

# BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

*Newsletter No. 8 - 2021*



## **FRIENDSHIP**

Loving people  
for the love of God

03. *A brother to everyone and a friend to his friends*

04. *Lifelong friends: he offered understanding, support and all possible help*

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## BIOGRAPHY

Alvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid in 1914 and joined Opus Dei in 1935, when he was a civil engineering student.

He was ordained to the priesthood at the age of thirty and became the most direct aide of Saint Josemaría, with whom he worked closely in governing and guiding Opus Dei and its apostolates throughout the world.

He was esteemed by Popes from Saint John XXIII to Saint John Paul II, who valued his Christian faith, his pastoral work, his intellectual abilities and his social sensitivity. They entrusted him with tasks in the service of the Church on different occasions, especially during the Second Vatican Council.

He was elected as first successor of the Founder of Opus Dei in 1975. He impelled the spread of the message of the Work through different countries. This was made evident specifically by his encouragement to start numerous educational, scientific and social initiatives. Saint John Paul II consecrated him as a bishop in 1991.

He died a holy death three years later, on 23 March 1994, just after having made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Pope went to pray before his mortal remains at Opus Dei's headquarters, as an acknowledgement of his service to the People of God. Alvaro was beatified in Madrid on 27 September 2014. His feast is on 12 May.

*For more information: [www.alvarodelportillo.org](http://www.alvarodelportillo.org)*

# A BROTHER TO EVERYONE

## *and a friend to his friends*

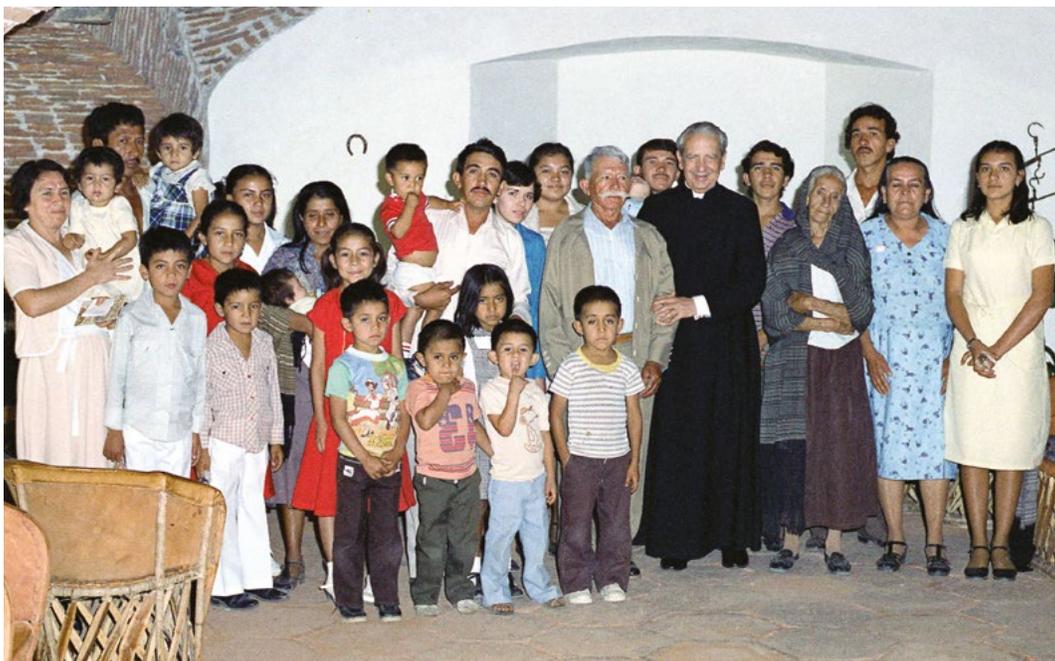
Those who had the opportunity to get to know Blessed Alvaro recognise that what Saint Josemaría wrote in *Furrow* applied to him: “A calm and balanced character, an inflexible will, deep faith and an ardent piety: these are the indispensable characteristics of a son of God.”<sup>1</sup> Awareness of being a son of God was the foundation of Blessed Alvaro’s friendly, open character and of his deep fraternity: because of this awareness, he behaved as a brother to everyone and a friend to his friends.

*He fostered friendship until the last hours of his life on earth.*

Alvaro del Portillo had many good friends. One of his biographers says: “He fostered friendship, which was inseparable from his personal apostolate, until the last hours of his life on earth. At the time of his death, on his bedside table, was the visiting card of one of the pilots of the plane that had brought him back to Rome from the Holy Land. Bishop Alvaro had asked him with real interest about himself and his family, especially while they were waiting at Tel Aviv airport. The relationship was brief, but profound: that pilot went to pray before Bishop Alvaro’s mortal remains as soon as he learned about his death.”<sup>2</sup> ■

<sup>1</sup> *Furrow*, 417.

<sup>2</sup> S. Bernal, *Álvaro del Portillo. Una semblanza personal*. Eunsa, Pamplona 2012, p. 27.



# FRIENDS FOR LIFE

*he offered understanding, support and every possible help*

On his 80th birthday, Bishop Alvaro received a handwritten letter from Saint John Paul II in which he called him “Venerable and dear brother”. On that day, 11 March 1994, he opened his heart to those present at Mass, in the homily: *“Through God’s goodness I am 80 years old today. The wonders that I have been able to witness in the course of this period of time are innumerable. I have received so many gifts from God that they cannot be counted, many caresses from Our Lady, my Mother (...) Thank you, Lord! Forgive my scant correspondence and, from today, help me even more. Pray that I may know how to fill the empty spaces in my life, and instil great love for God in everything. Today, besides fostering in myself a sincere and joyful contrition, I resolve to pronounce more strongly than ever the aspiration Nunc coepi! I begin now! which was the watchword of our Father’s life<sup>3</sup> (...). In my heart, thanks to God and to our Father’s intercession, the fire of love burns strongly. That is why I feel very young (...). It is the youth of people in love – in love with God – who endeavour to make their love grow ever greater.”<sup>4</sup>*

A few days later he had the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. In the homily that he preached in the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem, he emphasised the Holy Family’s example in their complete availability to God’s plans: *“We are children of God, and we have to follow in everything the example left to us by Mary Most Holy, Saint Joseph and, above all, Jesus Christ (...). In the little things, when we find it hard to do what God asks of us, we should say: Lord, do You want this? I want it too! And just the*

*same in the big things; although the difference is that for Him there are no big or little things, because when He asks us something which is difficult to accept, He also gives us the graces that we need to carry it out. It is enough for us to apply our good will. And God does have the right to demand that. May we know how to say yes to Our Lord, as we want to serve Him.”<sup>5</sup>*

**SAINT JOHN PAUL II**  
*called him venerable and dear brother, in a letter that he wrote to Blessed Alvaro on his birthday.*



# IN HIS HEART

*the fire of love burnt strongly*

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In the early hours of the morning of 23 March 1994, when Blessed Alvaro had just returned from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the Lord called him to His presence. At mid-afternoon that same day, Saint John Paul II went to the prelatric church of Opus Dei, to pray before his mortal remains, kneeling amidst an impressive silence, and concluding with a “Hail Holy Queen” followed by three “Glory be”s and the invocation *Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine* – “Eternal rest grant unto him O Lord.”

It can truly be said that Saint John Paul II was one of Blessed Alvaro’s many friends, given the closeness and intensity of their relationship. But many others had the opportunity to feel welcomed by him with affection and understanding.

In a short published profile we read: “Alvaro del Portillo’s natural friendliness

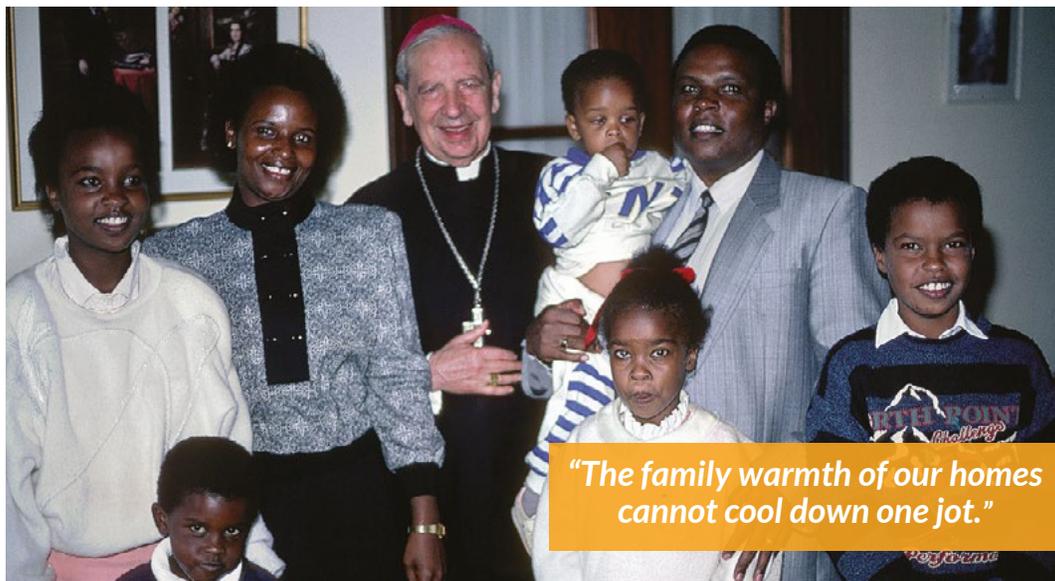
gave rise to long-standing friendships, with deep mutual affection. Among his lifelong friends were the maintenance man, Emilio, in Rome, and the gardener, Manolo, in Spain. He was also on terms of firm personal friendship with Pope Paul VI, Pope John Paul II, and very many other cardinals, bishops and priests. He was friends with so many people because he was a good friend; he kept in touch with them, when most people in his place would have decided they had too much work to do. He offered understanding, support and practical help in any way he could.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This refers to Saint Josemaría.

<sup>4</sup> *Romana*, 18 (1994), p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Javier Medina, *Álvaro del Portillo. Un hombre fiel*, Rialp, Madrid 2012, p. 675.

<sup>6</sup> H. Scott, E. Tolansky, *Alvaro del Portillo: The Power of Humility*, p. 55, CTS, London, 2014.





# MANY GOOD FRIENDS



The story of his friendship with a gardener from Asturias, Spain, is related by Salvador Bernal, quoting Manolo, who had to give up working due to illness: “He used to speak to me as if I was someone he had known all his life. (...) I am sure,” Manolo reminisced in 1995, “that he prayed for me every day, because prayer for all his family members was constant in him and he would tell us that we were like his family. And now, from heaven, I hold him as a friend and I ask him for many things, so that he can intercede from there.”<sup>7</sup> That comment emphasises the affectionate connection that Don Alvaro established with simple people, just as he had deep friendships with outstanding personalities. Manolo concludes by saying: “He preached what he lived: ‘Friendship

*entails common interests and affection for people, which leads to loving them as they are, to devoting time to them, being understanding with them, not breaking off contact with them even when it seems that they do not respond or that they do so slowly.”<sup>8</sup>*

## FRIENDSHIP

*entails common interests and affection for people, which leads to loving them as they are, to devoting time to them, being understanding with them, not breaking off contact with them even when it seems that they do not respond or that they do so slowly, Blessed Alvaro used to say.*

<sup>7</sup> S. Bernal, *ibid.*, p. 25-26.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Javier Medina, *ibid.*, p. 621.

<sup>10</sup> S. Bernal, *ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>11</sup> Javier Medina, *ibid.*, p. 633

# FATHERLY LOVE,

*“There is no sorrow of yours, my dearest children, which is not my sorrow”*

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In his biography of Blessed Alvaro, Javier Medina highlights the fact that he was a father and a pastor. The book quotes some of Blessed Alvaro’s letters where he insists on love for one’s neighbour, which is the basis for fraternity and also friendship. He wrote one such letter to his daughters in Canada a few months before his death: “Love one another more and more each day. Do not get tired of serving one another. Do your utmost for one another.”<sup>9</sup> It was a *leitmotiv* on his lips: “Love one another; let others notice that you love one another.”

Combining love with the fortitude to correct faults may seem an arduous task. Don Alvaro explained this to the father of a family: “When you need to correct, don’t have a long face: say things with a smile and don’t worry. When one really loves, one can say everything, including the hardest things.”<sup>10</sup>

He showed his closeness in a particular way to those who were suffering sorrows

deeply. On one occasion he said: “There is no sorrow of yours, my dearest children, which is not my sorrow.”

Among many possible examples, Medina mentions the case of the father of a large family who was kidnapped in Mexico, and managed to escape from his captors on 12 May 1991, after 257 days. “As soon as they told him the news, Don Alvaro wrote to him: ‘I have not ceased to be close to you one single day during these months of great difficulty for you. I do not mind telling you that, from the moment I received the news of your kidnapping, I had on my desk a memento that Gina (the victim’s sister) sent me, so as to remember you constantly.’”<sup>11</sup>

He showed a genuine interest in the sick, following the development of their illness, praying for them and helping them in every possible way. ■



# FAVOURS

## He helped me to finish my degree

I am an African immigrant in Madrid. I have not yet managed to obtain Spanish nationality, despite having lived in the capital for over 17 years. I was in the fifth year of my degree course at university and short of money to pay for the registration. They crossed my name off the computer register and, as a result, I could not log in nor could my teachers mark my work. I went away to work and get the money I needed.

By the time I returned, the government had closed down my degree course, removing the first level degree and adding a higher level degree. The only way of managing to pass the year and some additional subjects that were outstanding, was to speak with each teacher one by one and ask them to remember who I was and the qualification

he had given me in his subject, some years ago by now, but that he had not been able to record in the official register, as my name had been removed from it due to the non-payment of the fee. Nobody thought it possible to do this and they kept telling me that I needed to start the degree from the beginning, and register to study for the higher level degree. A teacher who was a friend of mine prayed insistently to Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. **Countless miracles took place and I have managed to finish my degree, close my file, and qualify.** Now I will be able to do the doctorate with that teacher who had prayed for me to achieve this and who has offered me the possibility to do my thesis with him. Thank you, my God, for the enormous favour that you have granted me, through the intercession of your servant Don Alvaro!  
G.E.M.



## Protector of my family

I wish to make known the favours received from Don Alvaro del Portillo in less than a year.

My husband suffers from a very severe chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). In one of the checkups they diagnosed a tumour in his left lung. As he could not have surgery due to his respiratory impairment, they performed a bronchoscopy and decided on some sessions of radiotherapy.

In a subsequent check, they saw that there was another tumour in the right lung and they decided to wait to see how it evolved. From the first moment, not only us but also many members of the Work and other friends, **began to pray to Don Alvaro for his recovery.** After some months, in the latest PET-CT, they saw that the tumours had disappeared.

For two months we have also been praying to Don Alvaro for the success of one of our sons in a competitive examination, and for two other sons to find work. The first one passed the exam and the other two were called to work until the Summer. We continue to pray to Don Alvaro for his intercession so that those two temporary jobs become permanent. We are grateful for all this, we give thanks to Don Alvaro and we wish these favours to be published.  
M.P.C.



## Finding employment at 50

My husband lost his job in June 2018. But no matter how hard he searched, he found nothing. We were desperate because 3 years earlier he had been made redundant after 15 years' employment in the banking sector and he did not find work for 9 months. A little while later, a year ago, he had the opportunity of returning to banking, but only to be made redundant again



This second occasion was harder because being almost 50, it is more difficult to obtain a good job. A friend encouraged me to pray to Don Alvaro with a lot of faith, and we did so every day! That very week when we started to pray to him he received 3 calls for interviews and he got 2 offers with very good prospects. It was quite striking. Two in the financial sector and another with a very good company, but no salary was mentioned for this last one.

I prayed very devoutly asking Don Alvaro to please get him a very good job, I felt I had never prayed so strongly: it was a profound request. At the same time I would say to my husband **"Don't let go of Don Alvaro, pray with a lot of faith!"** And a few days later they called him with an offer, which was by far the best of the 3, and that he accepted. We are sure that this was due to Don Alvaro's intercession and we are deeply grateful. We won't let go of him, ever!

C.M.



Saxum Visitor Center

# SAXUM, IN THE HOLY LAND

## *A project inspired by Blessed Alvaro*

18 km from Jerusalem is Saxum, a Visitors Centre and residential conference centre, where spiritual formation activities take place. It was set up to help pilgrims go deeper into the roots of their faith, and to foster intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. It dates back to 1994, when Blessed Alvaro del Portillo visited the Holy Places. Following a wish expressed by Saint Josemaría Escrivá, he encouraged the setting up of a centre to fulfil that function.

The Visitors Centre offers a didactic journey through the Holy Land: its geography, the Holy Places, the Bible, and the central events in the history of salvation. It uses advanced projection technology, personal explanations, audiovisuals and digital re-creations. Thousands of people thus prepare to have a more profitable

experience of their visit to the land where Jesus lived.

### *Reading the Gospel as if present there*

Saint Josemaría Escrivá always wanted to visit the Holy Land, to follow in Jesus' footsteps even in this literal way. In the words of Blessed Alvaro, "He had a great desire to go to the Holy Land; he prayed like one of the characters in the Gospel, taking note of every detail. But since he had never been there, he re-created the scenery as best he could, according to what he had studied and read." He passed on the desire to visit the Holy Land to his children in Opus Dei and many other people. He wished many Christians to have the opportunity during their lives to "pray, kneel down and kiss the ground on which Jesus walked," Blessed Alvaro explained.

## Saint Josemaría called Don Alvaro Saxum

In 1939 Saint Josemaría wrote a letter in which he addressed Alvaro del Portillo by the name “Saxum”, which means “rock” in Latin, on account of his faithfulness and fortitude. In a letter written from Olot, Spain, young Alvaro replied to the founder: “I hope that, despite everything, you may be able to rely on one who, rather than rock, is made of clay without any consistency. But Our Lord is so good!” (13 July 1939).

**By giving this name to the project, its promoters expressed their gratitude to Blessed Alvaro for his life of service to the Church and his sowing of friendship among people of different cultures and religions.**

Saxum was able to begin functioning thanks to the cooperation of many donors from 50 countries, from 1995 until now. The Emmaus Way and the conferences for tourist guides stand out among the main initiatives related to Saxum. This project is the fulfilment of a dream of Saint Josemaría’s and of Blessed Alvaro’s, who wanted thousands of Christians to have

the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Christ in his native land and to meditate on the passages of the Gospel in the surroundings where they had taken place. When we know the places in the Holy Land where Christ lived, where He prayed, where He worked with His hands, where He preached and worked miracles, where He suffered, etc., it is easier to find Him in our life, to talk and listen to Him, and to fall in love with Him more deeply each day.

**Through its activities, the Centre also aims to facilitate a profound inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in that complex crossroads of cultures and religions.** From the beginning, both in its design and its implementation, people from the three main religions in the Holy Land (Christians, Jews and Muslims), have worked together in perfect harmony. A spirit of cooperation, the emphasis on work well done and the respect for all beliefs, led many of the workmen involved in its construction to say that working on Saxum was a rewarding experience of human co-existence. ■



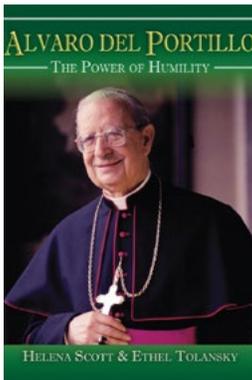
# PRAYER

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 canonisation of Blessed Alvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favour I request... (*here make your petition*). Amen.

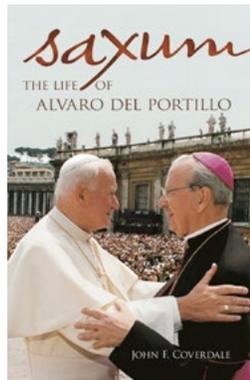
Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.



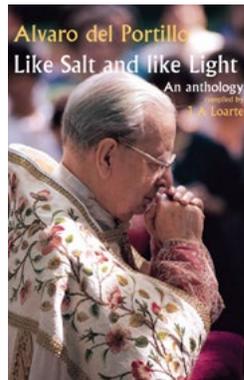
# PUBLICATIONS



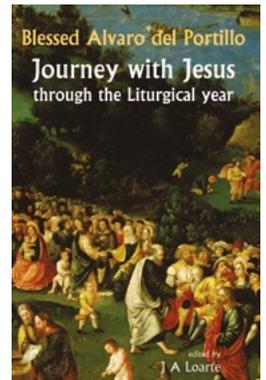
**Alvaro del Portillo -  
The Power of Humility**  
H Scott & E Tolansky  
Catholic Truth Society,  
London. Booklet B758



**Saxum: The Life of  
Alvaro del Portillo**  
John Coverdale  
Scepter, New York



**Alvaro del Portillo  
Like Salt and like Light**  
(Texts for prayer and  
spiritual reading)  
Alvaro del Portillo  
Scepter, London



**Blessed Alvaro del Portillo  
Journey with Jesus -  
Through the Liturgical  
Year**  
Alvaro del Portillo  
Scepter, London

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 below.

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