

NOVENA FOR SERENITY

to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo

to obtain peace of heart



Abbreviations used in the novena:

DV – Decree on the Virtues: Congregation for the Causes of Saints, “Decree on the Virtues of the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo y Diez de Sollano, Titular Bishop of Vita, Prelate of the Personal Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei,” Rome, 28 June 2012.

JM – Javier Medina Bayo, *Alvaro del Portillo: un hombre fiel*, Madrid, Rialp, 2012.

SB – Salvador Bernal, *Alvaro del Portillo*, Four Courts Press, 1999.

PL – Pastoral letter from Alvaro del Portillo (the main source of quotations from Blessed Alvaro’s pastoral letters is José Antonio Loarte, *Like Salt and Like Light*, Scepter, 2014).

CR – Paper given by Mgr Fernando Ocariz, now Prelate of Opus Dei, at a conference in Rome, 12-14 March 2014, to mark the centenary of Blessed Alvaro’s birth.

Author: Francisco Faus
With ecclesiastical approval

NOVENA · FIRST DAY

The peace of the children of God

Meditation

Blessed Alvaro “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 trusting self-abandonment to the will of the Father” (DV).

“The knowledge that we are God’s beloved children will be a powerful motivation for us. And as an inseparable accompaniment of this most precious gift, comes the *gaudium cum pace* into the soul, that peace and joy so proper to the children of God” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 May 1988).

Blessed Alvaro “had the joy of one who lives in the Lord and with the Lord; and a serenity that no tiredness could trouble, no suffering suppress (...). [He was] a priest who knew how to inspire in souls, together with the joy of discovering that they were children of God, a decision to be converted” (Bishop Javier Echevarría, JM, pp. 693-4).

Prayer

Grant me, Lord, through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro, the grace to understand ever more clearly, that by Baptism all of us have become *beloved children of God* (cf. *Eph* 5:1), that each one of us is loved by our Father God: a Father who sees us, hears us, calls us by our name, looks after us and helps us in all our needs (cf. *Mt* 6:25 ff.).

Grant that, in following the teachings of St Josemaría Escrivá, the founder of Opus Dei, as Blessed Alvaro did, I may be convinced that “God is close beside us all the time. (...) And he is here like a loving Father – he loves each one of us more than all the mothers in the world can love their children – helping us, inspiring us, blessing... and forgiving” (*The Way*, no. 267).

Help me to find my rest in God my Father, trusting in him totally, full of faith in his divine Providence, so that, come what may, I may at all times find in him the serenity, peace and joy of those who are children of God.

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

O God, merciful Father, you granted your bishop Blessed Alvaro the grace of being, with our Lady’s help, an exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and a most faithful son and successor of Saint Josemaría, the Founder of Opus Dei. Grant that I also may respond faithfully to the demands of the Christian vocation, turning all the circumstances and events of my life into opportunities to love you and serve the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Deign to grant the canonization of Blessed Alvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favour I request... (here make your petition). Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

NOVENA · SECOND DAY

Peace through prayer

Meditation

Filled with “love by the Holy Spirit, constantly immersed in prayer, strengthened by the Eucharist and by a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary”, Blessed Alvaro could say that “everything is good, because our God is good. Therefore we can always be joyful!” (DV and JM, p. 202).

Blessed Alvaro brought to those about him “confidence, security, peace. This came about not just because of his human qualities, but rather as result of his deep interior life and supernatural outlook” (Prof. Francisco Ponz, JM, pp. 196-7).

His “human gifts of kindness, friendliness, serenity, inward and outward peacefulness, were a tangible proof of the richness of his spiritual life” (Card. William Baum, quoted CR).

Prayer

Grant me, Lord, through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro, the grace to be “a soul of prayer,” who can trustingly talk with God about all things, at all times.

May I, especially in the more difficult moments of my life, go to the Tabernacle, where Jesus is really present, and abandon all my concerns in his most lovable Heart; and also in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as Blessed Alvaro used to do, convinced that she – especially when we say the Holy Rosary devoutly – will always fill our soul with peace.

Help me, O Lord, to follow St Paul’s advice: *Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7).*

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

NOVENA · THIRD DAY

Humility, source of peace

Meditation

St. Josemaría Escrivá, “although he was a saint, constantly begged everyone to pray for him. I need your prayers even more. I need them more than our Founder did, because I am a poor man and it has fallen to me to follow a saint” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 30 September 1975).

Humility “is expressed in a deep and heartfelt conviction that we are not better than others and, at the same time, in the complete confidence that we have been picked out by God both to serve him in the midst of the circumstances of each moment and to bring many souls to him. This assurance fills us with optimism” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 August 1989).

“Don’t forget that joy and cheerfulness are a consequence of inner peace, which in turn comes from the struggle waged against oneself; and that, in this personal battle, true peace is inseparable from compunction, from humble and sincere sorrow for our faults and sins which God forgives in the holy Sacrament of Penance” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 16 January 1984).

Prayer

Lord, may I always bear in mind the words of Jesus: *Learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls (Mt 11:29)*.

Grant me the sincerity of recognising that many of my worries and anxieties are due to my self-love, to my excessive concern about what others think of me, to my sadness at having given a bad impression, to my thinking that I am not appreciated, to seeing that I am not the centre of the attention of others...; in a word, to my pride.

Grant me, my God, the grace to be humble, for, without humility “there can be no charity or any other virtue, nor, therefore, can there be any real Christian life” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 August 1989). May I learn to think less about myself, my importance, my success, my own interests, and may I be more concerned about others, happy to be able to help them and serve them.

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

Serenity in illness and suffering

Meditation

Following a difficult and painful operation, Blessed Alvaro “was constantly calm and smiling. (...) He was in a lot of discomfort, but did not complain about anything. He was an example to the doctors and staff attending him” (Msgr. Joaquín Alonso, JM p. 377, note 82).

“It is clear that Don Alvaro’s whole life, in which there was so much suffering, pain, toil, illness, humiliation, and so on, could only be lived with that peace, serenity, good humour and joy, thanks to God’s grace, which led him to unite his life to the redeeming sacrifice of Jesus Christ” (Msgr. Iñaki Celaya, CR).

His heart rhythms were irregular and in May 1979 he suffered his first crisis of atrial fibrillation. “In spite of everything, Don Alvaro continued devoting himself fully to his tasks, even when in great pain or suffering other discomforts” (Bishop Javier Echevarría, JM, p. 606).

Prayer

Grant me, my God, the grace to imitate Blessed Alvaro, in the serene and confident way with which he accepted illness, ailments, tiredness, pain and death itself.

Lord, if you allow me to undergo the sorrow of the death of someone I hold dear, or the suffering of a family crisis, or the anxiety of unemployment..., stretch out your loving hand and bestow on me that confidence of a child which, as St Josemaría said, stems from faith in Providence and from a calm and joyful abandonment in your most Holy Will.

Grant that, following Blessed Alvaro’s example, I may learn to embrace the Cross, lovingly united to the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and endeavour to follow the advice of St Peter: *Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you* (1 Pet 5:7).

Help me to understand the truth of these words of Blessed Alvaro: “If all of us ponder, love, embrace the Will of God, we will savour the incomparable feeling of being with the Trinity, even in the most difficult moments” (Blessed Alvaro, Homily, 14 February 1992).

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

Serenity when faced with trials

Meditation

Blessed Alvaro “displayed heroism (...) when he was imprisoned during the period of religious persecution in Spain (1936–1939), and in the attacks he suffered on account of his faithfulness to the Church” (DV).

“Only with the logic of the Holy Cross, where sorrow becomes a medicine and death turns into new Life, can we glimpse the explanation and the deep meaning (...) of what remains inexplicable to human eyes” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 29 September 1978).

Referring to some people who were spreading false stories, seeking to do harm to the Work of God, Blessed Alvaro wrote: “Pray for them, renew your acts of atonement to the Lord for the offences which they commit, and let us not lose our peace even for a moment. Let us act like this every day, aiming to drown evil in an abundance of good, spreading the truth untiringly” (Blessed Alvaro, SB).

Prayer

I ask you, Lord, for that strength and peace which Blessed Alvaro – with the help of your grace – always showed in the face of persecution, campaigns of slander and malicious intent that arose because of his faithfulness to the Church and to Opus Dei, that portion of the People of God entrusted to his care.

If I find it difficult to bear injustice, misunderstanding or disconcerting trials patiently, help me to follow Blessed Alvaro’s advice to people going through such difficult moments: “God permits contradictions both for our own purification and also so that we may taste the sweet weight of the Holy Cross (...). Sow the peace and the love of Christ untiringly in so many hearts which are waiting for a voice to move them” (JM, p. 575, note 60).

Help me understand why “the saints appear so full of peace, even in the midst of pain, dishonour, poverty or persecution? The answer,” Blessed Alvaro said, “is clear: because they try to identify themselves with the Will of our heavenly Father, imitating Christ” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 May 1987).

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

The peace that comes from fidelity

Meditation

“A faithful man will abound with blessings (*Prov* 28:20). These words of Sacred Scripture highlight 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” (DV). “He was always a most faithful son to the Successor of Peter, adhering without quibble to him and to his teaching” (DV).

“I am convinced that Don Alvaro has served the Church constantly, precisely because he followed the Founder of Opus Dei as a most faithful son. I think that this expression, which is found in the prayer for private devotion, constitutes the most apt and precise portrait of his character” (Bishop Javier Echevarría, JM, p. 694).

Prayer

Lord, grant me the grace to imitate Blessed Alvaro, who, from the moment he understood what the Will of God was, what God was asking of him, answered “yes”, and was faithful to death.

Help me to imitate him in the virtue of faithfulness, which he so loved and practised, joyfully and generously, inspired by the faithfulness of St Josemaría. Blessed Alvaro explained this virtue of the Founder in this way: “His faithfulness was not a burden but a happiness renewed each day, a longing to respond to Love with love” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 March 1987).

Make my life, Lord, a generous and serene “Yes” – heroic, if necessary – to everything you ask of me: a “yes” to you, a “yes” to my Christian vocation, a “yes” to my family duties, to the commitments I have undertaken – especially those I have formally undertaken for your sake – to my spiritual resolutions, to my given word...

I ask you, finally, for the grace to meet death calmly, with the hope of hearing at that hour the words of Jesus: *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master* (*Mt* 25:21).

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

NOVENA · SEVENTH DAY

Peace, patience, and meekness

Meditation

“No one recalls any discourteous gesture on his part, any sign of impatience in the face of adversity, or any word of reproach or protest on account of difficulties” (DV).

“Don Alvaro is a precious help for me: he has helped me solve all my difficulties and, if ever I cannot explain what’s been happening to me, he guesses it and understands me” (Vladimir Vince, 1946, JM, p. 281).

“He really was a father, as they call him in Opus Dei. One felt like wanting to go to confession to him, rather than asking him questions” (Vittorio Messori, writer, JM, p. 685).

“Be patient [with others], just as our Lord is patient with each of us. Help those people you are dealing with to make a fresh start, again and again. Always receive them affectionately: let them be able to come to you in order to recover their enthusiasm after a defeat, because they feel understood, encouraged, loved!” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 2 October 1986).

Prayer

Grant me, O Lord, the friendliness, understanding and patience that Blessed Alvaro always had and which was so much appreciated by all who knew him, filling their hearts with peace.

Grant me the grace to keep calm and help me to overcome anger if somebody has upset me, contradicts me or does me harm; and the grace to be patient when things I have put a lot of effort into are slow in producing results or do not work out as I wanted.

I very much want, with your help, to avoid being rough or rude or reacting impatiently or protesting. Help me not to speak hard words about others and not to complain bitterly about anything.

Teach me to practise, as Blessed Alvaro did, the art of “knowing how to wait,” that he learnt so well from St. Josemaría. Before speaking, correcting or pointing things out to others, may I let a reasonable amount of time to pass and only take action after having prayed about the matter and reflected on it calmly.

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

The peace of a forgiving heart

Meditation

Blessed Alvaro “learned from the Lord to forgive, to pray for one’s persecutors, to open his arms in a priestly manner so as to welcome everyone with a smile and with Christian understanding” (DV).

“In these almost forty years I have seen Mgr del Portillo face trials that would have made anyone else collapse: our Lord often allowed Opus Dei to be the target of calumnies, unjust suspicions and, at times, vile and base manoeuvres. He had learnt from St Josemaría to forgive, to cover over injustice with charity. He would embrace the Cross, forgive, say nothing and keep on serving and working” (Card Giovanni Cheli, JM, p. 687).

Blessed Alvaro “asked the people of the Work [during a bitter campaign of slander in some countries in Europe] to forgive and understand; and he sought to console them, good humouredly, with a saying: “Wasps don’t usually go for the worst fruits.” He showed this same attitude in connection with the difficulties I was going through” (Bishop Joannes Gijzen, JM, p. 578).

Prayer

Lord, grant me the grace to imitate you in the grandeur of forgiveness: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk 23:34)*. May I be understanding, forgiving, may I overlook words or attitudes in others that are uncivil, unjust or offensive. May I, in those difficult moments, follow the advice of St Josemaría that Blessed Alvaro practised wonderfully well: “Pray, say nothing, work, forgive, smile.”

My God, free me from bitterness and rancour: from being moved by resentment in my thoughts, speech or actions. And, if ever I find myself harbouring in my heart resentful feelings, help me to make a good Confession so as to obtain through that Sacrament of Mercy the peace and forgiveness of God.

Help me to savour the happiness which Blessed Alvaro described in the following words: “Few joys can compare with that which comes after a good Confession, a feeling like that of the prodigal son: the embrace of our Father God forgiving us!” (Blessed Alvaro, Homily, 12 April 1984).

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

Transmitting peace to others

Meditation

“One of the fundamental characteristics [of Don Alvaro del Portillo] was to be a man of peace and a bearer of peace. It was a real example to see how, faced with any setback or affliction, any news of a more or less painful kind, the sort of thing that normally would make one give in to anger, he always reacted in a supernatural way, placing all that had happened in God’s hands” (Msgr. Tomás Gutiérrez, CR).

“One of the most striking things about Msgr. del Portillo’s manner of being was his serenity, his inner peace. He had peace and he gave peace” (Fr. Joseph Soria, CR).

“If you are understanding, optimistic and constant; and if you carry on sowing peace and joy around you, you may be sure that you will end up conquering the difficulties that confront you (...) and you will place Christ high up at the summit of all human activities” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 2 October 1986).

Prayer

My God, following the example of Blessed Alvaro, make me want for everyone “that peace which comes from God, and which Christ brought us, a peace which the world cannot give. A peace which comes from being united to God in all our thoughts, words and deeds” (Blessed Alvaro, PL, 1 October 1989).

May I never forget that, as Blessed Alvaro used to say, “Peace is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our souls. We will have peace and we will be able to spread it around us if we address ourselves to the Paraclete, and if we are ready to fulfil everything he asks of us” (*Ibid*).

Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Peace, make me a carrier of Christ’s peace to everyone I meet (cf. *Mt* 5:9). May I live in union with God in such a way that what is said of Blessed Alvaro can be said of myself: “Alvaro had an unfailing smile, frank and full of affection, which truly communicated joy and peace” (Fr José María Casciaro, JM, p. 197).

Prayer to Blessed Alvaro

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Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.

BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

BIOGRAPHY

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid on 11 March 1914. He studied engineering and began working professionally in that field. To his doctorate in engineering, he later added doctorates in history and canon law.

In 1935 Alvaro joined Opus Dei, which had been founded by St Josemaría Escrivá in 1928. He lived his vocation to Opus Dei with complete fidelity, sanctifying his professional work and fulfilling his ordinary duties, while carrying out extensive apostolic work among his fellow students and colleagues. He soon became St. Josemaría's strongest support, and remained so for almost forty years, as his closest collaborator.

On 25 June 1944, he was ordained to the priesthood. From then on, he dedicated himself entirely to pastoral ministry, serving the members of Opus Dei and all souls. In 1946, he took up residence in Rome alongside St. Josemaría. His tireless service to the Church was also evident in his dedication to the responsibilities entrusted to him by the Holy See as a consultant to various Dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and especially through his active participation in the work of the Second Vatican Council.

On 15 September 1975, he was elected as St Josemaría's first successor. When Opus Dei was established as a Personal Prelature on 28 November 1982, Pope St. John Paul II appointed him Prelate of Opus Dei, and ordained him as a bishop on 6 January 1991.

In the early hours of 23 March 1994, just a few hours after returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where he had devoutly followed in the earthly footsteps of Jesus, from Nazareth to the Holy Sepulchre, the Lord called this good and faithful servant to Himself. On the morning before his passing, he had celebrated his final Mass in the Cenacle in Jerusalem.

That same day, 23 March, Pope John Paul II visited to pray before his mortal remains, which now rest in the crypt of the Prelatic Church of St. Mary of Peace (Viale Bruno Buozzi, 75, Rome), accompanied by the prayers and affection of the faithful of Opus Dei and thousands of others.

More information:

www.alvarodelportillo.org