social concern shown in spurring forward so many initiatives all over the world for the assistance of the most needy.

A saint and a blessed: they have set the bar very high for you, haven’t they?

When I look at them, my reaction is: thank you, my God, for these two giants of holiness. More than as unattainable models (a very high bar, as you said), I like to see them as two great allies, two intercessors who are helping us from heaven. And from there they are encouraging and sustaining us with the same heart of a father and of a mother with which they loved us on earth.
Do we all have the “stuff of saints”?

St. Josemaría asked himself the same question in a point in The Way. And he answered that having the “raw material” to be a saint is not enough. We all have the possibility of following and imitating Jesus Christ, spreading charity. But to attain this goal—and to obtain happiness with a capital “H”—we need to let God’s grace do its work, normally with the help of others, with docility and obedience to the different calls that our Lord addresses to us.

* The address of the Prelate of Opus Dei in the conference *Vir fidelis multum laudabitur*, for the hundredth anniversary of Bishop del Portillo’s birth, is printed in full under the heading “Centennial” in the section “On the Venerable Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo.”

“Thank You, Holy Father,” on the first anniversary of Pope Francis’s pontificate, Various news agencies (March 12, 2014)

The conference for the centennial of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s birth, which we are beginning today, coincides with Pope Francis’ annual retreat and with the first anniversary of his election to the see of Peter.

Therefore I would like to begin these three days of reflection with the deepest gratitude to the Holy Spirit for his continual assistance to the People of God. Naturally, we also want to thank Pope Francis for the apostolic dynamism he is spreading around him and his great concern to draw close to each person.

His encouragement is a spur to all Christians to strive to bring Christ’s love and mercy to the furthest corners of the world. Many people have seen in Pope Francis a priest who prays a lot and who is always ready to listen to those he is with. All this is a reason for great filial joy and thanksgiving to heaven.
A central point of the preaching of Alvaro del Portillo was precisely fidelity to the Church and love for the Pope. Wherever he went, Bishop del Portillo asked people to pray for the intentions of the Roman Pontiff. He was always moved by the desire to bring “Rome to the outposts of the earth” and “the outposts to the Pope,” as St. Josemaría said (The Forge, no. 638).

Following Venerable Alvaro del Portillo’s example, let us be closely united to the Pope and his intentions on his retreat in Ariccia, as he asked of us in his Sunday Angelus.

+ Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei

Torna ai contenuti
Blessed Alvaro
Del Portillo

- Regarding the Beatification
- The Centennial
Regarding the Beatification

Announcement of the Beatification

After Pope Francis’s approval of the required miracle and the formal decree of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints (July 5, 2013), the Holy See confirmed in a letter dated January 21, 2014 that the Holy Father (at the request of the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría) has established that Alvaro del Portillo will be beatified in Madrid, his hometown, on September 27, 2014.

An International Encounter in Madrid

The beatification ceremony in Madrid will be presided over by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato, and faithful from all over the world are expected to participate. The next day, Bishop Javier Eschevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving.

“I ask that, in this time of special joy,” said Bishop Javier Echevarría, “you unite yourselves to my gratitude to the Pope, for his decision that the beatification will go forward of this bishop who loved and served the Holy Church so much. From now on let us entrust to the soon-to-be-blessed Alvaro the intentions of the Holy Father: the renewed apostolic spirit and service to God of all Christians, the concern and care for the most needy, the upcoming Synod on the family, the holiness of priests.”

Don Alvaro and Madrid

The biography of Bishop del Portillo—whom many people call “Don Alvaro”—is closely linked to the city of Rome (where he lived most of his life) and Madrid, where he was born on March 11, 1914, and where he spent his childhood and youth with his parents and seven siblings. It was also in the capital of Spain that he met St. Josemaría Escrivá and decided to join Opus Dei in 1935.

While he was a 19-year-old engineering student in Madrid, the young Alvaro del Portillo took part in the activities of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, teaching catechism to children in Vallecas and other poor
neighborhoods and distributing donations and food to needy families. Later, encouraged by St. Josemaría, he continued to carry out similar activities with the young people who participated in the initial work of Opus Dei organized around the DYA Academy.

After finishing his civil and ecclesiastical studies, he was ordained in Madrid by the bishop of the diocese, Most Rev. Leopoldo Eijo y Garay, on June 25, 1944, and he carried out his priestly ministry there until he moved to Rome in 1946.

**Setting of the Beatification**

As is well known, the papal decree of Benedict XVI on the rites of beatification and canonization—promulgated by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on September 29, 2005—states that beatifications will be celebrated by a representative of the Holy Father, usually the prefect of the aforementioned Congregation, in the place that is considered most suitable. The same decree provides that only canonizations will be presided over by the Pope.

For this reason, when the upcoming beatification was announced, several options were explored, with preference being given to central locations in Rome other than St. Peter’s Square, which is reserved to the Holy Father. Due to the large number of expected participants, however, these proposals proved difficult to implement, and the Congregation considered particularly opportune a second possibility that arose: celebrating the ceremony in Madrid, the birthplace of Alvaro del Portillo, in the year that marks the centenary of his birth, which will also allow a larger number of his countrymen, for whom a trip to Rome would be difficult because of the current economic crisis, to attend the ceremony.

Plans are already being made to take care of the participants from around the world, including visits to the Cathedral de la Almudena and places related to the life of Alvaro del Portillo and the beginnings of Opus Dei, which was founded by St. Josemaría Escrivá—in Madrid—on October 2, 1928.

[Torna ai contenuti]
Bishop Echevarría: Prepare for the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo with works of mercy

“Treating with greater affection the sick person who lives at home or in a hospital, helping out with a food-bank, showing concern for the needy in a poor neighborhood or for those who are ‘ashamed’ and hide their poverty, spending time with the aged in a nursing home or with those in prison, who have no one to show concern for them... All of this, moreover, will help us to prepare in an excellent way for Don Alvaro’s beatification,” said Bishop Echevarría in a letter of this past July 1, addressed to the faithful of Opus Dei.

The Prelate invited them to follow the future blessed’s example of service who, from his earliest youth, “took very seriously some words of the Master, which St. Matthew records for us, about the final judgment. The Lord will invite the just to share in his joy, based on the fact that they have helped the most needy on earth: ‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink...Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me’ (Mt 25:35, 40).”

“When we open our eyes to so many situations of need today, we discover each day Jesus Christ himself, who united himself in solidarity with each and every man and woman. And if we care for these people, close by or distant, with mercy, we ‘touch’ with our hands very closely the Most Holy Humanity of our Lord, as Pope Francis assures us: ‘How can we find Jesus’ wounds today? I cannot see them as Thomas saw them. We find Jesus’ wounds in carrying out works of mercy. These are the wounds of Jesus today.’ (Homily, July 3, 2013).”

Bishop Echevarría stressed the role that works of mercy had in the spiritual life of Bishop del Portillo: “the call of Don Alvaro to Opus Dei, on that 7th of July 1935, was prepared by the action of grace in his heart and by his fraternal charity towards everyone, and specifically towards the needy. Starting in 1934, with other friends who already knew Opus Dei, he frequently went to an outlying area of Madrid where he taught catechism
and visited the poor and the sick. And I think one can say that his first contact with St. Josemaría was a direct consequence of those activities.”

“On seeing how St. Josemaría asked those who came to the Residence to go to those encounters with the needy, with the sick, Don Alvaro saw even more clearly the importance, not only theoretical but also practical, of the works of mercy. ‘Contact with poverty, with destitution,’ he remarked many years later, ‘produces an enormous spiritual shock. It makes us see that often we are concerned about foolish things that are simply the result of our own selfishness and pettiness.’”

Alvaro del Portillo, following the path of St. Josemaría, fostered throughout the world numerous initiatives for the assistance of the most needy: “When he met with adults or young people, he invited them to grow in their concern for the disadvantaged, by promoting projects to help remedy educational, health, workplace needs, etc., and specifically, in order to bring God to people and help them get closer to him. He also fostered this responsibility among business people, industrialists, bankers and, in general, among men and women with financial means. He spoke to them about the possibility of starting or supporting such initiatives, which they should consider a duty stemming from the justice and charity that should inform each Christian’s actions, and from a sincere love for all mankind, our brothers and sisters.”

“Recently I asked you,” wrote the Prelate, “to make a special effort to prepare spiritually for that event: the works of mercy also,” he concluded, “form part of that preparation.”

Four social projects in Africa

“All of us, to the extent possible, need to put ourselves in contact with people who are suffering, with the sick, with the poor... with those who are lonely, the abandoned.” These words, written by Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo in 1981, reflect his desire to help those in need and bring to everyone the loving and merciful face of Christ. This ardent desire led him to spur forward dozens of social and educational initiatives throughout the world in
his years at the head of Opus Dei.

For his beatification, Harambee Africa International is seeking to give a new impetus to that desire. In coordination with the Beatification Committee, the NGO has organized a special collection to assist four of the projects promoted by Bishop del Portillo in several African countries.

1. The creation of a maternal and infant center dependent on Niger Hospital and Diagnostic Centre in Enugu, Nigeria. The Niger Foundation and Diagnostic Centre (NFH) began operating in 1990, with the aim of contributing to the improvement of the health of the people living in Enugu, Nigeria. Today the hospital offers medical consultations, diagnoses, therapeutical services, radiology and clinics for analysis. The creation of a maternal and infant pavilion will contribute to better health care for many of the 1.2 million people living in Enugu.

2. The expansion and improvement of three medical dispensaries and the training of nursing personnel at the Centre Hospitalier Monkole and the Institut Supérieur en Sciences Infirmières in Kinshasa, Congo. Monkole Hospital Center, located in the district of Mont-Ngafula, opened in 1991. Today the hospital, along with the nurses training institute, cares for more than 80,000 patients a year, of which 48,000 are women and 70% of them live in conditions of extreme poverty. The new ambulatory clinics will provide care for 10,000 children each year.

3. The development of a program to fight infant malnutrition by the Centre Rurel Ilomba in Bingerville, Ivory Coast. The country’s continued instability since the war in 2002, and the ensuing economic crisis, have caused a great deterioration in people’s living conditions, especially in the countryside. To alleviate this situation, the project seeks to mount a fight against malnutrition, provide medical attention to 4,800 persons, and offer training in hygiene and nutrition through courses for 500 women, as well as the acquisition of a vehicle to permit medical visits to homes.

4. A scholarship fund for African priests and seminarians who are receiving formation at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. This project seeks to further the formation of priests and seminarians from African dioceses who are unable to pursue ecclesiastical studies due to a lack of financial resources. A scholarship of 13,500 Euros ($17,000) per year
The miracle of don Alvaro: An Interview with the parents of José Ignacio Ureta Wilson

The miracle attributed to don Alvaro and approved by the Holy See refers to the cure of the Chilean child José Ignacio Ureta Wilson who, a few days after his birth, in August of 2003, suffered a heart stoppage of more than half an hour and a massive hemorrhage.

His parents prayed through the intercession of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and, when the doctors thought that the baby was dead, without any additional treatment and in a totally unexpected manner, the heart of the recently born child began to beat again, until it reached a rhythm of 130 beats per minute. Despite the gravity of his condition, eleven years later José Ignacio is living a normal life. The cure took place in August of 2003. In this brief interview, his mother narrates the sequence of events.

How old is José Ignacio today?

On 10 July [2013] he will be 10 years old. He was born on July 10, 2003.

He was born with problems, isn’t that right?

Well, in fact the problems started well before his birth. Already in January 2003, when I was expecting José Ignacio, we were told his birth would not be easy as it was very probable that he would be born with an omphalocele (an intestinal hernia). From that moment we entrusted ourselves to Bishop Alvaro, praying the prayer-card. When they did the ultrasound in March, the diagnosis was confirmed.

At the beginning of June I had to go into hospital so that I could give birth to the baby. The waiting seemed to go on forever, they were difficult
times, as our older son stayed at home and became anxious for his parents.

When finally José Ignacio was born, he weighed 3 lbs. 14 oz., but the doctors thought this was a success as they expected him to be no more than 3 lbs. 5 oz.

_Hadn’t they detected any problems with the heart?_

Before he was born they had not. But afterwards the doctors, in order to operate on his omphalocele as soon as possible, carried out various tests, and very soon detected that José Ignacio had a cardiac malformation with grave consequences for his blood flow.

The problems with his heart started from his birth. On Saturday July 12 José Ignacio underwent surgery for the omphalocele, but there were complications, because his temperature dropped, his heart stopped and they had to finish the operation urgently. In the following few days there were fresh problems, and he suffered some damage to the brain. We have a diagnostic sonography from July 28 that shows changes in brain mass, with lesions in both hemispheres due to lack of blood irrigation.

One day I started to pray in silence, and it seemed to me that the measurements of oxygen saturation shown on the screen for José Ignacio stabilized little by little. I remember telling my husband about it. At a given moment, the duty nurse came to see how he was, and when she saw the saturation levels had stabilized, she lowered the level of the respirator so that José Ignacio could start breathing little by little on his own. That was a key moment for us to be reassured in the conviction that Bishop Alvaro was helping us and so I asked a few more persons to please help us by continuing to pray to Bishop Alvaro for José Ignacio.

At first the idea was to stabilize José Ignacio so he could be discharged from the hospital and bring him back for an operation a year later, but in view of the situation the doctors decided on a palliative operation, still planning the definitive operation later.

The heart operation on José Ignacio took place on July 30, twenty days after he had been born. In the first 48 hours after the operation everything seemed fine. The doctors seemed happy.

After that the situation changed completely.
**What happened?**

On August 2, around 2:30 pm, we were asked to go immediately to the Intensive Care Unit for children in the University hospital because José Ignacio was very sick. We thought the situation was extremely grave. We prayed all the way there. When we got there I asked to see my son and they told me that it was not possible as they were reviving him. I was so nervous I almost couldn’t walk. I embraced my father in law who happened to be there at that moment, and started praying the prayer-card of Bishop Alvaro incessantly. I finished one and started another one straight away. We did nothing else.

We called several people and asked them to call everyone to ask them to pray to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo asking for José Ignacio.

A nurse told me later that that day she had seen José Ignacio and was surprised by how strange he looked, even though the measurements seemed normal. They decided to do an echocardiogram and it was then that they found out about the pericardial effusion, and immediately started to try to reduce it. After that is when his heart stopped.

*Another cardiac arrest, like the ones before the operation?*

No, this time the heart stopped for more than half an hour. The doctors thought he had died, because he did not react to the cardiac massage or to anything. But when they were starting to give up, the heart of José Ignacio started beating again.

Even then, the hemorrhage had been massive. I remember it was doctor Felipe Heusser, cardiologist from the Catholic University, who told us that José Ignacio had recovered his normal heart beat, but that there had been a blood spill in the pericardial area as well as in the area of the kidneys.

We went in to see José Ignacio and he was white as a ghost. We were distraught. His nails were purple — it had been explained to us that this was for lack of oxygen.

During the whole of that day our prayer was very intense.

*When did he start to recover?*
The next day, at the start of the day, they told us that José Ignacio had had a good night. When we went in to see him we were surprised by his healthy color, like the color of a new-born baby, and that his nails were no longer purple.

I remember that the duty doctor mentioned that doctor Heusser had come asking at what time of the night José Ignacio had died. It’s a small thing that has always struck me, as it is the same thing that a doctor asked the father of Saint Josemaría when he was gravely ill as a child. 

Doctor Heusser has confirmed to me that he never thought that the child would live. He constantly reminds me how surprised he was that José Ignacio was saved. He once asked us to whom we had prayed. The other doctors were also surprised.

*Does José Ignacio have a normal life now?*

He lives the normal life of a child of his age, even though he has had to overcome difficulties that other children have not had to contend with. After all that happened to him, we thought that the only alternative was that he would die or, if he survived, that he would be lying in bed all the time. That’s why for us everything that José Ignacio does can only be explained in the light of God and the intercession of Bishop Alvaro.

He is a great soccer player. Whenever he is able, he puts on the shirt of Alexis Sanchez, or of Messi, or the one of his team, the Colo-Colo, and plays soccer with his friends. He also likes tennis, and one teacher with whom he has played at our house in the country says that he is very well coordinated and enthusiastic. He never tires of dancing: he loves music, and goes round the house singing songs he has made up himself and dancing to all kinds of rhythms. In the wedding of his aunty he danced non-stop till the party ended.

*Have there been any bad neurological effects?*

José Ignacio gets help in order to concentrate better and, like some of his friends at school, has a special teacher to help him advance. In other words, you could say that the difficulties he has had are within normal parameters. At school, he has found reading and writing difficult, but now he has learned to manage better.
According to the special teacher, José Ignacio has a lot of potential and is very shrewd. Sometimes when he does some homework and it goes wrong he gets annoyed, but later thinks again and goes back to working at it. He is shrewd enough to understand things quickly, and is then able to use it as a joke to laugh about, or as an argument to justify something. At mealtimes he makes us laugh a lot, as he is very witty and humorous.

*How would you describe the character and personality of your son?*

I am his mother and I recognize that sometimes I can lose my objectivity. But I will try to be as close as I can to reality, trying not to be led by my feelings, or the pride of having a son like him.

José Ignacio is a cheerful and enthusiastic boy, very motivated. I would also highlight his perseverance, his low tolerance of frustration, a great self-esteem and sociability.

At school he has many friends with whom he gets together to do homework, or to play with the Wii or with the Play Station, or to play soccer. He is often invited to the houses of the others, and is a leader in his year. He is also a friend of many of the teachers, assistants, and older pupils. At one school event, he took part in a dancing competition, and had no problem getting the microphone from the older pupils to sing a song.

A story we remember from when he was eight years old, is about the religious studies teacher who sees him arrive at the school with a good packed meal in his hand. With great enthusiasm he tells José Ignacio that that lunch will go very well with coffee, and José Ignacio answers: “it would go better with some beer.” That quick wit is very usual in him.

Despite the fact that school has not been easy, he has known how to persevere and his self-esteem has never gone down as a result. If he finds something difficult he asks for help and it doesn’t become a problem.

In the family he is also a cheerful child, who tries hard and enjoys life. The birth of his younger brother, just over a year ago, filled him with happiness: he sings to him, talks to him, takes him in his arms, is concerned if he cries, and checks who goes near him in order to protect him.

*May I ask you what these events have meant for you and your husband?*

They have meant a lot spiritually. And they have left a mark in other
ways too, but above all it has been important in the spiritual plane. When we analyze our married life, we realize that for us the “adventure” of José Ignacio has been a process of deep conversion and getting closer to God.

It was then that we discovered our vocation to Opus Dei. For me it was when I was resting in the hospital, preparing for the birth of José Ignacio, and for my husband some time later. We hope that Bishop Alvaro will continue to intercede for us in the future, as he has done until now.

Do you think that the story of José Ignacio includes a message that can be of interest to everyone?

It’s a call to hope for all those living through difficulties. José Ignacio is a living testimony of the gift that God has made to us bringing us to this world, and his perseverance shows us what it means to struggle day by day to give the best of ourselves whatever our circumstances in life. In times when the circumstances make life difficult, being close to God is what gives you strength to go forward.

Torna ai contenuti

Words of the Prelate to the faithful of Opus Dei on the occasion of the beatification

On January 22, with the announcement of the date and place for the beatification of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Bishop Echevarría wrote these brief words of thanksgiving.

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

With great gratitude to God, I want to inform you that yesterday afternoon, shortly after returning from India, I received confirmation that the Holy Father Francis has decreed, accepting my petition (given the large number of people who wish to attend the beatification of our beloved Venerable Don Alvaro), that the ceremony will take place in Madrid, on September 27, 2014. This year will also coincide with the centennial of his birth in the capital of Spain on March 11, 1914. Moreover, in accord with
the praxis in force since September 20, 2005 (when Benedict XVI
established that the Pope would preside only over canonization ceremonies),
the beatification will be celebrated by the Prefect of the Congregation for
the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato.

Although other details regarding the various ceremonies in Madrid and
Rome will be made more specific later, I wanted to transmit this news to
you, which should fill us with joy, at the same time as we want to use it for
the glory of God, and the service of the Church and souls.

I ask that, in this time of special joy, you unite yourselves to my
gratitude to the Pope, for his decision that the beatification will go forward
of this bishop (for all of us, in years past, a brother; and later Father) who
loved and served the Holy Church so much. From now on let us entrust to
Don Alvaro the intentions of the Holy Father: the renewed apostolic spirit
and service to God of all Christians, the concern and care for the most
needy, the upcoming Synod on the family, the holiness of priests, and so
many petitions that he asks the People of God to pray for.

I suggest that you take advantage of these months prior to the
beatification (I too will do so) to follow more closely in the footsteps of Don
Alvaro: in fidelity to our Lord, to the Church, to the Pope, to St. Josemaría,
to his brothers and sisters, to his friends, to his sons and daughters in the
Work. In considering once again so many bright lights from his life, and
getting to know his writings better, let us try to imitate his love for God and
others, his desire to fulfill always and in everything the divine Will, his
apostolic zeal and capacity to serve souls, as well as his availability to carry
on his own shoulders the holy burden of the Work, which is now in your
hands and mine.

Don Alvaro spread peace in hearts, as so many people have remarked
who knew him personally or through videos of his get-togethers and
pastoral trips. My daughter, my son: let us ask him now to obtain for us
from God a deep gaudium cum pace in our hearts, also for those who have
ever been in contact with the apostolic work of Opus Dei. And let us also
ask the soon to be Blessed for peace in the world, ravaged by so many wars
and conflicts.

With all my affection, I bless you,
Your Father,
+ Javier
Rome, January 22, 2014

A few months before the beatification, on June 4, the Prelate of Opus Dei wrote the following letter to those who were preparing for this event in the Church’s life:

My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

As we draw closer to September 27, the date for Don Alvaro’s beatification, I find my desire increasing to prepare myself very well for that great feast of our Holy Mother the Church and of this “small portion” of the Church that is the Prelature. The same will be happening to you. I recall how Don Alvaro urged us to prepare ourselves for our Father’s beatification on May 17, 1992. I would like to follow in his footsteps, closely accompanied by everyone’s prayer, and uniting myself personally to what each of you does.

I think it only natural that our heart pours out a sincere act of thanksgiving to God, with the joy of seeing raised to the altars the first successor of St. Josemaría, and that this divine gift prompts us to intensify our petition, each day, for the fruit of that event for the good of souls, and for so many apostolic initiatives that the faithful and cooperators of the Work are organizing all over the world.

It seems to me, also as an expression of our gratitude, that I should help you with some suggestions. In first place, in preparation for that day, and then afterwards until the end of the year, each one should personally seek out some special small way to pray for the Church, the Pope, the Work, in accord with St. Josemaría’s example. And I ask you also to beseech God to hear us in my many other intentions, to serve souls more and better.

This special prayer, with Don Alvaro as the intercessor, could involve praying an extra part of the Rosary; or else a Memorare before an image of our Lady in our family home—in the Center of the Work, or the home
where each one lives. Or perhaps it could be to make each week a brief visit to a church dedicated to our Lady, or where her image is venerated, etc.

This is only a fatherly request that I am making known to you so that, with complete spontaneity and personal freedom, our faithfulness to God, to the Church, to the Pope, might be ever more refined. I dare to ask you that your help here be generous.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father,

+ Javier

Rome, June 4, 2014

Questions to the Postulator about the Cause

From 1997 the postulator of Alvaro del Portillo’s cause of canonization was Msgr. Flavio Capucci, who died on August 7, 2013, a few days after the approval of a miracle attributed to the intercession of the venerable Alvaro del Portillo. He was succeeded as postulator by Fr. Javier Medina Bayo, author of the biography Alvaro del Portillo, a faithful man, who has made his own several answers given by Msgr. Capucci and answered some more questions himself afterwards.

1. The Holy Father approved a miracle attributed to the intercession of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. Can you tell us what this miracle is?

The miracle is the recovery of a Chilean baby, with brain damage and other pathologies who, after suffering a cardiac arrest for over half an hour and a massive hemorrhage, not only continued living, but experienced an improvement in his general state, eventually reaching the point of being able to lead a normal life.

The events took place on August 2, 2003. His parents prayed with great faith through the intercession of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and, when the doctors thought the baby had died, in a totally unexpected way, the heart of the baby started beating again, until it reached 130 beats per minute.
Perhaps the most surprising thing about this case is that, despite the gravity of the clinical diagnosis, the child today, ten years later, leads an absolutely normal life.

2. *Why is Bishop Alvaro de Portillo a candidate for beatification? What has he done?*

His life was a constant “yes” to God’s demands. Bishop del Portillo gave himself heroically to the service of the Church and of souls, faithfully following the example of St. Josemaría Escrivá. He brought many people closer to God.

To open a cause of canonization, the decisive factor is a well-established reputation for holiness, which is both spontaneous and widespread among a significant portion of the People of God. Bishop del Portillo’s cause was initiated because, right from the day of his death, there were very clear signs of this reputation. Many people all over the world were convinced that he was a saintly man and invoked his intercession with a view to obtaining favors from Heaven. The role of the “cause” is to verify that this reputation has a real basis. The decree regarding heroic virtues promulgated by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints on June 28, 2012 tells us that the Church has indeed reached a positive judgment about his holiness of life.

In addition to his personal struggle for holiness, one should also consider the decisive push he gave to the creation of institutions for the good of others, such as for example the Monkole Hospital in Kinshasa (Congo), the Niger Foundation hospital in Enugu (Nigeria), the Campus Bio-Medico University in Rome, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross and International Ecclesiastical College Sedes Sapientiae, also in Rome, where thousands of seminarians and priests receive careful doctrinal and spiritual formation.

3. *What is his principal message?*

Alvaro del Portillo’s teachings include doctrinal matters such as the role of lay people in the Church, the foundations of the ministerial priesthood, and unity with the Pope and the hierarchy. However, I would underline as a general characteristic of his personality, the virtue of faithfulness. He was an example of faithfulness to the Church (first as an engineer, then as a priest...
and finally as a bishop), of faithfulness to the Popes he knew, of faithfulness to his vocation and finally to the founder of Opus Dei. Fidelity should be seen as a creative virtue, which demands a continuous renewal both interiorly as well as exteriorly. It is not a question of simply “preserving” something, but of always drawing out new potentialities from the treasure one has received.

On his death, John Paul II wished to recall “his zealous priestly and episcopal life, the example he always gave of fortitude and of trust in divine providence and his fidelity to the See of Peter.” The then Cardinal Ratzinger recalled “his modesty and availability in every circumstance,” a characteristic of the service Alvaro del Portillo rendered for so many years in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which, Cardinal Ratzinger went on to say, “he enriched in a singular way with his competence and experience.”

4. Of all his virtues which one would you emphasize?

Obviously, the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love for God and others. Those who knew him, in addition to his faithfulness, emphasize other virtues which might be considered as being lesser but which nevertheless are essential for a Christian. Among these we could mention affability and gentleness, because one could not say merely that he smiled a lot: he smiled all the time. Also good-heartedness, the capacity to spread around him an atmosphere of serenity, especially in difficult moments. And one should not forget his work ethic: he had an enormous capacity to work hard, never sparing himself, and even then his smile never left him. He was very demanding with himself and also with others: he gave the maximum and asked it of others, but always in a peaceful way, sowing joy.

Nevertheless, in addition to all this, I would like to stress above all his charity. He loved God and others with his whole heart. He possessed the gift of a deep spiritual fatherhood. All those who approached him remember him as a good father who understands, who forgives, who has an unconditional confidence in others, in each person’s loyalty.

Finally, I would like to speak of his humility: he never tried to impose himself or his opinions on anyone. When he was called to succeed St.
Josemaría at the head of Opus Dei, his governmental program had as it only goal continuity with the founder’s example.

5. *Is devotion to Alvaro del Portillo confined to Opus Dei?*

No, his reputation for holiness can truly be called a Church-wide phenomenon. Up to 2012 we had received 12,000 signed accounts of favors obtained, attributed to his intercession, very often from countries in which Opus Dei is not as yet established. Right now the number exceeds 13,300. It is an enormous number, especially considering that among those who receive favors, only a few decide to put them in writing and send them to the postulator of the cause.

The newsletter about his cause for canonization has reached five million copies in print; ten million prayer cards for private devotion have been distributed world-wide. One can truly say that Bishop del Portillo is a gift of the Church and for the Church.

6. *What was Alvaro del Portillo’s role in the Second Vatican Council and in general in the Holy See?*

During the Council he was secretary of the Commission *De disciplina cleri et populi christiani*, from which came the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, and he was a “*peritus*” in the Commissions *De Episcopis et diocesium regimine* and *De religiosis*. Afterwards he was consultor for the Congregation of the Council, qualifier for the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office, and consultor for the Pontifical Commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law. He was also a judge of the Tribunal for the causes of competence for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith and consultor for the same congregation, as well as secretary of the Commission for Secular Institutes of the Congregation for Religious and consultor for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

Those who worked with him underline his determination to promote the rights of the laity in the Church’s mission (his book *Faithful and Laity in the Church* is a classic text of theological and canonical thought on the topic) and the beauty and importance of priestly holiness.

7. *Does Bishop Alvaro del Portillo have anything to say to non-Catholics?*
The nucleus of Opus Dei’s message, preached insistently by St. Josemaría, is the sanctification of work and one’s ordinary duties. Bishop Alvaro incarnated this teaching of St. Josemaría in an exemplary manner. He worked unceasingly throughout his whole life: first as an engineer, then as a priest and in his latter years as a bishop, always giving a deep meaning to his work, through which he sought the glory of God and the good of his neighbor. I think that precisely by seeing and living his work as the “hinge” for attaining holiness, he offers us a teaching of universal scope, valid not only for Catholics but for all men and women who want to give a transcendent and spiritual meaning to earthly realities.

8. Could you give us some data on the process which ended with the declaration of his heroic virtues? Who have been the witnesses?

In accordance with the relevant Church norms, I can make known data that is of a public nature.

There were two parallel processes. One of these was carried out before the tribunal of the Opus Dei Prelature, since the Prelate was recognized as being the competent bishop in this cause. Nevertheless, as his own name figured in the list of witnesses, he considered it preferable that he not to be interviewed by his own tribunal, but rather by an external one, so as to more scrupulously guarantee neutrality in the whole process. Consequently, he asked the Cardinal Vicar of Rome to entrust to the tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome the whole task of interrogating the principal co-workers of Bishop del Portillo in the government of Opus Dei. These included himself, as well as several ecclesiastics residing in Rome. In addition, given the great number of witnesses who live far from Rome, eight other processes were held in Madrid, Pamplona, Fatima-Leiria, Montreal, Washington D.C., Warsaw, Quito, and Sydney.

In total 133 witnesses were interviewed (all in visu, except for two who gave accounts of two miracles attributed to the Servant of God). Among these were 19 cardinals and 12 bishops or archbishops: 62 of the witnesses belong to the Prelature; 71 do not belong to it.

9. You told us earlier that more than 13,300 accounts of favors obtained through the intercession of Bishop del Portillo have reached your desk. Can you tell
us if there is a “specialty,” some type of favor or grace that many people ask Alvaro del Portillo for? Are there any favors that have especially struck you?

Those who have received favors through the intercession of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo tell us in their letters of graces of all kinds, both material and spiritual. Clearly the most striking are the extraordinary cures, of which there are several: from the disappearance of melanomas with metastasis after praying to Alvaro del Portillo, to the full recovery of a child who had drowned in a swimming pool.

But thinking of what you ask—his “specialty”—I would highlight the many graces that the venerable Servant of God has obtained in favor of the family: married couples who are reconciled and live together again in harmony; the ability to have children, sometimes after waiting for many years before going to his intercession; reconciliations between estranged relatives; giving birth to healthy children after being told that the baby would be born sick or malformed. Bishop Alvaro was a family person, who carried out a wide and deep catechesis on the family. It is perhaps because of this that the desire to go to his intercession for these kinds of matters arises spontaneously. Personally I am moved in a particular way by the favors granted to children—there are many of those.

10. What do you think of the coincidence of the announcement of the canonization of John Paul II and the approval of the miracle that paves the way for the beatification of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo?

For me it was a great joy. St. John Paul II and the venerable Alvaro del Portillo met during the Second Vatican Council and, since then, were united by a deep closeness and a great filial trust on the part of the Prelate of Opus Dei for the Pope.

They were two shepherds in love with the Church. Bishop Alvaro del Portillo had great admiration for the generosity and self-giving of the Pope, and did all he could to follow faithfully all the evangelization initiatives put forward by St. John Paul II. It was perhaps for that reason that the then Pope encouraged several other pastors to seek the spiritual help of the Prelate of Opus Dei.

This affection of the Pope was shown in a special way when Bishop del Portillo died. Pope John Paul II went to the residence of the Prelate of
Pastoral letter of Cardinal Antonio María Rouco Varela, Archbishop of Madrid (April 20, 2014)

My dear brothers and sisters in the Lord:

Pope Francis has recently promulgated the decree of beatification for the Venerable Alvaro del Portillo. A priest born and ordained in Madrid, a universal “madrileño.”

The celebration in which he will be proclaimed blessed will take place, God willing, on Saturday, September 27 in Madrid, in Valdebebas, precisely in this year in which we celebrate the centennial of his birth. Presiding will be Cardinal Amato, Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, as special delegate of the Holy Father. On the following day a Mass of thanksgiving will be celebrated in the same place. The beatification of the Venerable Alvaro del Portillo is a great joy for the whole Church and in a very singular way for our Archdiocese. His figure is united to that of so many of Madrid’s sons and daughters who in the twentieth century lived their specific Christian vocation heroically as a vocation to sanctity. Some of them are venerated in the holy Cathedral church of Our Lady of Almudena. The saints build the Church; and the Church needs above and before everything else, holy women and men. Let us give thanks to God for so many “madrileños,” beginning with our patron, St. Isidoro, who have lived and worked among us, offering themselves to God and being faithful to death, attaining holiness.

The future Blessed Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid on March 11, 1914, near the Gate of Alcalá. He was baptized in the Church of St.
Joseph, next to the Gran Via, and received his First Holy Communion—together with his companions in the Marianist’s Colegio del Pilar—in the parish of the Conception on Goya Street. He studied in our city to become a Public Works Assistant and then graduated as a Civil Engineer. After several years of professional work, he was ordained a priest in 1944 in the chapel of the bishop’s residence, by the Bishop of Madrid, the patriarch Don Leopoldo Eijo y Garay. Later he received doctorates in History and in Canon Law. His life was especially linked to that of a saint whom we venerate in one of the chapels of our cathedral: St. Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer. The future blessed was one of the first members of Opus Dei, and faithfully assisted and worked alongside the founder. After the death of St. Josemaría, in 1975, he was elected to succeed him at the head of Opus Dei. In 1982, upon erecting Opus Dei as a personal prelature, St. John Paul II named him prelate of Opus Dei, and, in 1991, conferred on him ordination as a bishop. For nineteen years he directed this portion of the Church with great evangelizing dynamism, a deep sense of ecclesial communion, and fidelity to its foundational charism. He died in a holy way in 1994, after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. St. John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains, in recognition of his service to the People of God.

He was endowed with great evangelizing creativity. Following with fidelity the foundational light of St. Josemaría, he promoted new apostolic works in numerous countries and various initiatives in favor of the universal Church, such as, for example, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, where priests, religious, and lay people from all over the world go to study. As a fruit of the need that he felt to live fraternal charity towards the poorest and most needy, he promoted social works in the poorest areas of many large cities and in the countries which some refer to as the “third world.” I had an extraordinary opportunity to deal with and get to know him well in the synod on “The Formation of Priests in Circumstances of the Present Day,” in 1990. We formed part of the same “working group.” I would like to emphasize two features of his personality, along with his kindness, serenity and good humor.

The first was his special concern for needy people, of which he had already given examples in the first years of his university career, when he
participated in the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul. He formed part of a group of young men who helped families living in shacks on the outskirts of Madrid, along the Abroñigal stream-bed—now highway M.30—and in other places. They brought them food and medicines and tried to help them in their needs; and gave catechism classes, during a very difficult period, to the children in the parish of St. Raymond Nonnatus in Vallecas. One of his companions recalled him carrying in his arms through the streets of Madrid a child who had been abandoned near one of the shacks. In spite of the difficulties he did not stop until he had entrusted the child to the sisters of St. Cristina, so that they would care for him until his parents could do so. Among the young men who accompanied him to visit these needy families in the slums, and who were friends of his, we find towering figures of our diocesan church, such as the Blessed Jesús Gesta, who became a brother of the Hospital Order of St. John of God and died as a martyr; and the Venerable José Maria García Lahiguera, Archbishop of Valencia, who for many years was spiritual director of our seminary and auxiliary bishop of Madrid.

A second feature of his life was his untiring work for the good of the Church. His warm charity towards everyone, united to his deep theological and juridical knowledge, earned him the appreciation of successive Popes, who entrusted him with numerous roles in various dicasteries of the Roman Curia at the service of the people of God. He participated very actively in tasks of great responsibility in the work of Vatican II, especially in the decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, and he contributed to the spiritual renewal of the Church with an open mentality and fidelity to the Gospel. He gave special attention to the problems of women, and his books and essays, translated into various languages, have provided a notable contribution to the mission of the laity and of priests in today’s world.

Many people from our diocese personally knew the future blessed and go to his intercession. I unite myself to the joy of all of them, and in a special way to his relatives, among whom there are several priests and a missionary in Africa. I encourage all the faithful of Madrid to take part in the ceremonies for this beatification, and to open the doors of our homes, parishes and schools (as we did so generously for World Youth Day) to provide housing for the thousands of pilgrims who are going to come from
all over the world. His beatification, besides being a great joy for the Church, should strengthen our eagerness to be saints in ordinary life. He is a clear example, with his deeds and teachings, of how to walk the path of holiness that we began on the day of our Baptism. Young people can learn a lot from him.

Let us ask our Lady of Almudena for the fruits of this beatification, so that it redound to the good of the whole Church, and in a special way of our Archdiocese of Madrid, to which the future blessed always felt himself so deeply united.

With all affection and with my blessing,

+ José María Rouco Varela
Cardinal-Archbishop
of Madrid

An Alvaro del Portillo Webpage

Since the past March 23, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo has had an official webpage. In the new site, users can find biographical and spiritual information about the successor to St. Josemaría, references to the initiatives that he fostered during his life, in addition to various multimedia items about his preaching. The page is integrated in the Opus Dei site, but can also be reached by searching for www.alvarodel-portillo.org.

The webpage offers information about Bishop del Portillo life, as well as the prayer card for private devotion. It also recounts a number of favors attributed to his intercession by people who have appealed to him in their needs. It also includes news of the progress of his process of beatification and canonization. There are also videos and texts taken from the preaching and writing of the one who was the head of Opus Dei from 1975 to 1994.
Ceremonies in Rome in connection with the beatification

On Monday June 23, the organizing committee for the beatification of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo published the program of events planned to take place in Rome, where Bishop del Portillo lived from 1943 until his death in 1994, and where his body rests in the crypt of the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace (at Viale Bruno Buozzi, 75, Rome).

From September 29 to October 2, pilgrims coming to Rome will be able to visit the Basilica of St. Eugene, where the body of the new blessed will be placed temporarily to allow many faithful to pray before it. The body will be transferred from the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace to the Basilica of St Eugene on Monday September 29 at 6 pm.

On Tuesday September 30, two Masses of Thanksgiving will be celebrated, one in the Basilica of St. John Lateran (at 11 am) and the other in the Basilica of St. Mary Major (at 4.30 pm). The respective principal celebrants will be Cardinal Agostino Vallini, Vicar General of his Holiness for the diocese of Rome and Cardinal Santos Abril, Archpriest of the Basilica of St. Mary Major.

On Wednesday October 1, at 10 am, the faithful may wish to attend the General Audience with Pope Francis in St Peter’s Square, to show their gratitude for the beatification and their union with the Holy Father. On the night of October 1 to 2, especially organized for young people, a prayer vigil will be held in the Basilica of St Eugene.

Finally, on Thursday October 2 at 5 pm, in St Eugene’s Basilica, there will be exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, followed by a blessing with the relic of Blessed Alvaro, after which his body will be transferred back to the prelatic church of Our Lady of Peace. On that same day, at the Campus Bio-Medico University in Rome, an institution born through the urging of Bishop del Portillo, a chapel dedicated to our Lady will be inaugurated.
The Centennial

The Conference Vir Fidelis Multum Laudabitur, Rome (March 12-14)

For the centennial of the birth of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and his upcoming beatification, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross organized an international conference from March 12-14 on his life and teachings. More than 300 people took part.

Those giving presentations focused on Bishop del Portillo’s contribution as St. Josemaría’s principal co-worker and successor; his love for and service to the Church; and his teachings regarding the new evangelization, the mission of priests, and the role of the laity in the Church.

In his inaugural address (reprinted in full below), the Prelate of Opus Dei and Grand Chancellor of the University stressed Bishop del Portillo’s loyalty “to God, to the Church, to the Roman Pontiff, to St. Josemaría, and to the spirit of Opus Dei.”

Emphasizing the faithfulness of the soon to be blessed to the Roman Pontiff, the Prelate said: “I have no doubt that the spiritual biography of Don Alvaro, a good and faithful servant (Lk 19:17), offers us an example that we can all imitate.” For “our greatest aspiration as Christians is to serve the Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls, as the Gospel teaches us.” This was always “Don Alvaro’s way of acting; he strove with peace and joy, with constancy, to put into practice the spirit St. Josemaría had passed on to him.”

The first day continued with a presentation by Professor Fr. Josep Ignasi Saranyana from the University of Navarra, who gave a global view of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s life from 1935 to 1994. This was followed by a presentation by Professor John F. Coverdale from Seton Hall University in New Jersey. He stressed that “St. Josemaría was a holy man, endowed with great human qualities, but he also needed affection and support, which he received, above all, from Alvaro del Portillo.”
Love for the Church

Alvaro del Portillo played an important role, working behind the scene, at the Second Vatican Council. This topic was the focus of the second day of the conference. Cardinal Julián Herranz, president emeritus of the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, underlined various aspects of the work that Msgr. Del Portillo carried out as secretary of the Commission on the life and ministry of priests in the Church and the world.

His presentation also included a story about his recent visit to Benedict XVI. “I went to visit him,” recalled the Cardinal, “a few days ago in the Vatican gardens. He already knew about the upcoming beatification of Don Alvaro and he said to me: ‘How wonderful! I had his help for years, when he was consultor in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. What a good example for all of us!’”

Msgr. José Luis Gutierrez, from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, spoke about “Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and the Canonical Codification.” In his talk he stressed the future blessed’s role in fostering the active participation of the laity in the Church’s mission.

At the close of the second day, Msgr. Lluis Clavell offered an historical overview of Alvaro del Portillo’s efforts, grounded on his strong faith, to make the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross a reality.

Spiritual testimony

The saints are people in love with God, but who also have a deep concern to assist those around them. Under Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s inspiration, dozens of social initiatives all over the world sprang up to assist those most in need. As Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz, Vicar General of Opus Dei, said in his presentation: “the tie between charity and justice was not only a topic for preaching, but also for action.” Some of the people in charge of these social initiatives shared their reflections at the conference.

Ruben Laraya, from the Philippines, said that in 1987, when his country was undergoing great social upheavals due to poverty and political oppression, “and when many were speaking about terror, one man was speaking about change: Alvaro del Portillo.” Four years later, in Cebu, the Center for Industrial Technology and Enterprise opened its doors, and
since then has offered human and professional training to many young men from that region.

St. Josemaría’s first successor also gave impulse to the Monkole Medical Center, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which began its activities with three beds in 1991. Today, with several buildings and 50,000 medical visits each year, it is a reference point for health care in one of the potentially richest, but also most war-torn, countries of Africa. Dr. Leon Tshilolo, its director, said that even during “the country’s most agitated moments, the center never closed its doors. And the people from the surrounding area protected it against the armed bands that repeatedly invaded the capital city of Kinshasa.”

Roberto Ueda, director of Pedreira, a center for professional training situated in the slums of São Paulo, Brazil, said that “it is clearer every day that people can only contribute to peace in their surroundings if they first find peace in themselves.” Hence the need “to not limit our work to what is exclusively ‘social,’ but to direct it to the whole person, as the Pope asks in Evangelii gaudium.” The latter point was especially stressed by Sharon Hefferan, who directs Metro, a center for assisting young women in the inner city of Chicago.

Carlo Caffara, Archbishop of Bologna, attested to his gratitude for the personal help he received through the future blessed’s friendship and advice. Particularly detailed was the testimony of Mother Maria de Jesús Velarde, foundress of the Religious Institute “Daughters of our Lady of the Heart of Jesus.” In describing the help she received from Bishop del Portillo in difficult moments, she said. “I had twenty-four meetings with him over a nine-year period, almost all of them an hour long. I also have ten letters and three documents that he sent me. Over the telephone we had more than a hundred conversations. I was moved by the friendliness and supernatural spirit he showed in answering my calls.”
Address of the Prelate at the Conference for the Centennial of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome (March 12, 2014)

The virtue of fidelity, the fruit of charity and justice, is invested with great dignity in the eyes of upright people, for it is a participation in the fidelity of God, who in Sacred Scripture, defines himself as “a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deut 32:4). St. Paul forcefully assures us: “the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you” (2 Thess 3:3). And he wants his perfections, all of them, to shine forth in the saints and in those who truly strive to attain the goal of union with the Trinity. St. Thomas Aquinas, when reflecting on Christ’s Passion, asks why he chose to follow that path. And he points to a twofold reason why it was appropriate for Christ to do so: in first place, to remedy the evil that man had incurred; and secondly, and no less usefully, to serve as an example for us, for no model of virtue is far from the Cross.[1]

The faithfulness of the saints leads them to this self-emptying that conquers evil; and it gives them the strength to follow the Master’s example, who with infinite joy, and infinite suffering, gave himself for us. Certainly fidelity demands renunciation, but it brings with it the happiness of intimacy with the One who saved us and who has shown us the path we should follow.

I think that this was the path that the life of my venerable predecessor at the head of Opus Dei followed, the soon-to-be-Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. Yesterday was the hundredth anniversary of his birth. The hearts of many people throughout the world were raised in thanksgiving to God, from whom all good things come, for the help received from this good and faithful servant. This gratitude also includes a fervent supplication to our Mother in Heaven and recourse to the intercession of St. Josemaría, asking that both we and all those who are nourished by the spirit of Opus Dei, may walk each day along the path of holiness proclaimed by St. Josemaría, and followed so integrally by Don Alvaro del Portillo. A path of faithfulness that leads to serene joy.
The presentations in this symposium will consider various aspects of the life of my predecessor and his influence on the life of the Church, before and after the Second Vatican Council. I will therefore center my talk on the motto chosen for the conference: *vir fidelis multum laudabitur* (*Prov* 28:20), the faithful man will be highly praised. As the decree on the heroic virtues of venerable Alvaro del Portillo issued by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints states: “These words of Sacred Scripture manifest the most characteristic virtue of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo: fidelity. He lived an unquestioned fidelity to God, carrying out his will promptly and generously; fidelity to the Church and the Pope, fidelity to his priesthood, and fidelity to his vocation as a Christian in every moment and circumstance of his life.”[2]

This phrase of Scripture was chosen by St. Josemaría to be engraved above the door of the office where Don Alvaro worked for fifty years. First as Secretary General of Opus Dei, until the moment of St. Josemaría’s going to Heaven; then as President General and later as Prelate, until his last day on this earth, March 23, 1994. Following the founder’s custom, Don Alvaro also usually worked in the office of the Vicar General. It was, and continues to be so now, a way of emphasizing collegiality, an essential characteristic of government in Opus Dei. For those of us who reside in the central headquarters of the Prelature, these words are a continual reminder of our service to the Church, to the Work and to souls: to forget about ourselves completely, with an extreme fidelity to the spirit received from St. Josemaría and with a total dedication to the task that our Lord has entrusted to each of us.

In this regard it seems opportune to cite a paragraph from a letter written by St. Josemaría in May 1962, when Don Alvaro was in the hospital. “Pray,” he said, “because while among you there are many children of mine who are heroic and so many who are canonizable saints (and I'm not exaggerating here), Alvaro is a model, and the son of mine who has worked the most and suffered the most for the Work, and who has best captured my spirit. Pray.”[3] Years later, in 1973, on Don Alvaro’s birthday, taking advantage of the fact that he wasn’t present, he remarked: “he has the fidelity that you should have at all times, and has willingly sacrificed everything personal with a smile... And if you ask me, Has he ever been
heroic? I will reply: yes, he has often been heroic, very often: with a heroism which seems something ordinary.”[4]

“I would like you to imitate him in many things, but above all in loyalty. In the long years of his vocation, there have been many occasions—humanly speaking—for getting angry, for becoming irritated, for being disloyal. But he has always had a smile and an incomparable fidelity—for supernatural reasons, not because of human virtue. It would be very good for you to imitate him in this.”[5]

In March 1994, in the homily at the Mass for the eternal rest of the soul of Don Alvaro, I said some words that, now twenty years later, seem very timely to me. “When they write his biography, among other relevant aspects of his supernatural and human personality, this has to occupy a very high place: the first successor to Blessed Josemaría Escrivá in governing Opus Dei was—first and above all—a loyal Christian, a most faithful son of the Church and of the founder, a shepherd completely dedicated to all souls and in a particular way to his *pusillus grex*, to the portion of the People of God that our Lord had entrusted to his pastoral care, in close communion with the Roman Pontiff and with all his brothers in the episcopate. He did so with absolute forgetfulness of himself, with generous and cheerful self-giving, with an ever burning and vigilant pastoral charity.”[6]

During the first Mass celebrated by the Servant of God after his ordination as a bishop, on January 7, 1991, on finishing his homily he added some significant words. Recalling St. Josemaría and the ordination of the first three priests of the Work in 1944, he said: “our Father repeated on that day, and always: “prayer, prayer, prayer”; and I, echoing him, insisted: “fidelity, fidelity, fidelity” while I was lying prostrate on the floor of the Basilica of St. Peter’s. Let us be faithful: it is worthwhile! The only thing that is worthwhile is to lead a consistent life when we have answered yes to our Lord. Let us decide to be faithful! Let it be seen!”[7]

1. *A constantly renewed fidelity*

Pope John Paul II, whose upcoming canonization we are looking forward to eagerly, said that we can speak of true fidelity only when we have overcome the most demanding proof: the passage of time, which is capable of undermining the best intentions. “It is easy to be consistent for a day or a
few days. It is difficult and important to be consistent during our entire lifetime. It is easy to be consistent at the hour of exaltation, and difficult to be so at the hour of tribulation. The only real fidelity is consistency that lasts throughout one’s whole life.”[8]

These words were fully fulfilled in Don Alvaro del Portillo. All throughout his long life—imbued with the joy of knowing himself to be a son of God in Christ—his fidelity was being forged with the passage of time. Already in his childhood and adolescence he gave example in his family home, among other virtues, of loyalty, the human basis of fidelity. Educated by his parents in a solid life of Christian piety, he learned to be consistent with his baptismal commitments; at the same time, in his soul there arose a strong desire to show his closeness, without any fissures or shadows, to his parents and brothers and sisters, to his friends and classmates, and to any person to whom he had given his word.

Don Alvaro’s parents, Don Ramón and Doña Clementina, fostered the growth of the personality of each of their children, respecting their characters and teaching them to prudently administer their freedom. They always showed an absolute trust in them, to the point that, for example, they saw no problem in some of them moving to other places, even outside Spain, for reasons of study, something that was not very frequent in that era. They had a deep concern that their children receive a true Christian formation, in first place within the heart of the family itself, which later on would be the reference point for overcoming the difficulties they encountered in life; and they became true friends of each of them. Don Alvaro always remembered with joy and gratitude the conversations he had with his father.

His mother, after the death of her husband, in the midst of the Spanish civil war, confronted with great generosity and strength the problems that arose. Her character had been strengthened thanks to the spiritual closeness of St. Josemaría to the members of her family. As a good mother, she had deep affection for her son Alvaro, no different than that she showed the others, but still special, since she perceived in him a more responsible attitude and a greater sensitivity towards family problems, always offering to help out.

Alvaro’s sense of responsibility, perhaps unusual in a youth of his age,
was shown, for example, in the financial difficulties that his family had to confront. After finishing his secondary schooling, moved by his loyalty, he decided to take on an intermediate profession that would enable him to contribute to his family’s support as soon as possible. Therefore he enrolled in the School of Public Works, because the training was shorter than that for a civil engineer, which he considered his real professional vocation. He had no reluctance in sacrificing his personal preferences, although he also thought that with his professional earnings, he would be able to finance his studies in civil engineering, as in fact was the case, without being a burden on his family.

At home he learned to be understanding, assisted by his good-natured temperament. He learned to be magnanimous, and to adapt himself to the people he dealt with, without judging quickly or rashly the behavior of anyone, even more so if he did not know in detail the circumstances of that person’s situation. At the same time, he showed himself always intransigent when necessary, without worrying about the criticism of others if justice and charity were involved. It was not hard for him to rectify when it was made clear to him that he was mistaken, or when he himself became aware of his mistake. Therefore living with this young man was very pleasant, as was true during his whole life on earth. While still an adolescent, his affection led him to be concerned about his younger brothers and sisters. They all recall his care for them, never skimping on time or effort to help them or teach them when necessary. He was proud in a holy way of his whole family and he behaved in a similar way with his friends and even people he hardly knew. To sum up, from very early on Alvaro was good at fostering friendship, understood as true service, with his agreeable manner, despite a certain timidity that crept in when he had to intervene in public. He made himself liked because his simplicity was attractive and his magnanimity facilitated friendship.

During his youth, while growing in his personal friendship with God, he began to be concerned with sincere affection for those most in need. The poverty that he encountered in some sectors made him suffer; especially the wretched state of many people living in the outlying areas of Madrid. Therefore with a fully Christian motive of concern for his neighbor, he frequently took part in visits to the poor and the sick, with a desire to assist
their spiritual and human formation and to alleviate their moral and material misery. With the solid foundation of his human virtues and his life of faith, our Lord was preparing him for his meeting with the founder of Opus Dei, in 1935.

2. His first meeting with St. Josemaría

One of the friends with whom Don Alvaro went to visit the sick in the hospitals of Madrid knew Fr. Josemaría Escrivá and spoke enthusiastically about this priest. Don Alvaro asked that friend to introduce him, and thus, in March 1935, he went for the first time to the DYA residence, on Ferraz Street in Madrid. It turned out, however, to be just a brief encounter, since the priest had to take care of some commitments that could not be postponed. They agreed to meet again and fixed the day and hour of their meeting.

But for various reasons that meeting never took place. In the meantime Alvaro was already working professionally as a Public Works Assistant, while also taking courses at the School of Civil Engineering, where he obtained good marks. When summer began, before beginning his vacation with his family in the small town of La Granja near Segovia, he thought that he should go to say good-bye to that priest who, from his first and only meeting, had shown himself to be so likable, and had made a deep impression on him. Years later, when he referred to that decision, he could not find any explanation other than the action of grace; he would say that, remembering the cordiality of St. Josemaría, it seemed only natural to him that he should go to the Ferraz residence before leaving.

He went without any appointment, on July 6, 1935. Fr. Josemaría received him with his usual priestly and human cordiality. They spoke for a long time, touching on various topics in a deep spiritual conversation: work, family, studies, etc. At the end, the priest invited him to a day of recollection that they were having in the university residence on the following day. This friendly invitation, which showed a sincere interest in him, surprised him, for he had never taken part in a spiritual activity of this kind, although—as he recalled—he had received a thorough Christian education in his family and had done his high school studies in a school run by religious. He always thought that, given his slightly timid character, and, above all, because of Fr. Josemaría’s cordiality, he didn’t know how to
respond negatively and so he committed himself to come. Very happy after that conversation, he said good-bye and, with full freedom, he altered his vacation plans. This decision would not cause any surprise in his family, because they knew of his professional commitments that at times meant unexpected changes of plan and also because of Alvaro's maturity and sense of responsibility.

What happened that July 7, 1935 has been recounted in detail in the published biographies of Don Alvaro.[9] That morning, after attending the first meditation given by St. Josemaría, one of those present spoke to him about the possibility of dedicating his life to God in Opus Dei, without giving up his professional work, and Alvaro said yes right away. Years later he spoke about this on several occasions, spurred by his sons' affectionate insistence.

“I went to the day of recollection, and attended a meditation. After the meditation they spoke to me about the beauty of following God. And I, with God's grace, said: Here I am. And I didn't go away for the summer. I remained in Madrid, working and receiving formation in the spirit of the Work. Our Father, who was very tired (it was the end of the school year, and he had worked a lot and had been ill), nevertheless began a course of formation just for me.”[10]

From the first moment, he sensed that a change had taken place in his soul and also in his personality. From that July 7 on, while before he saw himself as timid, he now felt the imperious need to speak more with others and to meet many people, to help them discover the good fortune of being sons of God. Therefore, without worrying what others might think, he invited students and acquaintances to take part in the means of spiritual formation.

Some time later, while outside of Madrid on a trip connected with his engineering studies, he wrote a letter to the founder of the Work in which, among other things, he said: “My enthusiasm is gone.” St. Josemaría used this phrase for a point in The Way: “’My enthusiasm is gone,’ you write. You have to work not out of enthusiasm but out of Love: conscious of duty, which means self-denial.”[11]
Don Alvaro later said that when he had a chance to speak with the founder of Opus Dei, he made it clear that he had not expressed himself in that way because he found himself in a moment of discouragement or disorientation, but just to say that he lacked the external enthusiasm that up till then he had felt so strongly. He added that St. Josemaría had answered: “I understand, but it seems to me that what I have written is not wasted, but will help all of us.” This episode from *The Way*, which has done and continues doing so much good to souls, reflects a lived Christian experience, taken from real life, not a mere theory. At the same time, it is a confirmation of what Benedict XVI once said: “The school of faith is not a triumphal march but a journey marked daily by suffering and love, trials and renewed faithfulness.”[12]

As time went by, there grew in Alvaro the need, the holy eagerness, to acquire an ever deeper formation, in order to respond to the gifts he had received and was receiving every day from God. A few months after that July 1935, St. Josemaría began to rely on this student for directing the people who had spent more time in the Work and guiding their apostolate, although logically the bulk of the burden still fell on the founder’s shoulders. To everyone around Alvaro it was clear that, with his eagerness to form himself in order to serve better, he was absorbing the spirit of St. Josemaría with a faithfulness that was striking. No one was surprised when Fr. Josemaría, whenever he had to leave Madrid for some reason, entrusted to Alvaro the task of directing the means of spiritual and apostolic formation for the young people who took part in the apostolic work at the Residence.

After the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939, the apostolic expansion of Opus Dei grew considerably. The founder was no longer able to take on himself the spiritual direction of all the faithful of the Work, as he had been doing, and he looked for assistance from his older sons. Alvaro was the first to assist in the spiritual direction of the youngest ones. St. Josemaría insisted that he needed to carry out this task with great responsibility, since the others would go to him with the same confidence with which they put themselves in the founder’s hands.

Not a few times I heard Don Alvaro remark, years later, that before beginning each of those conversations of spiritual guidance, he would
entrust himself to the Holy Spirit to look after these people with the greatest possible care. And he added that, in order to fulfill that task with the greatest possible fidelity, he always advised those listening to him to strive to grow in their union with St. Josemaría. The latter was a point he never failed to bring up with tact and, from what I myself saw, always in a convincing way. He was fully aware that in those moments he was taking the Father's place, guiding each and every one by the path of a greater self-giving, with a radical fidelity to the spirit received from God.

It was the unanimous remark of all the faithful of Opus Dei who received spiritual assistance from Don Alvaro: they saw St. Josemaría behind each word of that brother of theirs, especially through the affection and closeness with which he accompanied them.

3. Full fidelity to the spirit of Opus Dei

Right from the start of Opus Dei, the founder saw with absolute clarity the need to proceed with order and with a theological and juridical mentality in the organization of the Work of God, in accord with the lights received from Heaven. In the first years, for more than a decade, he personally took responsibility for even the material concerns, to teach the faithful of the Work in a graphic way how they should seek holiness in ordinary life. At the same time he strove to transmit the specific features of the spirit of Opus Dei through gatherings and classes, and in personal conversations. He also asked for the assistance of a few of them, first of all Alvaro, in typing up the foundational documents he was preparing. Some years later, St. Josemaría asked Alvaro to annotate the Instructions and other documents of the founder. This way of acting, combined with comments and indications he made to those who were helping him, proved to be very useful in showing how deeply they were assimilating the spirit of the Work and how they were striving to put it into practice.

Offered such a clear sign of trust, all of them tried to respond with the greatest possible generosity. St. Josemaría realized right away that Don Alvaro showed, by his concern and his deeds, a full availability, always accompanied by correctness and cheerfulness. And when he was asked for his opinion, it was always marked by great prudence and a very refined sense of government, united to an extraordinary gift for dealing with people. In the working sessions, he also saw clearly the finesse with which Alvaro
followed the founder’s explanations, made them his own, and tried to put them into practice.

During the months of the civil war, when the founder of Opus Dei sought refuge in a consulate with several faithful of the Work including Alvaro, and later when this son of his managed to join him in Burgos in October 1938, fleeing from the zone where the Church was being persecuted, St. Josemaría had the opportunity to deal with him more closely. They could converse while walking on the streets of this Castilian city, when Alvaro was being trained as a provisional second lieutenant, and also during St. Josemaría’s visits to Cigales, where Alvaro was assigned by the army, in the first months of 1939.

A few of the founder’s letters have been saved in which he uses the word “saxum” when referring to Alvaro: “Saxum! I am trusting in the strength of my rock,” he wrote on February 13, 1939. And the following month, on March 23: “May Jesus watch over you, Saxum. And, yes, that is what you are. I can see that our Lord is lending you strength and is making my word operative in you: saxum! Thank him for it, and be faithful.” Later, on May 18 of the same year, he insists again: “Saxum! How bright I see the path, a long one, that lies before you! Bright and full, like a field ripe for the harvest. Blessed fruitfulness of the apostle, more beautiful than anything else on earth!” Finally, from Burjasot, Valencia, on June 6, he wrote: “Saxum! Both your Father in Heaven (God) and your Father on earth and in Heaven (me), are expecting a lot from you,”[13] making reference to the spiritual filiation of the faithful of the Work with respect to the founder.

The choice of the name “saxum,” rock, shows that St. Josemaría, at the end of the 1930’s, sensed that this man would be a strong support for him, providing firm help in the task of consolidating and developing Opus Dei.

Also in the historical archives of the Prelature (and this is a notable proof of his loyalty), the manuscript outline is preserved of a meditation preached by St. Josemaría in Cigales, the small village where Alvaro del Portillo was assigned, along with another faithful of Opus Dei, Vicente Rodriguez Casado. Dated February 10, 1939, the eve of our Lady of Lourdes, it is the oldest document in which this term is found. The first point of the outline says: “You are Peter, saxum, rock! And you are such because God wants it. In spite of the enemies surrounding us, in spite of
you... and of me... and of everyone who is opposed. Rock, foundation, support, strength... paternity![14] In light of the letters cited above, there is no doubt that he was referring principally to Alvaro, although he leaned trustingly for support on all of his children.

Particularly significant is a document in which Alvaro describes the behavior of a person who is truly responsible when confronted with the need to make an important decision, and is unable to get in touch with the person in charge. The note was probably written at the end of 1939, when he had been freed from his military obligations, which had been prolonged for several months after the end of the civil war. In that note, which fills two sheets of paper written on both front and back, Alvaro, at the request of St. Josemaría, briefly describes his own experience, using the military language that was then familiar to everyone. He presents the figure of the “liaison” (who acts as an intermediary between the commander and the troops) to describe how to decide in accord with the mind of one’s superiors, when it is impossible to receive orders directly. Alvaro offers an ascetical reflection, applying military language to the supernatural plane, since Christian life—as Sacred Scripture teaches—is a battle of peace (see Job 7:1) that spurs Christians to struggle untiringly against anything that could separate them from God. Among other considerations, he wrote: “If we really fulfill the norms [the plan of spiritual and ascetical life], if we read the Gospel trying to live it with intensity, making ourselves actors in its scenes, if we pray the Rosary in a similar way, if we fight wherever necessary to keep God always present, then we who form a single body with Christ will become more and more like Him.”[15] He also speaks there about unity with and obedience towards the one who is in charge of the apostolic work, in order to know his spirit well and identify oneself with whomever is governing; and he reflects on the action of the Holy Spirit in the soul, the Communion of Saints and perseverance in the face of obstacles.

Once the fighting ended, the regiment to which Alvaro belonged was transferred to Olot, in Catalonia, and he remained there until July 18, when he was relieved of his military duties and could return to Madrid. There he quickly resumed his professional work as a Public Works Assistant. And he wrote to a friend, filled with joy: “Today I arrived home from Olot. Finally back in Madrid! You can imagine what this return to my hometown means
to me; it is like the definitive end of the war. Up until now it had not yet ended for me.”[16]

During the previous months, physically far from St. Josemaría, he had made several trips to be with the founder of Opus Dei, to speak with him personally and to take part in days of recollection. Besides going to Burgos seven times, he obtained two military passes to travel to Valencia and to Vitoria, overcoming the enormous difficulties of the trip due to the lack of highways and means of adequate transport. Moreover, during those weeks he wrote almost daily to St. Josemaría, to other members of Opus Dei and to various friends. These letters were filled with supernatural optimism and affection, in which his desire to be faithful to his Christian life and to improve the moral situation around him was evident.

After one of these trips on military leave, when he returned to Olot he sent the following letter to the founder of the Work: “I have been thinking about what you told me about the obligation we have to spur the apostolic work forward now very especially. That is what we both want [referring to our Lord and to himself]. And my hope is that, despite everything, you can have confidence in the one who, rather than rock, is clay without any consistency. But God is so good!”[17]

As we can deduce from all the above, St. Josemaría realized—in very different ways—that God had put Alvaro close beside him because he had the special conditions needed for the work of government and for the spiritual and apostolic care of the others. During those years, the founder knew he was the only person responsible before God for the growth of Opus Dei as he had seen it on October 2, 1928, and he was aware that he would have to give an account of how he fulfilled this duty; although without overlooking the initiatives of his children on how to put his teachings into practice.

I have no hesitation in saying that, both at the beginning of his years in Opus Dei, as well as at the end of his life, Alvaro was fully aware of the great importance—of the significant weight—implied by the divine and human adventure of carrying out God’s will, seconding St. Josemaría. He never let himself be disheartened by that splendid panorama that was beyond the strength of anyone, even of an especially gifted person, and he reacted in the way described in the Book of Deuteronomy: “For this
commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ But the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (Deut 30:11-14). He had been a witness to St. Josemaría’s generous fidelity and, moved by grace, he followed in his footsteps day after day, with loyalty, with an equally generous daily struggle.

Alvaro did not lose any opportunity to listen closely to, to meditate on what he heard, to mull over in his prayer the advice and teachings he had received, and he accepted all the tasks St. Josemaría asked of him. At the end of 1939, back in Madrid, the founder appointed him Secretary General of Opus Dei: his closest co-worker. The other faithful of the Work understood immediately that he was not taking on this post as a personal honor, and much less as a “promotion.” On the contrary, they perceived even more clearly his eagerness to grow in his interior life, to work with professional outlook in the various tasks or offices that came upon him, to serve everyone in any circumstance or moment when he was needed. Certainly he had a good teacher in the founder of Opus Dei, who offered each day by his conduct the example of generous self-giving, striving to be heroic in his correspondence to divine grace, both in important jobs and in everyday activities.

Don Alvaro was always, and specifically from the moment he received that appointment, a very solid support for St. Josemaría. From then on, “in his relationship with the founder he showed even greater veneration and respect, with the maximum availability and generosity in putting his qualities at the service of the mission received. He accompanied him in all the trials and tribulations he had to confront. His courage, prudence and readiness to obey were for the Father [for the founder] a support that never weakened. Alluding to him in an implicit but also clear way, St. Josemaría once said: ‘There have never been lacking, in a providential and constant way, brothers of yours who—more than sons—have been for me like a father when I needed the consolation and the strength of a father’.”[18]
Perhaps also for these reasons, after many years had gone by St. Josemaría would remark from time to time that he had not chosen Don Alvaro to work at his side, but that it was God who had put him close by. He added that the fidelity of this man, so constant throughout the years, had “a permanence that had to be something of the Holy Spirit.”[19] And Don Alvaro himself told us on various occasions: “it was not our Father who chose me to have me at his side; he used to say that it was something of the Holy Spirit. The others, for one reason or another, were not able to be close to our Father. Thus God chose me: our founder said this many times.”[20]

I close this section on Don Alvaro’s fidelity to the founder of Opus Dei, as a sign of his fidelity to God’s will, with two very expressive anecdotes by witnesses who were present for them.

In 1950, Don Alvaro suffered a painful attack of acute appendicitis that put his life in danger and that made surgical intervention urgent. It was February 26. Both because of the techniques used at that time and because of the duration of the operation, which proved more complicated than foreseen, the doctors decided to increase the amount of anesthesia; and as a result the post-operative waking up was slower than usual. In those circumstances there occurred an anecdote, narrated by Encarnación Ortega,[21] which I myself heard on several occasions from the lips of St. Josemaría.

When Don Alvaro was already in his room, one of the doctors came by to check on post-operative developments. He was surprised when he saw that no one had been able to awaken him and he began to be concerned because all possible means had been used without success. This was the situation when the founder of Opus Dei reached the hospital and they explained to him the situation, possibly critical, of the patient. St. Josemaría went up to the head of the bed and, with great calm, whispered affectionately: “Alvaro!” The patient’s response was immediate: “Father!” And then he began to wake up, which up to then did not seem imminent. St. Josemaría remarked with naturalness, as though it was nothing out of the ordinary: “This son obeys me even when asleep.”

An incident mentioned by Juan Masià is also quite significant. “A day or so after the operation,” we read in his testimony, “our Father asked me to
accompany him to visit the patient. The three of us were alone in the room, and Don Alvaro was still delirious... He kept repeating this phrase: “I want to work alongside the Father, with all my strength, until the end of my life.” Since these were the only words he kept repeating, our Father and I, deeply moved almost to tears, had to leave the room.”[22]

Don Alvaro’s faithfulness was shown in a special way in leading to its conclusion the canonical path of the Work, erected as a personal prelature in 1982. This definitive canonical form assured that the charism St. Josemaría had received on October 2, 1928 would not be diluted, thus strengthening the unity of spirit, governance and jurisdiction of this portion of the People of God made up of ordinary Catholics, laity and priests.

It is both moving and, it seems to me, a special sign of divine Providence that in the last pastoral letter this exemplary bishop sent to the faithful of Opus Dei, in which he asked us to accompany him spiritually on the occasion of his 80th birthday, a few days before his unexpected death, Don Alvaro wrote: “on this anniversary that is so significant for me, and on reaching fifty years as a priest in the upcoming month of June, the best gift you could give me, my daughters and sons, is a deep renewal of our ardent desire for a faithfulness shown in winning new vocations.”[23]

4. Fidelity to the Church and the Roman Pontiff

Fidelity to the fullness of one’s Christian vocation is not a virtue that affects only a few people. Rather it is everyone’s responsibility, since our Lord grants his grace to every baptized person, in order that it may yield fruit in our ordinary life. As Pope Francis said in one of his first homilies after his election as Roman Pontiff:

“Each day the Lord calls us to follow him with courage and fidelity; he has made us the great gift of choosing us as his disciples; he invites us to proclaim him with joy as the Risen One; but he asks us to do so by word and by the witness of our lives, in daily life.” And the Holy Father adds: “This has a consequence in our lives: we have to empty ourselves of the many small or great idols that we have and in which we take refuge, on which we often seek to base our security. They are idols that we sometimes keep well hidden; they can be ambition, careerism, a taste for success, placing ourselves at the center, the tendency to dominate others, the claim
to be the sole masters of our lives, some sins to which we are bound, and many others.

“This evening I would like a question to resound in the heart of each one of you, and I would like you to answer it honestly: Have I considered which idol lies hidden in my life that prevents me from worshipping the Lord? Worshipping is stripping ourselves of our idols, even the most hidden ones, and choosing the Lord as the center, as the pathway for our lives.”[24]

I have no doubt that the spiritual biography of Don Alvaro, a “good and faithful servant” (Lk 19:17), offers us an example that we all can imitate. Our greatest aspiration as Christians is to serve the Church, the Roman Pontiff and all souls, as the Gospel teaches us. This was Don Alvaro’s way of acting; he strove with peace and joy, with constancy, to put into practice the spirit St. Josemaría had passed on to him. From the moment that he made it his own, he lived and taught others to live the universal call to holiness. That was the trajectory of his fidelity, first as a young man, then as a member of Opus Dei, marked by the closest possible union with St. Josemaría and with his spirit, during the years he spent at his side, and later during the decades when he directed Opus Dei through his pastoral service.

His Christian and human loyalty to the Church and the Pope grew in crescendo and became even clearer when he definitively moved to Rome in 1946, up to his death in 1994. As I already said above, I won’t stop here to consider aspects that have been amply dealt with in his published biographies: the help he provided in various dicasteries of the Roman Curia during the pontificates of Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul I and John Paul II; his work in the preparations for the Second Vatican Council and as secretary of one of the Conciliar commissions; his role in the revision of the Code of Canon Law promulgated in 1983, etc. I will mention here only a few events of which I was an eye-witness during the pontificate of Blessed John Paul II, for whom Don Alvaro had a deep filial affection.

From the first months of the election of the new Pope in 1978, a close and frequent relationship was established between John Paul II and Don Alvaro. He offered the Pope a wide-ranging assistance in both small tasks and projects of greater importance, since Don Alvaro, with deep faith, discovered God’s will behind every request or suggestion from the Holy
Father, as he had always done with the previous successors of Peter. During the first weeks of that new stage in the Church, he offered his support to the Pope when he planned to ordain his successor in Krakow on the altar of Confession in the Basilica of St. Peter. The plan had not been received with warmth in some spheres of the Roman Curia, out of a fear that the Basilica would not be filled. A churchman suggested to the Holy Father that he go to Don Alvaro’s help ensure the attendance of a large number of people. Don Alvaro succeeded in mobilizing many Romans to attend the ceremony, through the apostolic efforts of the members and cooperators of the Work residing in this city. The Holy Father was grateful for that gesture and mentioned Opus Dei at the end of the ceremony.

Something similar happened with the Pope’s wish to restore the Corpus Christi Eucharistic processions through Rome, which had not ventured into the streets of the Holy City for many years. He also assisted another apostolic desire of John Paul II: to begin a custom very much loved by the Pope when he was Archbishop of Krakow. This was the celebration of a Mass for university students in Advent and in Lent, in preparation for Christmas and for Easter, with the attendance also of professors and instructors. Although not a Roman custom, the Pope communicated his desire to Don Alvaro and asked for his suggestions. As a faithful priest, Don Alvaro immediately responded with joy to that proposal, and suggested printing personal invitations to be distributed among the students. He pointed out that it would be a great opportunity to bring young people to the sacrament of Penance and to have present in St. Peter’s Basilica many secular priests (among them some of those incardinated in Opus Dei who were residing in the city) available for confessions for several hours before the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration. Cardinal Martínez Somalo, the Substitute Secretary of State at that time, said that “the response of the students was enthusiastic; and from then on it has always been like this. Influenced by one another, many of them took part in that Mass. Afterwards the priests present remarked that they were surprised at the large number of confessions, thanks to the liturgical celebration of the Pope.”[25]

Another chapter here could be the Pontiff’s pastoral trips. In 1979, John Paul II asked for Don Alvaro’s opinion about going to Mexico, to
preside over the Latin American Bishops’ Conference in Puebla. Msgr. del Portillo responded that he thought it would be a great good for the Church, in spite of some pessimistic predictions. In preparation for other pastoral trips by the Pope throughout the world, he reminded the faithful and cooperators of the Prelature that they should show their filial affection for the Holy Father in every way possible, and that they should pass on this concern to their friends, relatives and acquaintances through their personal apostolate. This support accompanied the Pope everywhere, and it was especially decisive on some pastoral trips in which people feared that a cold or even hostile reception could be given to the Vicar of Christ.

Also in larger projects, Don Alvaro showed he was very sensitive to the Pope’s desires, and he incorporated them into the pastoral plans of the Prelature. A very clear example of this was the beginning of the apostolic activity of the Work in the countries of northern and eastern Europe.

One of Don Alvaro’s apostolic “dreams” was that Opus Dei would be able to go to continental China, to assist in sowing Christ’s light in that immense country. That aspiration began to become a reality, at least partially, at the end of 1980, when the first center of the Work was established in Hong Kong. Two years later Opus Dei began its apostolic work in another important crossroads of the Far East: Singapore. In December 1982, Don Alvaro informed John Paul II about Opus Dei steps in Asia, and mentioned his desire to go as soon as possible to continental China. The Pope responded that he appreciated that desire, but that he was more concerned about the situation in the Scandinavian countries that had become very distant from the Christian faith. On hearing those words, the Prelate realized that it would be more pleasing to God to change the trajectory of his plans, and to go as soon as possible to those countries of northern Europe.

In fact, in the Christmas greeting card sent to his children a few days later, Don Alvaro wrote: “Now I want to insist that you pray for the apostolic expansion of the Work, preparing with your prayers and your sacrifices, with your joyful and generous dedication, for the work in the cold regions of northern Europe, in the Scandinavian countries.”[26] The apostolate in those countries became a priority for Don Alvaro, and he dedicated great energy to it. He knew very well that it would not be easy to
obtain fruit in the short run, but he was convinced that God would provide the help needed. Referring to the difficult harvest faced by the faithful of the Work there, he remarked: “It is very hard! But if it is very hard, we know that we can count on more grace from God, because our Lord, when he sends us to plow a field, always gives us the necessary instruments so that we can bring life to those dried out lands. Going there, he will grant us sufficient graces to move souls.”[27]

John Paul II harbored in his soul a zeal for the new evangelization, and in 1985 he gave a strong impulse to this pastoral priority, above all in the countries of eastern Europe and North America, where the symptoms of secularism were growing at an alarming rate. A symbolic date is October 11 of that year, when the Holy Father closed a symposium for European bishops held in Rome, inviting the Church to a renewed missionary zeal. Don Alvaro right away echoed this apostolic project, and on December 25 of that same year he wrote a pastoral letter to the faithful of the Prelature, urging them to collaborate with all of their strength in this task, especially in the countries of “old Europe.” From then on he redoubled his pastoral efforts in this sector, making frequent trips throughout Europe. The years from 1987 to 1090 were marked by the extension of this effort to other continents: to Asia and Oceania, North America, and finally Africa.

At other times, moved by his zeal to faithfully support other intentions of the Pope, he put into operation apostolic initiatives with a deep impact on the life of the universal Church and the particular Churches, oriented to the formation of priests and candidates for the priesthood in various countries. Especially important here were the obtaining of Church recognition for the ecclesiastical schools at the University of Navarra and the creation of the Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross, which in a few years became the present Pontifical University. Certainly, it was necessary to overcome many obstacles to see these projects carried out, but he did not cease in his efforts because he knew that it responded to the plans of the Holy Father in his understandable eagerness to make Jesus Christ more widely known, as he had outlined in the encyclicals Redemptor hominis and Redemptoris missio.

Regarding the formation of candidates for the priesthood, and responding to another express suggestion of the Roman Pontiff, Don
Alvaro founded two international seminaries with the aim of preparing for the priesthood seminarians sent by their respective bishops: the International Bidasoa residence in Pamplona, Spain, and the *Sedes Sapientiae* residence in Rome, established respectively in 1988 and 1991, as parts of the University of Navarra and the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross. With the intention of providing dignified lodging for the students, he asked many people to help with their prayer and their alms in the construction or remodeling of the necessary buildings, both in Rome and in Pamplona.

These projects required the raising of large sums of money, not only for the construction and maintenance of the buildings, but also for many scholarships for students coming from dioceses with few financial resources.

These apostolic initiatives and many others continue to provide a lot of fruit, and are a sign of how our Lord always helps apostolic works begun in his service. Don Alvaro was filled with joy to see how, year after year, the number of students from many different dioceses was increasing in those academic centers. We can cite here are some figures provided by the CARF Foundation, dedicated to channeling financial aid to these apostolic instruments. According to data provided in 2011, since 1989 more than 11,000 students from 109 countries have pursued ecclesiastical studies at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome or at the University of Navarra. These include seminarians, priests, men and women religious, religion teachers, catechists, etc., of whom some 2,500 have received scholarships and more than 1,700 have been ordained as priests. In the International Bidasoa Seminary in Pamplona, and in *Sedes Sapientiae* in Rome, 776 seminarians have been ordained priests over the years.[28]

Before ending this talk (which has only been able to give a partial picture of the exemplary fidelity to God and to the Church of St. Josemaria’s first successor and the first Prelate of Opus Dei), I would like to remind you how deeply Blessed John Paul II valued that fidelity. It was widely reported in the media that, a few hours after my predecessor’s death, the Pope came to pray before his mortal remains in the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace. When I thanked him for his presence among us, which brought so much consolation and joy to everyone, John Paul II replied: “*era cosa dovuta, era cosa dovuta*” (it was my duty).
I have no doubt that this gesture was, on the part of the Pope, a paternal and explicit recognition of Don Alvaro's fidelity to the Successor of Peter and to his mission as Supreme Pastor. He had already given expression to this on the occasion of Don Alvaro’s 80th birthday, on March 11, by sending him a photograph of himself accompanied by a hand-written message with his blessing. After expressing his “great appreciation for the faithful work he had carried out in service to the Church,” he beseeched for Don Alvaro “abundant heavenly graces for a ministry that has already yielded so much fruit over many years.” And he imparted “from his heart a special apostolic blessing, which I extend affectionately to all the priests and laity of the Prelature of Opus Dei.”[29]

A few hours later, in a get-together with his sons in Rome, Don Alvaro remarked with his usual simplicity: “it is a gift that deeply moved me because I did not expect it; it was a good surprise.”[30]

On the day of Don Alvaro’s death, besides the visit already mentioned to pray before his mortal remains, John Paul II sent me—as Vicar General of Opus Dei—a telegram expressing his heartfelt condolences to all the faithful of the Work, laity and priests, while recalling “with gratitude to our Lord the life filled with priestly and episcopal zeal of the deceased, his example of courage and of trust in divine Providence that he always offered, as well as his fidelity to the See of Peter and the generous ecclesial service as intimate co-worker and well-merited successor of blessed Josemaría Escrivá; and he assured them of “his fervent prayers of suffrage so that [our Lord] will receive in eternal happiness this good and faithful servant.”[31]

A short time later, a postcard Don Alvaro had sent a few days earlier from Jerusalem reached John Paul II’s hands. Addressed to the then personal secretary of the Pope, Msgr. Stanislaw Dziwisz, he asked him to present “to the Holy Father our desire to be fideles usque ad mortem, in the service of the Holy Church and the Holy Father.”[32]

This last remembrance seems to me very fitting for concluding my words, in which I wanted to highlight—in a necessarily incomplete and fragmentary way—one of the essential characteristics of Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo, Bishop and Prelate of Opus Dei, founder and first Grand Chancellor of this university: his fidelity to God, to the Church, to the Roman Pontiff, to St. Josemaría, and to the spirit of Opus Dei. I ask him
that, through his intercession, we too may follow to the end the same path.

Thank you very much!


[13] Letters from St. Josemaría to Don Alvaro on the dates noted: AGP, series A.3.4, leg. 256, carp. 2; AGP, series A.3.4, leg. 256, carp. 2; AGP,
series A.3.4, leg. 256., carp. 3; AGP, series A.3.4, leg. 256, carp. 3.


[22] Testimony of Juan Masià Mas-Bagà, AGP, SPD, T-0503, p. 3.


[27] Alvaro del Portillo, Notes from a family gathering, January 1, 1983.

John Paul II, Dedicatory manuscript on a photograph, March 11, 1994.


Torna ai contenuti

Telegram from Pope Francis: Alvaro del Portillo: “The Precious Example of his Life”

The Holy Father sent a telegram to participants in the Conference *Vir Fidelis Multum Laudabitur*, held in Rome for the centennial of Bishop del Portillo’s birth. The text, sent by the Secretary of State, was read in the opening ceremony for the event. This is a translation of the telegram sent in Italian.

Rome, February 28, 2014

On the occasion of the conference dedicated to the Venerable Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, first Chancellor of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, for the centennial of his birth, the Supreme Pontiff Francis sends his best wishes, with the hope that you will duly highlight the precious example of the life of the faithful follower and first successor of the holy founder of Opus Dei and promoter of this Pontifical University for the service of the Church. He was a zealous priest, who combined an intense spiritual life founded on faithful adhesion to the rock who is Christ, with a generous apostolate as a pilgrim throughout the whole world, following in the

His Holiness exhorts you to imitate his humble, cheerful, hidden and silent life, but a life that was also determined to give testimony to the perennial newness of the Gospel, by announcing the universal call to holiness and the furthering through one’s daily work of the salvation of all mankind.

The Holy Father, while asking you to pray for him and for his ministry, invokes the light of the Holy Spirit for a fruitful work of reflection. And he warmly imparts to your Excellency the Rector and to the professors his apostolic blessing, including those taking part in the conference and those attending the Pontifical University.

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State for His Holiness

The Polytechnic University of Madrid remembers one of its alumni: Bishop del Portillo

A ceremony honoring the centennial of Bishop del Portillo’s birth and his upcoming beatification took place on January 29 in the School of Civil Engineering in Madrid (formerly the School of Public Works). The speakers were Pablo Perez Lopez, Professor of History at the University of Navarra; Jesús Martinez Alegre, dean of Madrid’s School of Engineering for Public Works; Carlos Delgado Alonso-Martirena, professor and director of the School; and Antonio Tormo, director of Beta Films and producer of the video “Saxum, Memories of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.” The latter introduced the projection of this video. Many engineers at the School and relatives of Bishop del Portillo took part.

Some facts about Alvaro del Portillo’s stay at the school were presented, including unpublished documents such as the marks he obtained and the
projects—bridges, dams, railways, etc.—on which he worked as a public works assistant in the Tajo Hydrographic Confederation, a state organization for regulating the channel of this river. Also emphasized were his efforts in his studies, his responsibilities in the projects during his short period of activity there, and the doctorate he obtained as a civil engineer in 1965 after twenty years absence from his professional career.

Pablo Pérez López, professor of Contemporary History at the University of Navarra, emphasized Bishop del Portillo’s constant endeavor to serve the Church in Opus Dei. He also said that the future blessed was “a great friend of freedom, whose life was based on freely forgetting about himself in order to put himself at the service of other people.” Don Alvaro “had a great concern for social problems all throughout his life,” he said. His life was marked by “always thinking about others” and striving to “alleviate people's suffering.” This concern was shown, among other things, in the impetus he gave to medical research in projects such as the Center for Applied Medical Research (CIMA) at the University of Navarra, and the Campus Biomedico in Rome.

A Conference in Quito, Ecuador

On Tuesday, March 11, in the auditorium of Los Pinos High School in Quito, Ecuador, more than four hundred people took part in a conference for the hundredth anniversary of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s birth.

The event opened with the projection of the documentary “Saxum: Memories of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.” Following this Archbishop Antonio Arregui of Guayaquil gave an address on Bishop Del Portillo and the Second Vatican Council. “The Holy See,” Archbishop Arregui said, “realized very quickly the intellectual caliber of this priest, which is why they asked him to serve on several committees preparing for Vatican II and later to take part as a peritus. His love for the priesthood was shown in overseeing the effort to prepare the decree Presbyterorum ordinis.”

Archbishop Arregui spoke of the first successor to St. Josemaría as an “instrument of the Holy Spirit” in ensuring that essential aspects related to
the sanctification of ordinary life were taken up by the Conciliar
magisterium. His talk also included personal anecdotes and memories.

The conference given by the Archbishop of Guayaquil was followed by
five testimonies from people who had a chance to get to know the venerable
Alvaro del Portillo. Finally an interview was projected featuring Fr. Javier
Medina Bayo, author of a recent biography of Don Alvaro entitled *Alvaro
del Portillo: Un hombre fiel*.

**Inauguration of an Exposition at the
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross**

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and Africa was the topic chosen by the
Harambee Africa International association for a photographic exhibition
commemorating the centennial of Bishop del Portillo’s birth. Twenty large
panels of photographs and “infographs,” installed in the hallways of the
Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, offered students, teachers and
visitors information about various social and educational initiatives
developed on the African continent thanks to the impetus of St. Josemaría’s
successor. Four of these projects will be financed thanks to the collection of
funds organized in connection with the upcoming beatification. The
exposition included the photographic collection *Born in the Congo*, by the
photographer Ismael Martinez Sanchez. This is a visual documentary of
daily life in Kinshasa, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

**A Traveling Exposition**

“A Saint Documented” is the title given to an exposition organized by
the Loreto Spa architectural studio as a way of making the first successor to
St. Josemaría better known. Following its inauguration on May 19 at the
University of Navarra in Pamplona, the exposition traveled to seven other
cities on the Iberian peninsula: Granada, Seville, Vigo, Alicante, Oviedo,
Saragossa, Barcelona, and finally Madrid, where pilgrims arriving for the beatification of Bishop del Portillo will be able to view it.

The exposition has several different parts. A “time-line” presents the most important events in Don Alvaro’s life. The second section sums up his work at the head of Opus Dei, his work in the Holy See, and the impulse he gave to priestly formation. The section entitled “Footsteps of Love” present some of the social projects that Bishop del Portillo spurred forward all over the world. Finally a section entitled “The Intangible Secret” shows some of the keys to his holiness.
ABOUT SAINT JOSEMARÍA
A Church in Tarlac, the Philippines

“Parokya ni San Josemaria Escriva” is the name, in Tagalog, of the first church dedicated to St. Josemaría Escrivá in the Philippine archipelago and in all of Asia. Eleven years after it was erected canonically on February 24, 2003, the parish now has a definitive church, constructed in Gerona, Tarlac, a community situated some 80 miles from Manila.

On February 14, the new parish church was solemnly dedicated by Bishop Florentino Cinense of Tarlac. “This Church is dedicated to St. Josemaría because he is the saint of ordinary life, who reminded us that we can find God in the fulfillment of our ordinary daily duties,” the bishop said in an interview. The diocese of Tarlac was thus putting into effect its plan to assign future parishes to the patronage of contemporary saints. “These saints experienced what we ourselves are living through today,” Bishop Cinense said, “and we hope that our faithful will be able to relate to them.”

When helping out in the construction of the church, the local parish people tried to explain to many others the message of the universal call to holiness and distributed prayer cards of their new patron, St. Josemaría.

Presiding over the church building is a large statue of a guardian angel. A light illuminates it at night to serve as a guide and a point of reference for those who walk through the area. Between the two main entrance doors there is a large “medallion” with the figure of St. Josemaría in profile. The sanctuary of the church has a reredos composed of scenes of the Annunciation, the Holy Family at work, the flight into Egypt, and the Nativity. To the left of the Tabernacle there is a picture of St. Josemaría, and on the opposite side a space has been reserved for a picture of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, which will be installed after his beatification.

Devotion throughout the world

*Plaza in Fondachelli Fantina*
On May 17, the small community of Fondachelli Fantina, in the Italian province of Messina, dedicated a plaza to St. Josemaría. The ceremony began with the Eucharistic celebration in the Church of the Holy Guardian Angels. Following this, in the plaza, the mayor and Rev. Bruno Paudula unveiled a relief of the saint, carved on a stone plaque, which was blessed in the same ceremony.

_A high relief sculpture in Saragossa_

The church of Our Lady of Cogullada, in Saragossa, has a new sculpture of St. Josemaría in one of the side chapels. A bronze sculpture in high relief, it was blessed on February 22 in a ceremony presided over by the Vicar of the Delegation of Opus Dei in Saragossa. St. Josemaría celebrated Mass in that church on the 25th and 26th of January in 1958.

_The southernmost image of St. Josemaría in the world_

This past April 4, an image of St. Josemaría was installed in the parish of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, in Rio Grande, a municipality of the province of Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and the South Atlantic Islands, in Argentina.

During the homily at the Mass, with many families present, St. John Paul II's words on October 6, 2002, the day of the canonization, were cited, encouraging the multitude of faithful gathered in St. Peter's Square to spread the call to holiness in the midst of the world among people of all walks of life.

_Two roads with his name_

_Viseu_

Located in the geographical center of Portugal, Viseu is a small city of 60,000 inhabitants, where devotion to St. Josemaría is wide-spread. The founder of Opus Dei visited this city on several occasions and, in gratitude, the city council decided to put his name on a new road: the _Avenida São Josemaria_. The street is in a newly urbanized area and connects two residential neighborhoods.

_Casanova_
On Sunday, April 27, the city of Casanova in Reggie Calabria, Italy, inaugurated a new road dedicated to St. Josemaría, in a ceremony presided over by the city mayor, Alessandro Cannatà, and by Dr. Antonio Monteleone.

*The splendor of the divine in the ordinary*

On Sunday, May 11, the Italian TV channel *Rete 4* presented a documentary dedicated to the founder of Opus Dei. It is directed by Marco Palmisano and has commentary provided by Father Antonio Sicari. With this presentation, the television network closed a series of fourteen chapters devoted to saints in a series entitled “The saints: the splendor of the divine in the ordinary.”

*In the cathedral of Puebla*

On February 23, after celebrating Sunday Mass, Archbishop Victor Sanchez of Puebla, Mexico, presided at the installation of a painting of St. Josemaría in the cathedral’s chapel of the Most Sweet Heart of Mary. Taking part in the ceremony were Msgr. Francisco Ugarte, regional vicar of Opus Dei, various concelebrating priests, Martha Orozco, the artist who did the painting, and numerous parishioners.

Torna ai contenuti

**Other new publications**

*Books by St. Josemaría*


The publisher Swiety Wojciech of Poznan, has revised the 16th ed. of *Droga* (*The Way*), and the 8th ed. of *Burzda* (*Furrow*). The translation has been improved and Scripture references have been added on the margins alongside points, to facilitate their consultation.


*Pogovori z mons. Escrivájem de Balaguerjem,* Ljubljana, Rivez, 2014, 1st ed. of *Conversations with Msgr Escrivá* in Slovenian

*Amar al mundo apasionadamente,* México City, Minos, 2014, 8th Mexican edition of *Passionately Loving the World.*


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**Books about St. Josemaría**

*Entre la noche y la esperanza: El paso de san Josemaría Escrivá a través de los Pirineos en el otoño de 1937* [Between the night and hope: The passage of St. Josemaría Escrivá through the Pyrenees in the autumn of 1937], Jordi Piferrer i Deu, Lleida, Milenio, 2014, 1st Spanish edition, 331 pages.

*Ganz einfach heilig: Cesar Ortiz erzählt über seinen heiligen Freund Josemaría Escrivá* [Quite simply holy: Cesar Ortiz speaks about his saintly friend, Josemaría Escrivá], Martin Lohmann, Kißlegg, Christiana-Verlag, 2014.
Publication of “St. Josemaría and Theological Thought”

At the beginning of June, the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross published the first volume of San Josemaría y el pensamiento teológico [St. Josemaría and Theological Thought] (Edusc, 492 pp.), with the proceedings of the international conference held in Rome from November 14 to 16. Coordinated by Professor Javier Lopez Diaz, the first volume offers the plenary addresses of the conference, while the second volume, which will be published in the coming months, will contain a selection of the papers read throughout the meeting.

The volume opens with an article by Bishop Javier Echevarría, the Prelate of Opus Dei, on the contribution of St. Josemaría to the Second Vatican Council. This is followed by a study by Msgr. Fernando Ocáriz on the impetus that St. Josemaría’s teachings can bring to theology. Professor Robert Wielockx examines the use that St. Thomas made of the teachings of the saints, while Cardinal Kurt Koch discusses a parallel question in the works of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI. In addition, Professor Jean-Marie Léthel O.C.D. considers the relation between the “science of faith” and the “science of love,” while Professors Tanzella-Nitti, Maspero, Réal Tremblay C.Ss.R., O’Callaghan, Rodríguez Luño and Villar, among others, deal with the light that the teachings of St. Josemaría might cast on various areas of theology. Professors Juan José Sanguineti and Ana Marta Gonzákez, in turn, consider the stimulus that these can represent for philosophy. It concludes with articles by Carlos José Errazuriz and Gaetano Lo Castro on St. Josemaría and Canon Law.

This work is directed to anyone interested in the renewal of theology through the light and vigor provided by the teachings of the saints.
The Center of Documentation and Studies on Josemaría Escrivá (CEDEJ), in coordination with the Historical Institute of St. Josemaría Escrivá (ISJE), premiered in early 2014 a virtual library on St. Josemaría. One of the most complete bibliographic collections about the founder of Opus Dei, it can be consulted on the internet at http://www.unav.es/bvcedej/. This collection offers information of a bibliographic and academic nature on St. Josemaría Escrivá, and provides access to the texts of thousands of records and digitized documents. The website also offers content referring to historical questions and research projects on Opus Dei, as well as a selection of books by category.

Eucharistic Celebrations on the Feast of St. Josemaría

On June 26 the liturgical memorial of St. Josemaría Escrivá was celebrated. For this occasion numerous Masses were held all over the world.

Noteworthy was the fact that for the first time a Mass in honor of St. Josemaría was celebrated in the penitentiary of Rio Seco (Piura, Peru), a prison afflicted with overcrowding and poor living conditions.

Following Pope Francis’ call to go out to the “peripheries” of society, Father Martin Chero, pastor of the parish of Nuestra Señora del Tránsito (Piura), wanted to share the feast of St. Josemaría with the more than 250 inmates in the prison. “St. Josemaría,” he told those attending, “reminded us of what our treasures are on earth so that we don’t let them go to waste: hunger, thirst, heat, cold, pain, dishonor, poverty, loneliness, betrayal, slander, prison (see The Way, no. 194). Do we discover these treasures in our own life?”

Following the Eucharist, prayer cards of the founder of Opus Dei were distributed among the inmates, who then shared an appetizer in an atmosphere of friendship.

An interactive map, published on the webpage www.josemariaescriva.info, provided information on the Eucharistic
celebrations held throughout the world. Masses in memory of St. Josemaría have also been celebrated in countries where Opus Dei is not yet carrying out its apostolic work in a stable way, such as Vietnam, The Arab Emirates, Ukraine, and Tunisia.
News
New Centers of the Prelature

The vicars of the respective circumscriptions have established eight new Centers of the Prelature in the following cities: one in Sorocaba, Brazil, one in Florianopolis, Brazil, one in Queretaro, Mexico, and five in Poland, in the cities of Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Torun.

Project Saxum: Pilgrimages to the Holy Land

St. Josemaría always hoped to visit the Holy Land during his life, in order to follow closely, here as well, in the footsteps of Jesus. “He had a great desire to go to the Holy Land,” Bishop Alvaro del Portillo said. “In his prayer, he put himself as another person in the Gospel scenes, taking note of each detail. But since he had never been there, he imagined the scenery as best he could according to what he had studied and read.” That desire has also extended to all of his spiritual children in Opus Dei and to their relatives and friends, for he wanted everyone to have the opportunity during their life to “pray, kneel and kiss the ground that Jesus tread.” The Venerable Alvaro del Portillo was able to fulfill this desire in 1994, by carrying out a pilgrimage in thanksgiving for God’s gifts. Only a few hours after his return to Rome, on March 23, God called him into his presence. He had celebrated his last Mass in the church of the Cenacle in Jerusalem.

Following the footsteps of Christ

Since then, inspired by the wish of St. Josemaria, and in memory of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, faithful of Opus Dei, together with cooperators and friends, have put into operation the “Saxum” project: the construction of a center for spiritual activities and service to pilgrims in the Holy Land. In the Saxum center retreats and conferences will be held, inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá. It will be a place where people from all over the world, eager for a renewed encounter with Jesus and his Gospel, will have the opportunity to deepen their desires for holiness and evangelization, combining the pilgrimage with time for study, prayer and
reflection. With its doors wide open to all men and women, Saxum also seeks to become an instrument of peace and unity in that region of the world.

The complex will also offer orientation and information for visitors and tourist guides in the Holy Land, with interactive and multimedia resources to illustrate the Christian heritage, as well as its Jewish roots. The hope is to foster mutual understanding with other religious beliefs, as well as offer resources for a deeper understanding of the visits made by pilgrims to the holy places. Visitors will be able to attend daily Mass, receive the Sacrament of Confession, and spend time in prayer.

*With the assistance of all*

“Saxum,” the Latin word for rock, is a term St. Josemaría used for Alvaro del Portillo, beginning in 1939, because of his fidelity and strong support. In giving this name to the activities center, the promoters want to show their gratitude to the future “Blessed” for his life of service to the Church.

The buildings, now under construction, are located in Abu Gosh, a small community some ten miles from Jerusalem, through which the “way to Emmaus” runs.

Saxum International Foundation is a not-for-profit organization responsible for the international fundraising campaign. It has established agreements with other foundations in various countries to facilitate local donations and has organized informative gatherings throughout the world.

Saxum is a project that is being built brick by brick, through the generosity, effort and affection of many people all over the world who take part in the Prelature’s apostolates. People from of all walks are providing financial assistance in a great variety of ways.

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**Pontifical Appointments**
Rev. Arturo Cattaneo, professor at the School of Theology in Lugano, Switzerland, was appointed consultor for the Pontifical Council for the laity on February 6, 2014. On the same date Professor Yago De La Cierva, professor of Management and Crisis Communication at the School of Institutional Social Communications in the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome was also named a member of the Pontifical Council for the laity.

On February 19, 2014, Rev. Pablo Gefaell, professor of Eastern Canon Law in the School of Canon Law at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome was named a consultor for the Congregation for the Eastern Churches.

On April 30, 2014, Rev. Carlos Lema Garcia, until now spiritual director of Opus Dei for Brazil, was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the diocese of São Paulo, Brazil.

Centennial of the birth of Dora del Hoyo

On March 29, 2014, the municipality of Boca de Huergano in the province of Leon, Spain, was the scene of a ceremony in tribute to Dora del Hoyo, on the centennial of her birth (January 11, 1914 — January 11, 2014). A commemorative plaque was unveiled in the house where she was born with the following inscription: “To Dora del Hoyo Alonso, on the centennial of her birth, for her contribution to social projects throughout the world, following the impulse of St. Josemaría.” Dora del Hoyo was the first woman of Opus Dei who dedicated herself to sanctifying domestic tasks, seen as a professional occupation. Her life was marked by the desire to serve others disinterestedly and joyfully, making life agreeable for them, an inheritance she left to many people throughout the world. Her mortal remains repose in Our Lady of Peace, the Prelatic Church of Opus Dei, close to the soon to be beatified Alvaro del Portillo. Thousands of faithful of the Prelature and many others have testified in a spontaneous way to Dora’s influence in their lives. Her process of canonization was opened on June 18, 2012, in Rome.
Priestly Society of the Holy Cross on the Internet

The new Opus Dei website now offers ample information on the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, an association inseparably united to the Prelature. The section “What it is” explains the history and purpose of the Priestly Society and the spiritual assistance it offers to diocesan priests. The “Resources” section contains texts and videos that are useful for personal formation and for pastoral work. St. Josemaría’s love for priests was deeply embedded in his life, since the founder saw them as instruments in God’s hands to bring many souls to heaven.

New design for the Opus Dei webpage

On Sunday, March 23, a new version of the website www.opusdei.org was premiered. The website is offered in 32 different languages with versions for 78 countries and has been especially designed for browsing on mobile devices. The increase in visits and suggestions from users were the impetus for a change in format, with more space for pictures and audiovisual content, and with substantial technical improvements.

The main menu has been simplified to make it more intuitive. More than 60,000 articles are organized in five large sections: “What is Opus Dei,” “The Prelate,” “News,” “Saint Josemaría,” and “Christian Life.” The site also has a “Press room” for media professionals.

An important addition are various web pages integrated into the site itself, for the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, Cooperators of Opus Dei, and each of the 13 faithful whose cause of canonization has begun.

Since half the visits to the site come through smart phones or tablets, an effort has been made to provide a design adaptable to all sizes of screen and
various operating systems. All articles can now be downloaded in *epub* and *mobi* format.

A more powerful search engine has also been added, which displays results in a clear and orderly way.

To assist in the task of evangelization, and as it has already done for some years now, the website offers words of the Holy Father, messages from the Prelate, information about the doctrine and life of the Church, testimonies from people seeking God in their ordinary life, and stories about initiatives for the most needy in society.

Some Diocesan Assignments Received by Priests of the Prelature

You can read the full text of "Romana" by subscribing to the print edition.

Other publications of interest


On May 22, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, presided over the closure of the diocesan phase of the process of canonization for Fr. Joseph Muzquiz (Badajoz, Spain, October 14, 1912 — Pembroke, Massachusetts,
June 21, 1983). In the ceremony, which took place in the pastoral center of the archdiocese, Cardinal O'Malley said that this priest “showed us what a virtuous life can attain day by day if we open our heart and soul to the graces God is granting us.”

Fr. Joseph Muzquiz was one of the first three priests of Opus Dei and helped St. Josemaría extend the apostolic work through various countries, especially in the United States. His cause of canonization was begun in June 2011. Once the diocesan phase was completed, all of the documentation was sent to the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints in Rome, for its study.

Fiftieth anniversary of the start of Opus Dei’s apostolic work in Paraguay

For the 50th anniversary of the start of Opus Dei’s activities in Paraguay, a commemorative ceremony was held in Asunción, with some 450 people attending. During the event, held in the Mariscal Lopez Conference Center, the documentary “St. Josemaría and Paraguay: Testimonies,” was presented. Taking part was the Vicar of Opus Dei for Paraguay, Rev. Luis Caballero; the producer of the documentary, Juan Martín Erath; and a local journalist, Patricia Lafuente, who offered her testimony on the positive influence of the message of St. Josemaría in her own life.

Stable work of Opus Dei in Paraguay began on January 21, 1962, by the express wish of the founder and at the request of the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Carlo Martini, who was a close friend of the Venerable Servant of God, Alvaro del Portillo. Many initiatives have been begun in Paraguay by faithful of Opus Dei in these past fifty years. These include university residences in Asunción, formational centers for professionals, young people’s clubs, and a number of educational and social undertakings.
UNIV 2014: “Ecology of the person and the human environment”

During Holy Week, three thousand students from over 200 universities around the world gathered in Rome for UNIV Forum 2014, the 47th year it has been held. The topic was “Ecology of the person and the human environment.” This yearly international gathering began under the impetus of St. Josemaría, who wanted to infuse in young people’s hearts a great love for the Church and the Pope.

On April 16 the students had an opportunity to take part in the Wednesday general audience with the Holy Father. At the end, the president of the Univ Forum, Oskari Juurikkala, presented Pope Francis with some letters written by elderly people from various countries who, because of their advanced age, were not able to meet the Roman Pontiff in person.

The gathering also included a Social Initiatives Forum that provided information about volunteer and solidarity projects being carried out by students throughout the world. The participants collected funds to assist various educational and health initiatives in Africa, organized by Harambee Africa International.

The international congress also included various cultural programs and round tables. Students had the opportunity to meet with the Argentinean doctor Abel Albino of the Conin Foundation against Infant Malnutrition; Esther Jimenez, director of the International Center for Work and Family at the IESE Business School; and Kishore Jayabalan, director of the Acton Institute in Rome.
In Brief
El Salto: on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile

Back in the 1950s, a small group of people gathered in an economically depressed part of Santiago de Chile, in the Recoleta district, to begin a medical dispensary. The staff consisted of several volunteers and a doctor who saw patients two afternoons a week for free. Over the years the initiative grew into the Polyclinic and Center for the Family, which people in the neighborhood refer to familiarly as El Salto. The complex now includes primary medical care, along with specialties in pediatrics, gynecology, a department of mental health, a complete dental service, two programs for recovering alcoholics, and a school of basic education for adults.

“Along with health care,” says Juanita Arteaga, director of the project, “we want to provide work training through workshops, courses, and basic classes for adults. In total, almost 14,000 persons have already been helped by El Salto.”

The polyclinic, a recent installation, provides care in the areas of pediatrics, gynecology and rheumatology. A small fee is charged, and patients have access to medical examinations, a pharmacy service and, if necessary, x-rays and scanners.

The workshops at El Salto began with the aim of providing housewives from the area with Christian formation, along with the opportunity to receive work training and earn an income while at home. The afternoon they spend there each week is a chance to relax with their neighbors and learn new skills such as painting, dress-making and hair dressing. The women are very grateful for the spiritual formation they receive. “I recognize here the influence of St. Josemaría,” says Anita Pereira, a pediatrician who for the past 15 years has worked every morning in El Salto. “One sees here great care for details in work and the dignity and affection with which people are treated, in a friendly and tidy place.”
Some apostolic activities brought forward by faithful of the Prelature

The initiatives described in this section are educational, social, and cultural activities brought forward by faithful of the Prelature and cooperators together with many other people, both Catholics and non-Catholics. Those who undertake and direct these activities (taking on full responsibility for them, including their financial aspects) are trying to respond to specific local needs without any discrimination regarding race, religion, or social condition.

The Prelature of Opus Dei, through agreements with the organizers, or through the guidelines established by the statutes of each entity, contributes to the development of these social initiatives by providing Christian doctrinal and moral orientation, and priestly service, always with full respect for the freedom of people’s consciences.

In Brief

Atibaia, São Paulo, Brazil -- Transmitting Christian Convictions

Fifty girls from cities all over Brazil—from Porto Alegre, in the south, to Fortaleza, in the far northeast—took part in a conference organized in Atabaia. The connecting thread was the importance of formation to transmit deep Christian convictions in society.

The conference took place from January 4 to 8, in Casa da Serra in Atibaia. Important topics that were discussed included the Christian vision of the family, the defense of life, questions in bioethics, etc. The program ended with classes of rhetoric and media training, to enable the young women to take an active part in the social debate about values that concern a Christian.
Madrid -- With journalism professionals

On Saturday, February 22, Colegio Mayor Santillana was the site of a conference for journalism professionals on the figure of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. The speakers were Antonio Hernandez Deus, director of Opus Dei’s information office in Spain, and Fr. Juan Luis Lorda, professor in the School of Theology at the University of Navarra. During the conference special stress was placed on the future blessed’s love for the Church.

Manila, Philippines -- The Daily Alvaro

Two young Philippine computer programmers launched an application dedicated to Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. They named it Daily Alvaro, a program for mobile devices that has spread to 40 countries. Its creators planned to destine part of the income from the application to Saxum, a conference center in the Holy Land. The application has five facets: access to the prayer card of the future blessed, information on the miracle attributed to his intercession, news about the progress of the Saxum project, writings of Alvaro del Portillo, and a chronology of his life. The software also includes a system for feedback from its users.

Madrid, Spain -- Ethics and Beauty

The Alcor student residence in Madrid organized a seminar on “Art and Beauty” in March for university women. The seminar centered on the connection between beauty and moral values.

Soledad Garcia Morales, a professor at the School of Architecture in
Madrid, inaugurated the seminar with a talk entitled “Beauty and Aesthetics.” She highlighted both the objective and subjective dimensions of beauty. The architect Emilio Tuñón, in turn, reflected on the role of architecture in fostering beauty in daily life, by providing spaces where human activities are carried out. Maria Molina, a professor of contemporary art, closed the cycle with a session on “Las Bellas Artes.” “Movies, the theater, music, dance,” she said, “are all an expression of the human being’s ability to leave behind assigned roles and to stop being ‘clones.’”

Munich, Germany -- Making a Home

The Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Forests for the Federal State of Bavaria organized in the spring a symposium on professional education in domestic services. The central lecture was by Professor María Pía Chirinos, Vice-Rector of the University of Piura, in Peru. Some one hundred people attending the symposium were offered reflections on the unifying force of domestic service among individuals, families and communities. Gertrud Gormann, in turn, director of the Domestic Management Center for Cologne’s Campus Müngersdorf, suggested some ways to stir up young people’s interest in service in the home.

Santana de Parnaíba, São Paulo, Brazil -- Horizons for Evangelization

From April 4 to 6, the Sítio da Aroeira Conference Center organized a program entitled Horizons: Perspectives and challenges for Christians in the middle of the world. Directed to young professionals from ten Brazilian cities, it provided work-related insights drawn from the teachings in Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii gaudium.

Those attending reflected on various dimensions of the evangelizing effort: friendship, as a sign of authentic charity and a path towards God;
initiatives aimed at teaching young people Christian values; the meaning and importance of sanctified work; and the family as a place for encountering God and for mutual service.

Enxomil, Portugal -- From Benedict to Francis

On February 10, the 16th session of the Pastoral Conference for priests was held at the Enxomil Conference Center in Portugal. More than 70 priests attended the gathering, entitled “The Transition from Benedict XVI to Francis: a Year Later.”

The General Secretary of the Portuguese Bishops’ Conference, Fr. Manuel Morujão, gave an address entitled “Two different Popes, a single ministry of Peter.” In another address, Fr. Hugo de Azevedo, author of a biography of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, stressed the fidelity to the Church and the exemplary pastoral work of the future blessed. The regional vicar of the Prelature in Portugal presided over the sessions.

Nairobi, Kenya -- Graduation at Strathmore University

Strathmore celebrated its tenth class of graduates on June 19. The university granted 104 diplomas, 643 licentiates, 136 master’s degrees, and 2 doctorates. Bernadette Musundi, president of the university Council, pointed out that 48% of these titles were awarded to women, a substantially higher percentage than in other universities in the country.

In his address, the rector, Prof. John Odhiambo, spoke about the university’s growing contacts with multinational and local corporations for research development. One example of this is the recently inaugurated
Bogotá, Colombia -- Family and Society

This past May, the Family and Society Research Group of the Institute for the Family published the book “Estilo de vida de los jóvenes y las necesidades de educación sexual” (Young peoples’ lifestyles and the need for sexual education). The publication is the fruit of joint research carried out by the University of the Sabana’s Institute for the Family and the national Attorney General’s office. It emphasizes certain factors that determine the behavior of school age youngsters in Colombia regarding the use of free time, interpersonal relations, the consumption of toxic substances, and emotional well-being.

Alcorcón, Spain -- A round table about don Alvaro

Alcorcón was the scene of a round table on June 18 about the upcoming beatification of Alvaro del Portillo. Taking part were, among others, the bishop of Getafe, Joaquín María López de Andújar, and Antonio Luis Galindo, cultural advisor. “As a Madrileño it is an honor and a joy to see a person as outstanding as Bishop Alvaro del Portillo beatified. His life is for us a joy and an inspiration. The saints inspire us with their example and help us with their intercession,” declared the bishop of Getafe.

Madrid, Spain -- 25th anniversary of the Roman Academic Center Foundation
Cardinal Manuel Monteiro de Castro, Major Penitentiary Emeritus of the Holy See and a member of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, participated on May 9 in the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the Roman Academic Center Foundation (Centro Académico Romano Fundación—CARF), an initiative begun by Bishop del Portillo to assist in the formation of priests and seminarians from all over the world.

CARF currently relies on more than 10,000 benefactors who contribute with their donations to the formation of priests. In its 25 years of existence, more than 13,500 students from 120 countries have received financial assistance to study at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, and in the ecclesiastical schools of the University of Navarra in Pamplona. Thanks to this initiative, over 2,000 diocesan seminarians, from 69 countries, have been ordained priests after having completed their studies and received formation in the ecclesiastical residence halls of Bidasoa and Sedes Sapientiae.

Madrid, Spain -- Fifty Years of Support for Schools

At the beginning of the 1960s, some married couples confided to St. Josemaría their dreams for the education of their children, and especially the possibility of starting schools that would respect the role of the family as the primary educator. They hoped for schools that would provide a formation inspired by a transcendent vision of human life, and by the Christian principles of personal dignity. The founder of Opus Dei encouraged them in their efforts to resolve this social need. In 1963–64, Ahlzahir school in Cordoba began with 108 students, the first school of the Fomento de Centros de Enseñanza, a support organization for these types of schools. On the celebration of its fiftieth anniversary, the institution now includes 35 schools with over 23,000 students, 16,000 families, 2,500 professionals and more than 80,000 alumni. For this anniversary, the Prelate of Opus Dei expressed in a letter his desire that, together with academic excellence, families would continue finding “trustworthy schools
that offer a deeply Christian formation, imbued with virtues such as fortitude, friendship, a spirit of service, and sincerity of life—virtues that further the integral development of each child’s personality and their ability to serve others.”

Sydney, Australia -- Annual seminar at Creston College

This year’s seminar opened with an address by Fr. Richard Umbers, chaplain of Creston College, a student residence for women. He spoke about Don Alvaro’s life and faithful service to the Church. In light of the future blessed’s example, scores of young professionals and university and high school students have committed themselves to supporting the social assistance projects organized from Creston. Current projects include assisting aboriginal girls in Dubbo and teaching catechism in various schools in Sydney.

Madrid, Spain -- Challenges of the New Evangelization

In January, more than two hundred people who work in the world of economics and finance gathered at the seat of IESE of Madrid to reflect on the new evangelization in their context of their professional life. Fr. Martin Schlag, a professor at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, gave two sessions on the topics of “The social doctrine of the Church in Benedict XVI” and “What does Pope Francis have in his heart when he speaks of a poor Church?”
Jarinú, São Paulo, Brazil -- Cultural Roots of the West

Prometheus, Sysiphus, Agamemnon, Antigone… A serious study of classical culture reveals the eternal yearnings of mankind: the soul’s desire for God, the search for true love, the virtues of nobility, fidelity, and so many other human virtues. Many of these values were assimilated by Christianity but now find themselves obscured in today’s culture.

University and high school students in Brazil gathered during the month of January to go deeply into this topic, in the framework of a study session entitled “The Cultural Roots of Western Civilization,” which took place at the Montes Claros Conference Center.

Sydney, Australia -- Workcamp in Vietnam

In January, Nairana Study Centre organized the fifth “Nairana Workcamp,” a volunteer activity in Vietnam. The boys taking part traveled to Saigon, where for twenty days they carried out various service projects. In the Phu My orphanage in Ho Chi Minh City, they provided assistance to the personnel from this institution in caring for several hundred disabled children. The second part of their program took place in K’Long, a village in the mountains near Saigon. There they built houses for the local people, repaired key roads for the town and prepared fertile land for agriculture. The boys also dedicated some hours to teaching English to local inhabitants. Financial assistance was provided by funds the students themselves had collected a year earlier, asking families and friends for help.

Rome, Italy -- Mercy and Law in Marriage

With the approaching Synod of Bishops on the family, the School of Canon Law at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross organized on
May 22 a study conference entitled: “Mercy and Law in Matrimony.” The topic was the relevance of mercy in matrimonial canon law, within the framework of the pastoral challenges facing the family today. Topics covered included admission to marriage; accompanying families, especially those undergoing difficulties; the process of marriage annulments; and pastoral care for divorced faithful who contract civil marriage.

Taking part in the conference were Prof. Denis Biju-Duval from the Pontifical Lateran University; Prof. Eduardo Baura from the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross; Prof. Benedict Ejeh, from the Pius X School of Canon Law in Venice; Msgr. Paolo Bianchi, Judicial Vicar of the Ecclesiastical Tribunal for the Region of Lombardy; Nikolaus Schöch, Substitute of the Supreme Tribunal for the Apostolic Signature; and Prof. Miguel Ángel Ortiz, Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.

Buenos Aires, Argentina -- University Students with Pick and Shovel

For the past 13 years, university men from Buenos Aires have traveled to the southern part of the country to carry out volunteer work in El Bolsón. Organized by the University Association for Development, this year 55 students and teachers dedicated 15 days of their vacation to this social work.

The Association, inspired by the message of St. Josemaría, also organized another social project in La Viña, in the north of Argentina, with over 90 young men taking part. The activities continue during the school year with visits to the sick and aged and other social work in the poor areas of Buenos Aires and other Argentinean cities.

Paris, France -- The Church’s Service to Mankind
Cardinal Robert Sarah, president of the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum*, gave a conference on the Church and its service to mankind at Garnelles Cultural Center. Two days later he took part in a colloquium for diocesan priests on the new evangelization, held in the Parisian parish of Saint-Augustin. This event was organized by the Fontblin Priests’ Forum.

**Santiago, Chile -- Nourishing a Smile**

Each Saturday a group of young women volunteers from the University of the Andes dedicates several hours to the women and children in San Roman, a district south of Santiago de Chile. It all began in 2009 when a priest from the area contacted a student at the university who was teaching catechism to children there. He asked if she would be willing to help organize the Padre Pio soup kitchen in San Ramón, which in addition to serving homeless adults also provides social services to women and children. He needed people who could help foster a cheerful atmosphere there and care for the people.

From that moment on, a group of students from the University of the Andes have been going to the soup kitchen to help out in various activities, including cooking, serving food, washing dishes, and accompanying the people there. The volunteers also seek to provide needed clothing, and basic health and hygiene care, first aid, manicures, hair dressing, games and recreation. All their efforts are aimed at meeting the material needs and easing the loneliness and abandonment of these people.

**Chía, Colombia -- A Corpus Christi Procession**

For the third consecutive year, La Sabana University organized a Corpus Christi procession on the university campus at Puente del Común. Taking part in the celebration on May 15 was the Vice Chancellor of the
University, Rev. Hernan Salcedo, who also presided over the Mass. The procession followed the paths and carpets made with flowers by students and employees of the university. The flowers were donated by stores near the University of La Sabana.

Cologne, Germany -- Fashion and Values

In February Campus Müngersdorf, a women’s residence in Cologne, held a study conference on the future of fashion. The principal speaker was Covadonga O'Shea, journalist, co-founder of Telva magazine and president of Tecnomoda Foundation. She assured listeners that the trends followed nowadays were not set by “high fashion” but by consumer demands, and pointed to the need to ground fashion in solid values, so that it expresses authenticity and aesthetic harmony. She also insisted that the best expression of personality and maturity is to be consistent with one’s own values.

In a conversation with a small group of women, Ms. O’Shea remarked that St. Josemaría had always encouraged the promotion of the true values of women in the world of fashion, in order to help give expression to the desire for truth, beauty and goodness, inscribed in the heart of each person.

Verona, Italy -- A Bridge of Solidarity

The centennial of the birth of Alvaro del Portillo inspired the Aquila Association for Social Development to take up a collection for the treatment of children affected by drepanocitosis (sickle cell anemia). The collection was destined for the Monkole Hospital Center, in Kinshasa, in the Congo R.D., to help fight this blood disease that, in central Africa, proves fatal to 50 to 75 percent of the children who suffer from it in the first five years of their life.

On Sunday, March 9, the fund-raising campaign organized a round
table moderated by the journalist Marina Zerman. Taking part from Monkole Hospital were Dr. René Lumu Kambala and the nurse Josephine Gadra, with 130 people attending. A piano concert by Stefania Cafaro was also organized in March at Verona’s *Circolo Ufficiali* concert hall.

Rome, Italy -- Promoting Cultural Change

More than 300 people took part from April 20 to 30 in the 9th Professional Seminar on Church Communications. Entitled “Creative Strategies for Promoting Cultural Change,” it was organized by the School of Institutional Social Communications at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. The seminar was aimed at directors of offices of communication, diocesan spokespersons, and other Church communications professionals.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the Archbishop of New York, inaugurated the seminar. In his address he said that “we have moved beyond a time when the bishops were the best spokesmen for the Church. Today the Church needs competent lay people to represent it.” Speakers included Cardinal Philippe Barbarin from Lyon; Helen Alvaré, professor of law at George Mason University; and Austen Ivereigh, co-founder of *Catholic Voices*. The seminar closed with an address by Joaquin Navarro Valls, former director of the Vatican Press office. In the context of the approaching canonization of Pope John Paul II, he spoke about the Pontiff’s personal holiness and communication skills.
IN PACE
Suffrages for the deceased

In the first half of 2014, 447 faithful of the Prelature and 23 members of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross passed away.

Suffrages have been offered for these deceased. As we continue to pray for them, let us thank God for the example they left us through their fidelity in striving to transform their professional work and the ordinary circumstances of their lives into an occasion for loving God and serving the Church and all souls. Their love for God and neighbor constitutes the meaning and value of their lives, whether outstanding in the eyes of others, or whether quite ordinary, as was true in most cases.

In addition to the names of all who have died during this period, we have gathered a few biographical details about some of the deceased, which give an idea of the variety of circumstances and situations in which the faithful of Opus Dei live. For reasons of space, we are not including this data in the other cases, but we must not forget that we have a debt of gratitude towards all of them for the example of fidelity they have left us. These brief sketches will help us live the Communion of Saints better with those who have preceded us to heaven.

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A study
Bishop Alvaro del Portillo and the Second Vatican Council

His Eminence Cardinal Julián Herranz

In the high-tech digital age we live in, even we Cardinals who are over eighty have to be familiar with computers, search engines, video conferences, etc. I ask your forgiveness if in my presentation I adopt a “global view” approach as if making use of the program “Google Earth” in its temporal rather than spatial dimension. I will “zoom in” from a global view of the subject expressed in the two terms “Bishop Del Portillo” and “Vatican II,” to three specific temporal views of the influence of the Servant of God (soon to be Blessed) in the Second Vatican Council, before, during, and after the celebration of that Council.

I will deal mainly with Bishop Del Portillo’s work during the Council, as secretary of one of the ten commissions of the Council Fathers. This commission was entrusted with one of the most difficult topics from the theological and disciplinary points of view: the life and ministry of priests in the Church and in the world. But first I would like to “zoom in” onto some aspects of the influence that Bishop Del Portillo had on the future subject matter and on the future protagonists of the Council.

1. Msgr. Del Portillo and the Roman Curia

I lived with Don Alvaro for 41 years, until his death on March 23, 1997. I met him in Rome in October 1953, at the central headquarters of Opus Dei, seven years after his arrival from Spain in February 1946. During my studies for a licentiate in canon law at the University of Saint Thomas (then known as the Angelicum), I began to notice the affection and prestige that this 38-year-old priest, procurator general of Opus Dei, enjoyed among the professors at that Pontifical Athenaeum and among more than a few of the prelates in the Roman Curia. He was already well-known as a canonist (especially in questions related to lay spirituality and apostolate), who previously in Spain had studied philosophy and civil engineering and had practiced that profession.

Many of these people knew that Don Alvaro was in close and continuous contact with the founder of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá,
assisting him in the difficult task of attaining an adequate juridical solution in Church law for the specific charism and social reality of this quite new apostolic work. Some of them had read articles by Don Alvaro in various ecclesiastical journals, or had heard him speak about the new and surprising reality of a lay vocation to holiness and apostolate, called to a filial dialogue with God and the spread of the Gospel in the midst of professional work and daily life.

In 1955 Don Alvaro began working as a consultor in dicasteries of the Holy See, where not only his doctrinal acuity, but also his friendly, humble and cordial character was very much appreciated. I will mention just one example. On April 16, 1960, when speaking with Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci, prefect of the Congregation for the discipline of the clergy and the Christian people, the Cardinal told me of his great esteem for Don Alvaro. And he said that that was why, a year earlier, when the first preparatory work began for Vatican II (announced by John XXIII on January 25, 1959), he had appointed him president of a special Study Commission on the Catholic laity set up within that dicastery. I wanted to mention this incident because it was in those years of preparatory work for Vatican II that Don Alvaro had the opportunity to get to know many people—bishops and cardinals, theologians and canonists—who later played a decisive role in preparing proposals for concilar documents referring, among other things, to what would be a central teaching of the Second Vatican Council: the role of the laity and the universal call to holiness and apostolate.

The simple and friendly character of Don Alvaro, the depth and also the humility of his thought and the extreme refinement shown in his judgments, explain his great capacity to win the sympathy and friendship of many people: those in the Curia, such as Bishops Domenico Tardini, future Secretary of State, and Giovanni Battista Montini, future Archbishop of Milan and later Pope Paul VI, and also of Cardinals Ciriaci, Marella, Antoniutti and Baggio, along with well-known theologians and canonists who were gradually drawn into the work of the Council. I would like to mention here some of these protagonists of Vatican II who expressed a special interest in getting to know, through Don Alvaro, the founder of Opus Dei and his teachings. I recall above all Cardinals Frings, Doepfner, Ottaviani, Koenig and Marty; also Archbishop Pericle Felici, Secretary
General of the Council and the future Cardinal President of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code of Canon Law; Bishop Carlo Colombo, Dean of the School of Theology in Milan, who was a *peritus* at the Council and a theologian close to Paul VI; Msgr. Willy Onclin, Dean of the School of Canon Law at the University of Louvain and *peritus* for four Conciliar commissions; Father Yves Congar, O.P., *peritus* for several commissions and future cardinal; Msgr. Jorge Medina, Conciliar *peritus* and future Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship; Bishop Karol Wojtyla, future Cardinal Archbishop of Krakow and St. John Paul II; Joseph Ratzinger, future Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and Pope Benedict XVI.

With regard to Benedict XVI, our beloved Pope emeritus, permit me a brief recent recollection. I went to visit him a few days ago in the monastery of the Vatican gardens. He already knew about the upcoming beatification of Don Alvaro and he said to me: “How wonderful! I had his help for years, when he was consultor in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. What a good example for all of us!”

2. A protagonist at the Second Vatican Council

I would like to turn here to the beginning of the Council, and specifically to Don Alvaro’s enormous work as secretary of one of the most difficult commissions of Vatican II. On November 4, 1962, he received a letter from Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci, President of the Commission *De disciplina cleri et populi christiani* for the Second Vatican Council, informing him he had been chosen as secretary of this commission. Four days later, on November 8, Don Alvaro received his letter of appointment.

To those who were present that day at the headquarters of the General Council of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría Escrivá expressed his joy at the great esteem the Holy See had shown for Don Alvaro by this appointment. He also said he had advised him to accept the heavy commitment of work that was being asked of him, out of love for the Church and in filial obedience to the Pope. And he voiced his well-founded hope that Don Alvaro would be able to continue carrying out his work as secretary general of Opus Dei, although this would require great effort and sacrifice. This is exactly what happened during the three long years of the great Conciliar assembly.
But besides this double commitment of work, Msgr. Del Portillo also had to confront, with the serenity everyone admired in him, a special difficulty in the task entrusted to him by the Holy See. I refer specifically to the obvious gap between the sketchy content of the preparatory schemas entrusted to the Commission “On the discipline of the clergy” (in whose work I too was also invited to collaborate) and the great number of doctrinal and disciplinary questions that began to arise about the identity and ecclesial image of the priesthood, and the demands and specific characteristics of the priest’s life and ministry.

Indeed, in the meetings that took place between January 21 and 29 in 1963, the coordinating commission for the work of the Council established that the number of schemas for constitutions and decrees to be presented in the hall by the various Conciliar commissions should be reduced to 17. As a result, the Commission on the Discipline of the Clergy was given the task of preparing a single decree schema, covering only three topics: priestly spirituality, pastoral ministry and the correct use of ecclesiastical goods. In fact, the coordinating commission itself decided a year later that the previous schema should be drastically reduced to the essential points, and should be presented, not in the form a true decree, but in a few brief “propositions.”

Undoubtedly these decisions of the directive organs of the Council were the result of methodological criteria that tended to give priority to the development of topics considered of primary importance, such as a renewed theological reflection on the Church, the directives for liturgical reform, doctrine on the episcopate and its sacramentality, the apostolate of the laity, and the ecumenical movement. Nevertheless, the 30 members of the De disciplina cleri commission (2 cardinals, 15 archbishops and 13 bishops) and the 40 periti or “experts” (theologians and canonists from 17 countries) were in agreement that the doctrinal development about the episcopacy and about the laity made it even more imperative to pursue a parallel theological and disciplinary deepening in questions related to the priesthood. (Don Alvaro was very familiar with this concern and made it known with his usual friendly strength.) Otherwise, the very theology of communion that underlay the Council’s work would have remained incomplete, thus disappointing the more than half a million priests who were and are, all
over the world, the bishops’ co-workers and the direct pastors of the lay faithful.

Nevertheless, the Commission on the Discipline of the Clergy, in response to the directives they had received, reluctantly prepared (the expression may seem strong, but later it would be shown to be understandable) the brief and therefore necessarily poor and insufficient propositions *De vita et ministerio sacerdotali*, which were debated in the Conciliar assembly on October 13, 14 and 15 of 1964. From the discussion and votes in the Council hall, and the many proposals for changes received, it became clear (as Don Alvaro had foreseen and had told me earlier) that the Council fathers wanted the topic of the ministerial priesthood to be dealt with, not in the form of brief propositions, but through a true and proper Conciliar decree of adequate breadth and content.

I recall very well how Msgr. Del Portillo, as the commission’s diligent and patient secretary, accepted this desire of the Conciliar assembly not only with a spirit of obedient availability, but also with a lively joy and satisfaction. So much so that he himself suggested to the *relator* of the schema, the then Archbishop of Rheims Most Rev. François Marty (years later the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris) that he immediately send a letter to the Cardinal moderators of the Council, through the secretary general, Archbishop Pericle Felici, asking for the necessary authorization to redo and develop the schema in the form desired by the assembly, that is, as a true Conciliar decree.

The letter, in Latin (Prot. N. 730/64 of October 20, 1964), received seven days later the expected response from the secretary general of the Council: “I have made your Excellency’s letter known,” said Archbishop Felici, “to the eminent cardinal moderators. In the session on the 22nd, the cardinal moderators, accepting the reasons presented by your Excellency, have expressed their view that the commission should re-work the text of the schema *De vita et ministerio sacerdotali* as your Excellency indicates.…” (Letter of the Secretary General of the Council, Prot. N. LC/758, of October 27, 1964).

*Omnia tempus habent* (Sir 3:1); everything has its proper time. Finally the moment had arrived when the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, realizing that the desired renewal of the Church and its evangelizing
mission depended, to a great extent, on the ministry of priests (see *Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis, proemio* and no 1; *Decree Optatam totius*, no. 2), could dedicate to them a document that was sufficiently broad, with all the required doctrinal explanations and pastoral and disciplinary norms, and with specific reference to the cultural and sociological circumstances of the contemporary world.

I recall that Don Alvaro immediately convoked, and put to work, the various subcommissions of members and “experts,” and the draft for the new schema was prepared in record time. The plenary commission, always under the direction of Msgr. Del Portillo, to whom the president, Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci, with serious health problems, had entrusted this task, examined the various parts of the new schema in the plenary gatherings (one could say that they were truly “interminable” sessions) on October 29, and November 5, 9, and 12, in 1964. The grace of the Holy Spirit, invoked with confidence at the beginning of each work session, enabled the draft for the decree *De ministerio et vita presbyterorum* to be prepared, printed, and distributed to the whole Conciliar assembly eight days later, on November 20, 1964, that is, on the eve of the conclusion of the Council’s third session. The secretary general of the Council was truly and happily surprised, and almost exclaimed: “a miracle.”

This text, later completed in some points with opportune additions, was discussed and approved by the assembly (*in aula*, “in the hall,” as was commonly said) during the fourth and final session of the Council, in October 1965. And it was voted on definitively with the following result: voting were 2394 Conciliar fathers; *placet*: 2390; *non placet*: 4. The Holy Father Paul VI, in a public session of the entire Council, solemnly promulgated the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis, de Presbyterorum ministerio et vita* on December 7, 1965.

These were days, weeks and months of very intense work, of great moral and psychological tension, fighting against time and stress. But Msgr. Del Portillo’s soul and face always reflected great serenity. He seemed to be telling us what was written on the base of a beautiful sun dial that I always liked to compare with Don Alvaro: *Horas non numero nisi serenas*. That is, I only register the serene hours, when the weather is serene, with the sun shining, and with peace in the soul.
I am sure that all of you, especially those who had the good fortune of knowing Don Alvaro and spending time with him, would like to hear the content of the letter that Cardinal Pietro Ciriaci wrote to him a week later, on December 14, 1965. I will only read a fragment:

“Most reverend and dear don Alvaro:

With the definitive approval on the past December 7, the great work of our commission, thanks be to God, has come to a happy end, guiding the decree, not the least among the Council’s decrees and constitutions, to a safe harbor.” After recalling with joy the “almost unanimous vote on the text,” the president of the commission added: “I know very well how much of this was due to your wise and tenacious work, which, without any lack of respect for the freedom of opinion of the others, was careful to follow a line of fidelity to what have been the major guiding principles of priestly spirituality. When informing the Holy Father I will not fail to mention all of this. Meanwhile I wanted to extend to you, with warm applause, my most sincere gratitude.”

I was not present when Don Alvaro read this letter. But since he would always direct any personal praise or gratitude to God, I am sure he must have remarked: thanks be given to God! Deo Gratias!

3. What is the image of the priest in the work of the Council?

Having reached this point, we need to ask: What were the “major guiding principles” that Cardinal Ciriaci mentions in his letter, and that assisted Don Alvaro, the Conciliar commission and all the Council fathers, in defining the theological identity and apostolic mission of priests? I would say that these principles involved, in first place, the dual commitment of being faithful to tradition and the deep renewal that inspired the whole of the Second Vatican Council.

By situating the ministry of priests and their triple function of teaching, sanctifying and governing at the heart of the Church’s salvific mission, the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis* views the priesthood from the original and profound point of view of the priest’s participation in the consecration and mission of Christ, Head and Shepherd. Thus a vision of the priesthood arises that is essentially sacramental and deeply dynamic, as Msgr. Del Portillo explained with exquisite clarity in 1966:
“Throughout the Conciliar debates on the decree on priests two positions emerged that, considered separately, might appear opposed and even contradictory. On the one hand, great importance was given to the aspect of evangelization, in announcing Christ’s message to all mankind; on the other, stress was given to the worship and adoration of God as the goal to which everything in the priest’s ministry and life should tend. An effort of synthesis was required, and the commission put all its efforts into harmonizing these two views, which were not in any way opposed or mutually exclusive. Rather these two facets are absolutely inseparable from one another, and mutually complement and highlight each other. The ministry in favor of men can only be understood as a service given to God, while the glory of God demands that the priest be zealous in striving to bring all mankind to praise Him... A dynamic view of the priestly ministry is thus offered. Announcing the Gospel engenders faith in those who still do not believe so that, by coming to form part of the People of God, they can unite their sacrifices to Christ’s sacrifice, forming a single Body with Him.”[2]

In this context, the priest is seen as a member of the People of God, chosen from among other men with a particular divine call (consecration) and sent (mission) to carry out specific functions in the service of the People of God and all humanity. A chosen man, a consecrated man, a man who has been sent. These are undoubtedly, in their unity and inseparability, the three fundamental characteristics of the image of the priest, as Don Alvaro highlights in his writings, especially in his book On the Priesthood (Escritos sobre el sacerdocio), which has been translated and published in almost all modern languages. We will briefly consider these three characteristics of Christ’s minister, also because today, fifty years after the Council, they are frequently emphasized by Pope Francis.

1) A man chosen and called

Chosen by whom? Chosen by the Christian community, as some want to claim? Chosen perhaps by himself, as if he had a absolute personal right to be a priest? It seems pointless and absurd to ask questions like these. Nevertheless, during the celebration of the Council, and still today, one finds ideological positions, opposed to the Church’s magisterium, that are defended with different arguments but that always undermine the true
nature of the priesthood. But the Conciliar teaching makes it very clear that
the vocation of the priest is absolutely inseparable from his consecration and
mission. The one who chooses him is also the one who consecrates and
sends him: that is to say, Christ himself, through the apostles and their
successors, the bishops.

This divine reality is explained very well in the decree *Presbyterorum
Ordinis*: “However, the Lord also appointed certain men as ministers, in
order that they might be united in one body in which ‘all the members do
not have the same function’ (*Rom* 12:4), These men were to hold in the
community of the faithful the sacred power of Order, that of offering
sacrifice and forgiving sins, and were to exercise the priestly office publicly
on behalf of men in the name of Christ.”[3]

In thus emphasizing the divine institution of the priesthood, the accent
was put on the priest’s divine vocation. A priest is not a “delegate of the
community” before God, nor is he a “functionary” or an “employee” of God
for the People. He is a man chosen by God from among men to carry out,
in Christ’s name, the mystery of salvation. The reality of the priest’s divine
vocation, as Don Alvaro liked to recall, is essential to counter certain
“democratic” conceptions, unfortunately present in some ecclesial spheres,
and also so that we priests do not ever forget the choice of love that Christ
has made of our lives. Pope Francis reminded us: “Called by God—I think
it is important to rekindle constantly an awareness of our divine vocation,
which we often take for granted in the midst of our many daily
responsibilities. As Jesus says, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you’ (*Jn*
15:16). This means returning to the source of our calling.”[4] “Becoming a
priest is not first of all our own choice, but rather it is our response to a call
and to a divine call.”[5]

2) A consecrated man

Since we have been chosen by God to carry out in an official way, in
Christ’s name, the priestly function, it is clear that priests are much more
than simply holders of a public and sacred office exercised for the benefit of
the community of the faithful. The priesthood, writes Msgr. Del Portillo,
“is, fundamentally and before anything else, a configuration, a sacramental
and mysterious transformation of the person of the man-priest into the
person of Christ himself, the only Mediator.”[6] I am sure that in all his
work as secretary of that commission, he always kept present the teaching on the priesthood of a holy priest who was still alive at that time, Msgr. Escrivá. In a homily in 1960 referring to the Eucharistic Sacrifice, the founder of Opus Dei said: “The Mass is, I insist, an action of God, of the Trinity. It is not a merely human event. The priest who celebrates fulfils the desire of our Lord, lending his body and his voice to the divine action. He acts, not in his own name, but in persona et in nomine Christi: in the Person of Christ and in his name.”[7]

In light of the deepening in doctrine that other Council documents provided regarding the episcopate and the common priesthood of the faithful, Presbyterorum Ordinis sought to stress the special sacramental consecration of priests, which makes them sharers in the priesthood of Christ, Head of the Church. Thus the document stresses the close tie of the priestly ministry with the fullness of the priesthood and the pastoral mission of the bishops, of whom they are co-workers, while also distinguishing them from the common priesthood of all the baptized. “Having sent the apostles just as he himself had been sent by the Father,” we read in section two of the decree, “Christ, through the apostles themselves, made their successors, the bishops, sharers in his consecration and mission. The office of their ministry has been handed down, in a lesser degree indeed, to the priests. Established in the order of the priesthood they can be co-workers of the episcopal order for the proper fulfillment of the apostolic mission entrusted to priests by Christ.”

Agere in persona Christi Capitis: through the reception of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest is made a sharer in the actions proper to Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church. The basis of this participation is the power received, while its goal is to make present here and now, through specific actions (ministerium verbi et sacramentorum), salvation as the life of the Church and, in the Church, of the world. We see in this formula the “sacramentality” of the specific actions of the ordained minister in respect to the life of the Church.

The priest, while “in the Church, is also placed in the forefront of it.”[8] As St. John Paul II stressed: “By his very nature and sacramental mission, the priest appears in the structure of the Church as a sign of the absolute priority and gratuitousness of the grace given to the Church by the risen
Christ. Through the ministerial priesthood the Church becomes aware in faith that her being comes not from herself but from the grace of Christ in the Holy Spirit. The apostles and their successors, inasmuch as they exercise an authority which comes to them from Christ, the Head and Shepherd, are placed—with their ministry—in the forefront of the Church as a visible continuation and sacramental sign of Christ in his own position before the Church and the world, as the enduring and ever new source of salvation.”[9] We priests and bishops are sacramental signs of Christ among men, and the more so the more we can sincerely say with St. Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal 2:20). Pope Francis told priests: “This living, this abiding in Christ marks all that we are and all that we do. It is precisely this ‘life in Christ’ that ensures our apostolate is effective... It is not creativity, however pastoral it may be, or meetings or planning that ensure our fruitfulness, even if these are greatly helpful. But what assures our fruitfulness is our being faithful to Jesus, who says insistently: ‘Abide in me and I in you’ (Jn 15:4).”[10]

3) A man who is sent

The priests of the New Covenant “are taken from among men and ordained for men in the things that belong to God.”[11] The priest is a man called and consecrated to be sent to all mankind in the service of the Church’s salvific work, as a shepherd and minister of God. Vatican II recalled and reaffirmed the dimension of worship and ritual in the priesthood, in accord with the tradition received from the Council of Trent. But it also sought to strongly emphasize its missionary dimension: not as two distinct aspects, but as two simultaneous facets of the same demand to evangelize.

The decree on which Don Alvaro worked so intensely spoke forcefully of the evangelizing presence of priests among men: “[They] live on earth with other men as brothers. The Lord Jesus, the Son of God, a Man sent by the Father to men, dwelt among us and willed to become like his brethren in all things except sin.”[12] The priest should always be present and active, as a minister of Christ, in the lives of other men.

Presbyterorum Ordinis also proclaims with great spiritual energy a teaching that I see as fundamental, in order to counteract the danger of “desacralizing” the image of the priest, or reducing his ministry to social or
philanthropic work. And it does so without any distancing of the priest from the world: “Priests of the New Testament, by their vocation and ordination, are in a certain sense set apart in the bosom of the People of God. However, they are not to be separated from the People of God or from any person; but they are to be totally dedicated to the work for which the Lord has chosen them. They cannot be ministers of Christ unless they be witnesses and dispensers of a life other than earthly life. But they cannot be of service to men if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men. Their ministry itself, by a special title, forbids that they be conformed to this world; yet at the same time it requires that they live in this world among men.”[13]

The presence of the secular priest in the world is always marked by this tension, inherent to the nature of his mission. “Because such a mission,” Msgr. Del Portillo wrote in his book on the priesthood, “can only be carried out if the priest—consecrated by the Spirit—can be among men (pro hominibus constitutus) and at the same time separated from them (ex hominibus assumptus): see Heb. 5:1. By living alongside other men, by coming to understand their problems, he will appreciate their values. But at the same time he will also, in the name of something else, give witness to and teach other values, other horizons of the soul, another hope.”[14]

Thus priests will also be able to resolve a problem that at times is exaggerated or misrepresented—today as in the time of the Council—on the sociological plane. I refer to their valid insertion into the social life of the civil community, into the ordinary life of other men and women. In fact, today more than ever, the laity—the intellectual, the laborer, the white collar worker—want to see in the priest a friend, a man who interacts simply and cordially with other people (a man, one might say, within arms reach), who understands and esteems noble human realities. But at the same time, they want to see in him a witness to future realities, to the sacred, to eternal life; in other words, a man capable of perceiving and of teaching, with fraternal concern, the supernatural dimension in their life, its divine destiny, the true answer to their thirst for happiness. In a word, they want to see a man of God.[15] A man able to open his heart to God’s tenderness, as Pope Francis said: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are
set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”[16]

4. The priest “called to holiness”

Permit me a final consideration about a truth we see constantly appearing in Don Alvaro’s interventions. The three essential features of the image of the priest that we saw above (his divine vocation, sacramental consecration, and evangelizing mission) are fully understood and harmonized only when seen in the light of a deep ascetical demand: personal sanctity, through the specific spirituality of a secular priest. Msgr. Del Portillo oversaw the work of the third chapter of the decree on the holiness of priests with great personal commitment and sacrifice, and with a deep love for the priesthood learned directly from St. Josemaría Escrivá.

On more than a few days Don Alvaro’s work day, and that of his closest co-workers on the commission, ended after midnight. At those late hours, with all the offices of the Holy See’s dicasteries closed, they had to meet in one of the residences of the Conciliar Fathers and “experts” (San Tommaso di Villanova, on viale Romania). There the would finish preparing the drafts of the texts for the decree, and also the responsiones ad modos (the answers of the commission to the corrections suggested by the Fathers), which had to be presented the morning after the plenary Commission and sent that same day to the Tipografía Vaticana for printing. I remember very well the great esteem and especially the cordial affection that, despite the relentless rhythm of their work, all of his closest co-workers showed towards Msgr. Del Portillo.

The entire work of the Council was aimed at fostering a renewal in the Church, enabling it to carry out a more effective evangelization of the world. So it is no surprise that these pages dedicated to priestly holiness strongly reflect that same commitment and spirit: “This holy council, to fulfill its pastoral desires of an internal renewal of the Church, of the spread of the Gospel in every land and of a dialogue with the world of today, strongly urges all priests that they strive always for that growth in holiness by which they will become consistently better instruments in the service of the whole People of God.”[17] And as the decree also emphasizes, this growth in holiness is to be attained through the exercise of the priest’s
proper ministerial functions, which not only require this commitment to strive for perfection, but which foster and further it.\[18\]

By carrying out his proper ministry, following the example of Christ, whose food was to do the will of the Father, the priest attains unity of life (an expression particularly loved by Don Alvaro because it appears so often in the teachings of St. Josemaría Escrivá). That is, a priest attains union and harmony between his interior life and the obligations, often quite varied and dispersed, that stem from his proper pastoral mission. One of the most significant elements in the decree’s ascetical teaching is the reference to priests’ unity of life, attained above all by “joining themselves with Christ to acknowledge the will of the Father. For them this means a complete gift of themselves to the flock committed to them.”\[19\]

Moreover, a priest will not be truly able to manifest Christ’s pastoral charity if he is not a man of the Eucharist and of prayer, if he is not an essentially Eucharistic and contemplative soul. As Presbyterorum Ordinis says: “This pastoral charity flows out in a very special way from the Eucharistic sacrifice. This stands as the root and center of the whole life of a priest. What takes place on the altar of sacrifice, the priestly heart must make his own. This cannot be done unless priests through prayer continue to penetrate more deeply into the mystery of Christ.”\[20\] With his attractive simplicity, Pope Francis has also spoken about this mystical reality: “We are good priests if we go to Jesus Christ, if we seek the Lord in prayer, even though we are sinners... If instead we distance ourselves from Jesus Christ, we have to compensate for this with other worldly attitudes, idolatries, and we make ourselves devotees of the god Narcissus... The priest who adores Jesus Christ, the priest who speaks of Jesus Christ, the priest who seeks Jesus Christ and allows himself to be sought by Jesus Christ. This is the center of our lives. If we do not have this, we lose everything! And then what shall we give to the people?”\[21\]

5. Facing the New Evangelization

We have looked at the decree Presbyterorum Ordinis, seeking in its pages the image of the priest that the Second Vatican Council left us and that Don Alvaro made known both in his writings and, above all, by the example of his own priestly life and work. Now we can formulate a question that Msgr. Del Portillo sometimes asked himself (I well remember some of
his conversations) towards the end of his life, almost on the threshold of the third millennium. These doctrinal and disciplinary parameters, this identity of the Catholic priest, how does it fit into the great challenges that the circumstances of today’s world present to the Church, and especially to Christ’s ministers?

From the Second Vatican Council to today the Church has undergone fifty years of life and suffering, years of theological reflection that was not always balanced and calm, years of pastoral renewal that was not always exempt from difficulties. And nevertheless the teaching found in the decree on the ministry and life of priests is not only still relevant, but it has steadily taken root with a growing vigor. I think the explanation for this is that the Second Vatican Council arose in the Church with a call for renewal and evangelization. And at a distance of half a century, the growing signs of the positive influence of its spiritual and pastoral teachings are easily discernible.

The Conciliar spirit of renewal during these years, under the providential guidance of great popes who have succeeded to the chair of Peter, has imbued liturgical life, canonical norms, catechetical teaching with new life. The Church has truly renewed its teaching, its legislation and its life in accord with Vatican II, and is now in a position to carry out its mission as the times demand. Moreover, it has been committed for years, under the vigorous impulse of St. John Paul II, of Benedict XVI, and now of Pope Francis, to the new evangelization, which “demands priests who are deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ and capable of embodying a new style of pastoral life.”[22] A new style that must always entail fidelity to their vocation, consecration and mission, that is to say, to the contents of the decree Presbyterorum Ordinis.

And the new evangelization, which should show with vigor the centrality of Christ in the cosmos and in history, not only has an ascending dimension—Christ as the fulfillment of all of the yearnings of mankind—but, and above all, a descending mediation: “In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also seeks him out. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man.”[23] These are words of St. John Paul II that Pope Francis also likes to repeat.

Christ, the sole Mediator, is present in the priest so that the whole
Church, the priestly People of God, can give the Father the spiritual worship that all the baptized are called upon to offer. How could there be an offering acceptable to the Father if what the faithful offer—their work, their joys and difficulties in family and social life, their life itself—were not offered in the Holy Mass, in union with the Body and Blood of his Son, the only propitiatory victim.

Christ, the One and Eternal Priest, is present in the mystery of the priest, to remind everyone that his passion, death, and resurrection are not an event relegated to the past, to Palestine 2000 years ago, but rather always bear salvific value, made continually operative through the miracle of love in the Eucharist, the center and root of the Church’s life.

Christ, by his divinity the only-begotten of the Father and by his humanity the first-born of all creatures, is present in the priest to announce to the world his Word with authority, to educate everyone in the faith, and to form through the sacraments the new humanity, the Mystical Body of our Lord, awaiting in hope his coming at the end of history.

Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, is present in the priest, to teach mankind that the soul’s reconciliation with God cannot ordinarily be a monologue; that man the sinner, in order to be forgiven, needs a man-priest, a minister and sign in the Sacrament of Penance of the radical need that fallen humanity has of a Man–God, the only Just and Justifying One.

In a word, Christ is present in the priest to proclaim and give witness to the world that he is the Prince of peace, the Light of souls, the Love that forgives and reconciles, the Food of eternal life, the Only Truth, the Alfa and Omega of the universe. And therefore that no truly human reality, no human process of perfection and growth, can be conceived of outside the new creation brought about by his incarnation and sacrifice.

Here is where all priests find our raison d’être, the “credentials for our identity,” which we have to present to mankind with greater courage and clarity the more shameless the pressures of religious agnosticism and moral permissiveness become. St. John Paul II said: “The Church of the new Advent, the Church that is continually preparing for the new coming of the Lord, must be the Church of the Eucharist and of Penance. Only when
viewed in this spiritual aspect of her life and activity is she seen to be the Church of the divine mission, the Church in statu missionis.”[24] This Church, in a permanent state of mission, of evangelization, is the same one that saves and provides mankind with true happiness.

As Pope Francis wrote: “The great danger in today’s world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience.”[25] Facing this reality, Christ’s salvific will (a task that falls to the Church, and in first place to the sacred ministers) is to offer human hearts the joy the world cannot give or take away: “The joy of the gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness, and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew.”[26]

6. Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo after Vatican II

The promulgation of the decree on the life and ministry of priests practically coincided with the end of the Second Vatican Council and, consequently, of Msgr. Del Portillo’s work in the Council. But his influence at the Council was kept alive in the following years and is still present among those of us who work in the University. We can recall here the following solemn statement of Vatican II: “This sacred synod is fully aware that the desired renewal of the whole Church depends to a great extent on the ministry of its priests. It proclaims the extreme importance of priestly training.”[27]

I think that Pope Paul VI, promulgator of the Council decrees and well-acquainted with Msgr. Del Portillo, rejoiced in Heaven on seeing the great care with which Don Alvaro took up this desire of the Council, already present in the mind and prayer of St. Josemaría. On January 9, 1985, under the impetus of the then prelate of Opus Dei, Msgr. Del Portillo, the Centro Superior de Estudios Ecclesiasticos (Center for Advanced Ecclesiastical Studies) was erected, in which we now find ourselves. Since then thousands of priests from all over the world have been formed in this Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, in close communion with the successor of the Apostle Peter, at the service of the renewed proclamation of the Gospel proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council.
Allow me to conclude with another brief personal memory of Msgr. Del Portillo. Our Lord, in his infinite goodness, arranged that this exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and most faithful son of the founder of Opus Dei, was able to celebrate the last Mass of his life in Jerusalem, in the Cenacle, in the same holy place where Jesus had instituted the Eucharist and the Priesthood at the Last Supper. It was March 22 in 1994. A few hours later, on returning to Rome, with his always kindly smile, he surrendered his soul to God in the early morning the next day, March 23. St. John Paul II who went to pray in front of his body was quite moved when he learned of those very special circumstances of Don Alvaro’s last Mass and dies natalis. Our Lord wanted to crown his life, so often marked by the Cross, with this well merited caress!


[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.


[18] See Ibid.

[19] Ibid. no. 14.

[20] Ibid.


