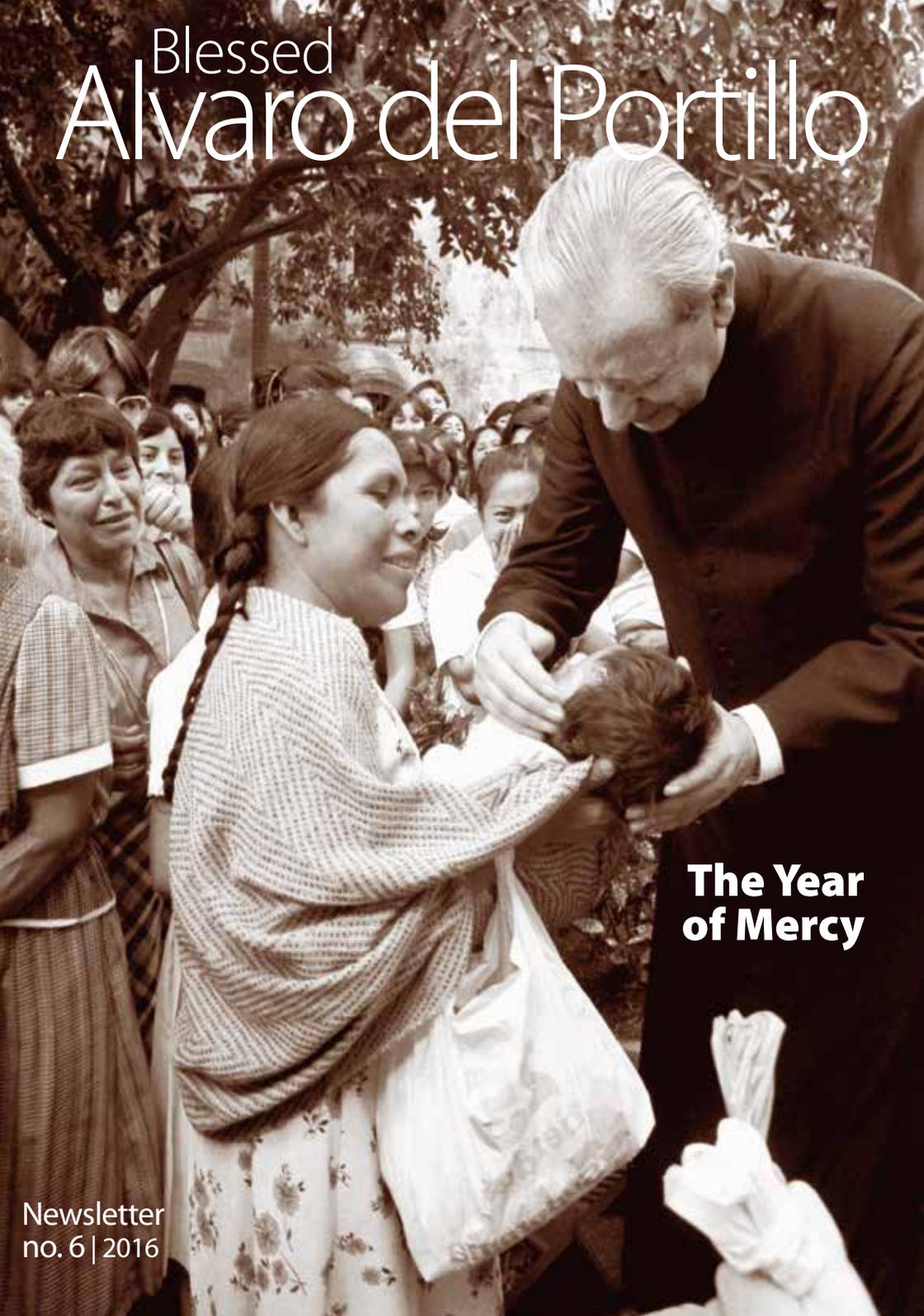


Blessed Alvaro del Portillo



**The Year
of Mercy**

Newsletter
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Blessed Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid (Spain) on 11 March 1914, into a large and deeply Christian family. As well as graduating as a Public Works official, he obtained doctorates in Civil Engineering, History and Canon Law. In 1935 he joined Opus Dei. He lived his Christian vocation with great loyalty and faithfulness, through his work and everyday duties, and helped to draw fellow students, colleagues at work and many other people closer to God.

Ordained a priest in 1944, he was completely committed to his pastoral ministry. In 1946 he moved to Rome. His service to the Church was also marked by his dedication to many tasks entrusted to him by the Holy See, especially in the Second Vatican Council. On 15 September 1975 he became Saint Josemaría Escrivá's first successor at the head of Opus Dei.

On 28 November 1982 Saint John Paul II established Opus Dei as a personal Prelature, made up of lay faithful and secular priests, and appointed Blessed Alvaro as its first Prelate. In 1991 the Pope ordained him a bishop. The way he governed Opus Dei was characterized by a deep communion with the Pope and the other bishops, complete faithfulness to the Founder of Opus Dei and his message, and tireless pastoral zeal.

Early in the morning of 23 March 1994, the Lord called this good and faithful servant to Himself, a few hours after his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, where with deep piety he had visited the places where Jesus had been in that land. That same day, Saint John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains, which now rest in the crypt of the church of the Prelature, Our Lady of Peace, at 75 Bruno Buozzi Street, Rome.

He was beatified on 27 September 2014.



Editorial



“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures for ever!” (Ps 118:1). In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis invites us “to contemplate the mystery of mercy” and to “experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope.”¹ In this way, allowing ourselves to be embraced by divine mercy, we become capable of being merciful towards others, as God is towards us.

“What is it that ‘pleases God most?’” the Holy Father recently asked. And he answered: “To forgive his children, to have mercy on them, so that they also, in turn, can forgive their brothers, shining as torches of God’s mercy in the world. This is what pleases God most.”²

This Holy Year is “an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal”³ first of all for each one to

obtain this mercy from God. In particular, it affords us the opportunity to rediscover the joy and peace which God the Father grants in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and an opportunity to alleviate the sorrows of others, by practising the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

It offers an opportune time to experience the closeness and tenderness of God, so that our faith is strengthened and, in this way, our witness as Christians can be more effective.⁴ In this issue we wish to echo this invitation from the Pope under the guidance of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. ■

1 Blessed Alvaro with a family in Montefalco, Mexico, May 1983.

2 At the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of St Josemaría Escrivá, Rome, 18 May 1992.

¹ Pope Francis, Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, 11 April 2015, 2-3.

² Pope Francis, General Audience, 9 December 2015.

³ *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3.

⁴ Cf. Pope Francis, Letter on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, 1 September 2015.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

A manifestation of God's mercy

In this Jubilee Year, Pope Francis is inviting us to rediscover God's mercy. He has recommended various ways in which we can do this, among them, having recourse to the sacrament of Penance. "Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy for themselves. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace."¹

Here are some texts on Confession from the preaching of Blessed Alvaro:

Divine mercy comes out to meet us

"When we fall, when we sin, divine mercy comes out to meet us, especially in the sacrament of peace and reconciliation, the sacrament of Penance. Go to Confession whenever you need to do so, so as to be cleansed of your sins and to recover the grace of God."²

Recovering our friendship with God

"The only really serious motive for worry and bitterness is sin, this voluntary turning away from God that leaves the soul in darkness, with the unease of having lost the genuine meaning of life, or at least of having cooled such an incomparable friendship: friendship with God! But not even in these moments, which may be frequent due to our weakness, should we allow sadness to get us down. We should feel sorrow for having offended

God and then run to recover our peace, by being reconciled with God and with the others through the Sacrament of Penance."³

The joy of frequent confession

"Go to confession frequently. Resolve to improve your sacramental reconciliation with God. Prepare it well. Examine your conscience deeply. Be sincere. Foster contrition of the heart. Renew the desire to fight better to do good. There are few joys as great as that of feeling, after a well-made confession, what the prodigal son felt: the embrace of our Father God forgiving us!"⁴

The strength needed to be Christ's witnesses

"In order to re-Christianise society, recourse to sacramental Confession is essential: in it each Christian receives the strength needed to be an effective witness to Christ, with his example and word, in all the earthly realities which have to be led back to God the Father. Each one of us needs to come to this source of grace; and we must help many others – relatives, friends, colleagues, neighbours – to have recourse to this marvellous Sacrament of God's Forgiveness."⁵ ■

1 The Pope administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Rio de Janeiro, 26 July 2013.

2 Confessions during the beatification of Blessed Alvaro in Madrid, 27 September 2014.

¹ *Misericordiae Vultus*, 17.

² Homily, 30 March 1985, in Alvaro del Portillo, *Like Salt and Like Light* (an anthology compiled by J. A. Loarte), Scepter, London, 2014, 254.

³ Homily, 12 April 1984, in *ibid.*, 252.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵ Homily, 27 June 1988, in Álvaro del Portillo, *Una vida para Dios*, Rialp, Madrid 1992, p. 257.



The works of mercy

Examples from the life of Blessed Alvaro

As a university student, Blessed Alvaro worked with fellow students looking after the material and spiritual needs of the disadvantaged. In the biography by Javier Medina we read about some of those initiatives, including some reminiscences of Manuel Pérez, a friend of his.

“Those students would go to shanty towns and violent districts, distributing alms, food vouchers redeemable at corner shops or grocery stores, medicines, etc. On Sundays they taught catechism in the parish of San Ramon.

They did not only try to help children, but also sought to reach out to adults. ‘We wanted to do

what we could to raise the level of spiritual formation of those people,’ Manuel Perez narrates, ‘and we organized something that may seem surprising now, but it wasn’t so then: a kind of retreat. At that time doing retreats was a widespread thing among ladies and gentlemen in nearly every parish in Madrid. And we thought we should organize a Lenten retreat for the poor folk we were looking after, in the same place where we gave the catechism classes. What we ended up with, instead of a retreat, were some catechism classes for adults, given in turn by the members of the Society [of St Vincent de Paul]. I particularly remember Alvaro giving one of those talks: with that simplicity and kindness that always characterized him, he knew how to deal with people with great affection and understanding. Around 20 men attended.’

The retreat ended with lunch ‘in the parish refectory, thanks to the parish priest, who provided the food for us. It had room for a hundred or so people. Some Sisters of Charity who ran a home for the blind across the street cooked the food – very succulent



1

The corporal works of mercy

To feed the hungry,
to give drink to the thirsty,
to clothe the naked,
to shelter the homeless,
to visit the sick,
to visit the imprisoned,
to bury the dead.



and tasty it was – and we served. The men were given wine and a packet of cigarettes. Alvaro, like the others, actively participated in organizing the meal and served them at table.’

Manuel Pérez mentions another episode of this time, which took place near the Abroñigal stream. Alvaro and Manuel had gone to visit several families living in slums and they found ‘that there had been a fierce row in one of the families. The police had arrested the parents and put them in prison, leaving four small children on their own, abandoned in their shack. The poor children – one was only one year old – were bewildered not knowing what to do: they had no food and were shivering with cold.’

The spiritual works of mercy

To counsel the doubtful,
to instruct the ignorant,
to admonish sinners,
to comfort the afflicted,
to forgive offences,
to bear wrongs patiently,
to pray for the living and the dead.

They took the children to the police station, but it was closed, so they gave some money to a neighbour to take care of them until the next day, when they could come back and go to the police station. But the police didn’t want to get involved, so they had to go to a charitable institution: the Santa Cristina children’s home, which was in the ‘university city’. Some of the children were so small they did not yet know how to walk. Manuel Pérez writes: ‘I have kept in my memory that image of Alvaro, carrying one of those poor children in his arms through the streets of Madrid, heading for the children’s home.’

Alvaro del Portillo went about these tasks with a Christian spirit, as reflected in the words with which he recalled this work, years later: ‘I always learned from them: people who did not have enough to eat, and I saw nothing but joy. For me they were a great lesson.’¹ ■

1 Blessed Alvaro in 1937.

2 While in Japan, February 1987.

¹ JAVIER MEDINA, *Álvaro del Portillo. Un hombre fiel*, Rialp, Madrid, 2012, pp. 76-78.



Favours of Blessed Alvaro

The bacterial infection disappeared

My sister who suffers from kidney disease is going through the process of getting a transplant, which includes having tests and investigations. At a certain point she was found to have a bacterial infection in her stomach. The treatment she was given for that made her so unwell that it had to be interrupted. She was told by the transplant unit that she had to correct that condition and she started the treatment again which was due to last 10 days, but after 8 days she could take no more. She had to return to have her case studied again and asked me to pray for her, as she could not put up with another course of treatment as it made her so sick. I prayed to Blessed Alvaro and the result of the new test was negative, the infection had disappeared. She phoned me to tell me the happy news and when I told her I had entrusted the matter to Blessed Alvaro, she too was grateful.

M. C. (Puerto Rico)

“I will carry on with my studies”

My son is in his third year of university in Japan. He started a music band and got too involved in it, neglecting his studies. In July he began to say that he was going to give up his studies to devote himself more seriously to music. I was very much against this. At first I got him to agree that, instead of giving up his studies, he should take some time off, but he was still intending to leave the university in the following April and go off to a bigger city. I began to pray to Don Alvaro about this. I was fortunate enough to be at his beatification in Madrid. During the trip, I prayed a lot through his intercession so that my son would change his mind and continue with his studies. Great was my surprise when, the day after I returned from Madrid, I talked to my son who told me: “I will carry on with my studies, find a good job and devote just my free time to music.” His decision was very firm and I can’t find an explanation for such a sudden change. That is why I consider it a favour obtained for us by Don Alvaro.

G. O. (Japan)

In favour of life

I wrote a play of which the main theme was the defence of life from the moment of conception. We

sent it in to a public competition, but rather fearful because we are governed by people who tend rather to promote generalised abortion. I assumed that we would not be chosen. For a whole week I prayed the prayer card of Don Alvaro and not long afterwards they contacted us to say we had won. The play was very well received: it benefited 40 schools with lots of pupils, from 100 up to 700 boys and girls. Some even asked us to put it on again, even though the planned performances had ended.

J. W. (Colombia)

Family reconciled

I have a niece who has been married for 10 years and has a 4-year-old son. Two years ago she and her husband went through a difficult time in their marriage. The cause was a period of serious financial difficulties due to her husband’s bad financial management. At a certain point her husband encouraged her to go back with her son to live with her parents, as he could not pay for their upkeep. In this worrying situation, I began to pray insistently to Don Alvaro. The situation got worse because when my brother saw the difficulties his daughter was going through he fell into a depression and didn’t want to have anything to do with his son-in-law, even avoiding or forbidding that anyone in his house should have contact with him. I continued praying a lot to Don Alvaro, whom I had known personally. I remember he had once spoken to me about my family, saying: “The better they know the Work, the happier they will be, and they too will want to join.” Trusting in these words, I was sure that in some way a solution would be found. For my part, whenever I could, I listened to my niece, kept close to her and encouraged her. Later, a year ago, my niece and her son have gone back to live with her husband and they are happy there, despite pressures from friends and relatives who had advised them to separate. But the story does not end there. Last September, during the very days of the beatification, my brother invited them to his home for dinner, my niece, her husband and their son, and had them sit next to him. I have to thank Don Alvaro for looking after my family with such kindness.

A. P. (Italy)

The Junkabal Foundation

With Blessed Alvaro's encouragement

Junkabal is a foundation in Guatemala City which offers women of scarce financial resources the possibility of learning a trade. It also promotes schooling, and offers medical care and distributes food to the needy. It is a corporate work of Opus Dei, inspired by the teachings of St Josemaría Escrivá.

The centre for professional training began in 1963 in rented premises in a poor district of the city. From Mondays to Fridays there were courses in subjects like cooking, dress-making and flower arranging. On Saturdays there were catechism classes for the children of the students and other children in the neighbourhood, and visits were made to families in need.



Since 1978, after the building of its second phase, Junkabal has also offered courses for parents, primary – and secondary – school education for girls between the ages of 7 and 18, and welfare programmes for the disadvantaged.

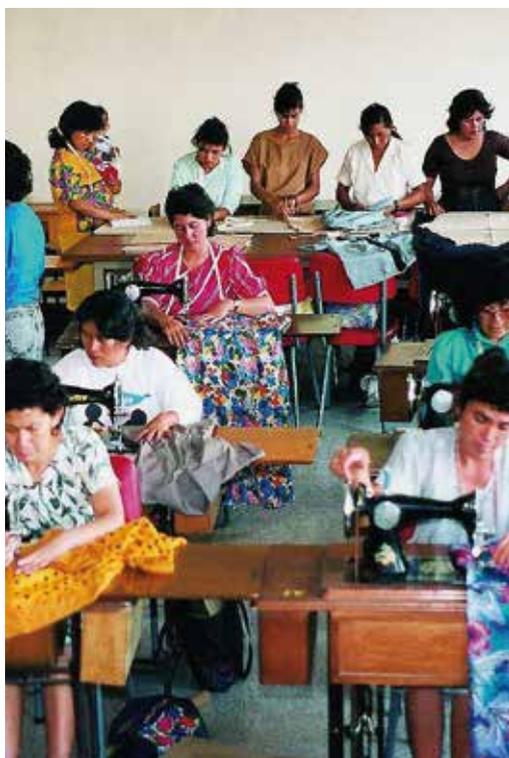
In 1992, with Blessed Alvaro's encouragement, new buildings were built, bringing an increase in the educational programmes on offer. There are courses to set up small businesses of various types: sewing and dress-making, home economics, basic cooking, cake-making, bread-making, flower arranging, making artificial flowers, machine embroidery, the use of cosmetics, etc. Currently 15 different workshops offer women students the possibility of learning a trade and thus earning a living. In addition, on completion of training, they can receive ongoing advice to help their professional development.



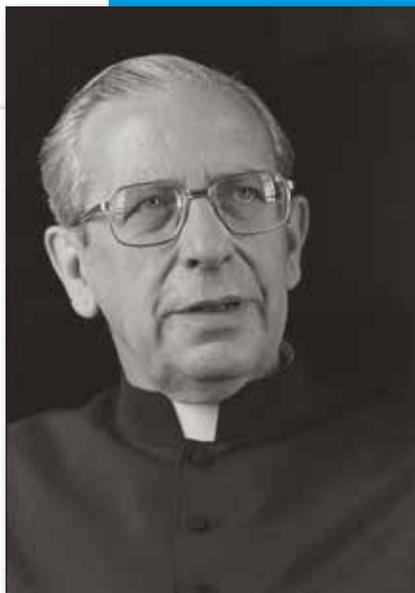
Junkabal also has a dental clinic and runs nutritional programmes for mothers and children. Over the years more than 100,000 people have attended classes, many of whom have also taken part and continue to take part in activities of Christian formation.



Further information can be found at www.junkabal.edu.gt



Prayer



*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 to 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 to the Father.*

Those who have obtained favours through the intercession of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo are asked to let us know by writing to us at the address shown on this page.

More information is available at www.alvarodelportillo.org

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