

## **(Letter from the Prelate: February 2014)**

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

With the announcement that the beatification of our beloved Don Alvaro will take place on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, we have begun the “countdown” for this event. It is a gift from God that will spiritually enrich the Church, the Work and each one of us. As we raise our thanksgiving to heaven, may each of us strive to follow with greater daily fidelity the call to sanctity proclaimed by Jesus. For us this is the path of sanctification in daily life that St. Josemaría opened up with his heroic correspondence to God’s grace and that Don Alvaro and many other faithful of the Prelature have traveled in full harmony with his teachings.

By declaring that Don Alvaro practiced the Christian virtues in a heroic degree, the Church attests that he “lived the spirit of Opus Dei wholeheartedly, in an exemplary way . . . Opus Dei calls Christians to seek the fullness of the love of God and neighbor through the sanctification of the ordinary tasks that make up their day.”<sup>1</sup> With the upcoming centennial of his birth on March 11, I suggest that we consider carefully the example of this *good and faithful servant*,<sup>2</sup> to whom our Lord entrusted the government of the Prelature of Opus Dei after St. Josemaría went to heaven. Let us do so with the desire to get to know better his correspondence to the Christian vocation, and to reproduce it in our own daily lives. Let us meditate on his writings, learn from his response to grace, and seek his intercession, so that we incarnate the spirit of the Work without any gaps.

For the faithful of Opus Dei, for its Cooperators, and for all those who desire to strive to become holy through this spirit, Don Alvaro’s consistent behavior shows us a very specific way to follow Christ, the only Teacher and Model of all perfection. And as he would sometimes say with his characteristic good humor, we need to do so “through the proper channel,” that is, by living as well as possible the same spirit of walking with Christ that, by God’s will, St. Josemaría passed on to us.

During this month, besides the feast of Jesus’ Presentation in the temple and the Purification of our Lady, we will celebrate that of February 14<sup>th</sup>, which highlights in a special way the unity of Opus Dei. On this day, as we know, we commemorate the anniversary of the beginning of the Work’s activities with women in 1930 and the founding of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in 1943. By the Holy See’s decree, in the Prelature we celebrate this day as a feast of our Lady, *Mater Pulchrae Dilectionis*, Mother of Fair Love.<sup>3</sup>

In 1972, in the record for the consecration of an altar, St. Josemaría wrote that he was consecrating the altar “in honor and praise of our Lord Jesus Christ, who wished to crown his Work with the holy sign of the Cross. Our Lord did this in one of the Centers of my daughters on the anniversary of their founding. I saw in this a new divine command of unity for our Family, being aware that the priests had to be ordained to serve both Sections of the Work.”<sup>4</sup>

1 Congregation for the Causes of Saints, *Decree on the Virtues of the Servant of God, Alvaro del Portillo*, Rome, June 28, 2012.

2 Mt 25:21.

3 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Decree Approving the Proper Calendar of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei*, Rome, November 10, 2012.

4 St. Josemaría, Written record of the consecration of an altar, October 21, 1972.

In our Mother Mary we see the perfect example of a creature who identified herself completely with God's will at every moment. We see this especially when she received the announcement that she would be the Mother of God, and also in her perseverance, filled with strength, faith, hope and charity, next to the Cross where her Son died for our salvation. The Holy Father writes: "To speak of faith often involves speaking of painful testing; yet it is precisely in such testing that Paul sees the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel, for it is in weakness and suffering that we discover God's power which triumphs over our weakness and suffering."<sup>5</sup>

St. Josemaría invited us to consider "to what extent we are friends of Christ's Cross, of this Cross with which Jesus wished to crown his Work . . . He wanted to crown it as some kings do the top of their palace: with the Cross. He wanted to place the sign of his kingship there so that the whole world would see that the Work was the Work of God. It was on a 14th of February. I began the Mass without knowing anything, like other times, and I finished knowing that our Lord wanted the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, that he wanted us to crown our supernatural edifice and that our spiritual family would bear on high this sign of the divine kingship."<sup>6</sup>

Don Alvaro behaved like this from the day he asked to be admitted to Opus Dei. As the years went by, with his refined fidelity to grace and his close union with our Founder, he grew day by day in his love for the Holy Wood. After he departed for his home in heaven, we have been learning many details about his life that show his love for sacrifice, which unites us to Christ's Cross. We see this especially after his arrival in Rome in 1946, and then later when, for many years (and among many other responsibilities), the task of obtaining money for building the central houses of Opus Dei fell on his shoulders. This effort gave rise to serious problems which, while never robbing him of his peace, caused him constant sufferings: illnesses of the liver, strong headaches, and other sicknesses that seriously affected his health. He faced these situations without complaining, with a smile on his lips, happy to be able to offer them to our Lord for the Church and for the growth of the Work.

I remember once when he was in bed with a high fever but had no choice but to get up and go out to resolve an urgent economic situation that only he personally could resolve. One of the women who worked in the domestic care of the central house of the Work knew that Don Alvaro had had a fever the previous day. Although she didn't know if he still had it, when she heard that he had gone out she said to St. Josemaría, "Yesterday he had a very high fever." Our Founder replied with fatherly affection: "If it had been you, I would not have let you go out; but him, yes." This was the extent to which he knew he could rely on this son of his whom, many years earlier, he had called *saxum*, rock.

And what was the deep reason for his acting in this way? In the decree on his heroic virtues we read that "the Servant of God based his dedication to the mission he received on a deep sense of divine sonship. This led him to seek to identify himself with Christ in a trusting self-abandonment to the will of the Father and love for the Holy Spirit. He sought to be constantly immersed in prayer, strengthened by the Eucharist and by a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary."<sup>7</sup> This document of the Holy See goes on to say that Don Alvaro "displayed heroism in facing illness, in which he saw the Cross of Christ . . . and in the mistreatment received on

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5 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei*, June 29, 2013, no. 56.

6 St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, November 2, 1958.

7 Congregation for the Causes of Saints, *Decree on the Virtues of the Servant of God, Alvaro del Portillo*, Rome, June 28, 2012.

account of his fidelity to the Church. He was a man of profound goodness and affability, sowing peace and serenity to those around him. No one can recall a discourteous gesture, signs of impatience, or words of reproach or protest in response to the difficulties he encountered. Rather, he learned from God to forgive, to pray for one's persecutors and to open his priestly arms welcoming one and all with a smile and with great mercy."<sup>8</sup>

A few weeks ago Pope Francis said that "the saints are not supermen, nor were they born perfect. They are like us, like each one of us. They are people who, before reaching the glory of heaven, lived normal lives with joys and sorrows, struggles and hopes. What changed their lives? When they recognized God's love, they followed it with all their heart without reserve or hypocrisy. They spent their lives serving others; they endured suffering and adversity without hatred and responded to evil with good, spreading joy and peace. This is the life of a saint. Saints are people who for love of God did not put conditions on him in their life."<sup>9</sup>

These words of the Holy Father, it seems to me, paint a portrait of Don Alvaro. Let us have recourse, I insist, to his intercession, so that we too can be strong in the face of difficulties and setbacks and place our confidence in God our Father.

Besides being *saxum*, a support for St. Josemaría on so many occasions, Don Alvaro was also, with his way of acting, a firm foundation for bringing forward the Work. And this was not only by his help in governing Opus Dei or his work to obtain the suitable juridical configuration for the Work as a personal prelature, but also by his efforts to facilitate the fidelity of everyone to the spirit of the Work in all the different circumstances. Our Father often said that Don Alvaro, moved by the Holy Spirit, would frequently remind him of some point of the spirit of Opus Dei that St. Josemaría wanted to bring up in a conversation: the practice of fraternal correction, the need to behave like a father or mother with the people around us, the kind and serene reception for those experiencing suffering or worries. . . .

St. Josemaría would even sometimes ask him for a suggestion to help him deepen his own personal piety with God. As he explained one day when opening his heart to a small group of his sons: "Today, after the thanksgiving after Mass, I asked Don Alvaro to give me a suggestion on how I could grow in my piety and in my love for our Lord in the tabernacle. He reminded me that our Lady is also somehow necessarily there. And along with Mary, Joseph. In an ineffable way, but they are there; they cannot be separated from their Son."<sup>10</sup>

February 19<sup>th</sup> is the "name day" of Don Alvaro. I recall a remark made by our Father on this date back in 1974 about this most faithful son of his: "Alvaro is quite lucky: he doesn't have a saint but only a blessed. So if he doesn't become a saint, I don't know how we are going to fix this."<sup>11</sup> This desire of St. Josemaría is on the point of being fulfilled. God willing, after the beatification we will be able to celebrate his feast on the date that the Holy See sets for its liturgical commemoration.

Once again I insist that considering Don Alvaro's daily response can help us, even more in the upcoming months, to follow in St. Josemaría's footsteps; and thus we will imitate Christ more perfectly. I cite here some words of my predecessor that will help us to make a deep and peaceful personal examination.

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8 *Ibid.*

9 Pope Francis, *Discourse during the Angelus*, November 1, 2013.

10 St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, June 3, 1974.

11 St. Josemaría, Notes from a family gathering, February 19, 1974.

“Throughout all the years of his earthly life, our Father went forward impelled, as it were, by the Holy Spirit, both in the early times when he was not yet able to recognize it and later when he was fully aware of it and responded in a heroic way to the Holy Spirit’s action . . . He used to say that after the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1928 the only thing he had to do was to let himself be carried along. It is easy to say this, but if we look at his life calmly, we see that ‘letting himself be carried along,’ this ‘only thing’ he had to do, required of him countless sacrifices, ridicule, misunderstandings, loneliness, calumnies, both before and after founding the Work.

“Let us too resolve to let ourselves be led in this way by God (cf. *Rom* 8:14). Our Father’s response was heroic at every moment, even though his words above try to mask this reality. Let us strive to imitate him, if not like giants, at least like good daughters and sons. Our Father was a giant of sanctity, and we, children who are trying to follow in the footsteps of such a good father, also have to be saints.”<sup>12</sup>

Let us continue praying for the Pope, for his intentions and for his close co-workers. In a special way let us pray for the success of the Consistory that will be celebrated in the second half of this month, so that it may produce great good for the Church, for the world, for souls. And continue being closely united to my intentions, which are many, so that they become a reality as God wishes. I feel an urgent need to ask you: How, and how much, are you praying for Pope Francis? How are you helping him with a generous spirit of sacrifice? Are you frequently making a reality in your life those words *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*, all with Peter to Jesus through Mary?

Pray for the expansion of the Work to new countries, where we are constantly being asked to go. During the trip to Jerusalem I had the joy of praying accompanied by all of you in the Holy Sepulcher, in Gethsemane, in the Basilica of the Nativity. I recalled Don Alvaro’s deep joy when he visited those sites. A few days later I was in Sri Lanka and in India. In the latter country, where we have already been working for some time, I saw how the apostolic activities of the Work are taking root. In Sri Lanka, where we began a short time ago, the first fruits can already be seen. Let us give a lot of thanks to God and renew our resolution to take part in the apostolic expansion, each one from his or her own place, with our prayer and work turned into prayer, loving all souls, all of mankind. What a marvelous mission our holy Mother, the Church, has!

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, February 1, 2014

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<sup>12</sup> Don Alvaro, Notes from a meditation, January 9, 1977.