



Looking for Our Lady
with Blessed Alvaro in Rome

"If I want you to imitate me in anything, it is in the love I have for our Lady." - Saint Josemaria Escriva

For almost 40 years, **Blessed Alvaro del Portillo** lived and worked side by side with the Founder of Opus Dei, **Saint Josemaria Escriva**, to lay the groundwork for the foundation of Opus Dei in many countries around the world. Although they were both from Spain, they spent many of those years together in **Rome**, Italy, close to the Pope and the Holy See.

Saint Josemaria and Blessed Alvaro used to like to "visit" Our Lady, by praying the rosary while walking or traveling to a specific Marian shrine, or even simpler places bearing her image. Over the course of the years they lived in Rome, they discovered many lesser-known sanctuaries of popular devotion around the city.



When facing problems or periods of more intense suffering, the saint and the blessed had recourse to Our Lady, often physically seeking out one of her many images.

Starting in 1978, three years after Saint Josemaria's death, Blessed Alvaro wanted to retrace the paths they had taken to find Mary in Rome. Turns out they had prayed at over 40 Marian sites and churches in and around the city. What follows could serve as a **Marian "tour book"** for your next visit to the eternal city.

We'll begin chronologically: when Alvaro del Portillo, our guide, came to Rome for the first time, one of the very first things he did was to visit **St. Peter's Basilica**, the heart of the Church, as well as two Marian churches close to his lodgings.

Over the years, Alvaro went to St. Peter's frequently, renewing his love for the Pope there often. The basilica is full of Marian images, and some are less well-known:



the Madonna del Soccorso, the Mater Ecclesiae, and the mosaic of our Lady (also Mater Ecclesiae) in the square.

Santa Maria Regina Pacis was among the first places Blessed Alvaro, not yet a priest, visited when he first arrived in Rome in 1943. Alvaro went to this church, just completed and dedicated to the Queen of Peace, every morning to pray and attend Mass. We can imagine what he told Our Lady at that difficult time, as World War II was raging. During that trip, Alvaro met with bishops in Rome to explain what Opus Dei was all about, and to seek Vatican approval.



When Alvaro, now a priest, returned to Rome in 1946, he celebrated daily Mass on the altar of the Sacred Heart in **Nostra Signora del Sacro Cuore**.

The next leg of our pilgrimage takes us to some of the most ancient places of Marian veneration. Alvaro inherited a passion for the Roman catacombs from Saint Josemaría and visited the **catacombs of Priscilla**, where the **oldest picture of Mary**, represented as Mother of God, is kept.



He also visited the Marian image of **Santa Maria in Cosmedin** and the ancient icon of **Santa Maria in Aracoeli**.

But of all the ancient representations of Our Lady, the one that Alvaro visited



most was the **Salus Populi Romani of Saint Mary Major**. The entire fifth-century basilica is a hymn of thanksgiving for the Divine Maternity of Mary, and over the years, Alvaro also prayed before the **Regina Pacis statue**, a commemoration of the First World War.

(Click on the churches above to see their pictures.)

Blessed Alvaro had a lively devotion to the scapular of Our Lady, and that's why he visited Rome's Carmelite churches more than once.

One of these is **Santa Maria della Scala**, a church in Trastevere with a relic of Saint Teresa's foot.



Continuing with Alvaro, our pilgrimage also takes us to **Santa Teresa in Corso Italia**, where there is a beautiful image of the Madonna and Child with the Scapular, and to **Santa Teresina del Bambin Gesù in Panfilo**.



Alvaro's visits to these churches were brief trips made early in the morning, to bring many of his concerns to Our Lady's attention.

(Click on the churches above to see their pictures.)



With Blessed Alvaro, we learn to consider Our Lady as the tradition of the Church does: she is the "Omnipotent Supplicant" whom God cannot refuse. Alvaro visited many churches with images of Mary to ask Our Lady for graces that

often seemed impossible.



For example, the Madonna della Clemenza in **Santa Maria in Trastevere**, the



Stella Maris (also called Fons Lucis and Our Lady Advocate) in **Santa Maria in**



Via Lata, **Santa Maria del**



Popolo, Our Lady of the Rosary in **Santa Maria**

sopra Minerva, and the **Gran Madre di Dio** at Ponte

Milvio.

He also went to **our Lady of Lourdes in Tor Marancia**, and to the reproduction of the grotto of Lourdes in the **Vatican Gardens**.

(Click on the churches above to see their pictures.)

In 1978, Alvaro made visits to an impressive number of Marian churches: **Saint Rocco** and **Santa Maria in Traspontina** in December and February, **Santa Maria delle Vitoria**, the **Consolatrix Afflictorum** in San Camillo de Lillis, the **Addolorata (Our Lady of Sorrows)** and the **Madonna delle Grazie (Our Lady of Grace)** in San Marcello in Corso, and **Santa Maria degli Angeli** in Piazza Esedra in March, the twin churches of **Santa**



Maria dei Miracoli

and **Santa**

Maria in

Montesanto

in Piazza

del Popolo,

the **Santa**

Maria in Portico image

in Santa Maria in Campitelli, the **Madonna de Parto** statue in Sant'Agostino, and the **Immaculate Heart of Mary** in the Euclid Square in May, **Mary Help of Christians** at the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Via Marsala, the **Immaculate and the Madonna** in the Basilica of the Holy Apostles, and **our Lady of the Rosary** in Christ the King in June, the **Madonna del Carmine** in San Martino ai Monti, the **Pantheon, our Lady of the Rosary** in Santa Sabina, the **Madonna del Perpetuo Soccorso** in Sant'Alfonso, the **Madonna Liberatrice** in the chapel of San Zenone in Santa Prassede. and the **Immaculate** in the Capuchin Church in Via Vittorio Veneto in September and October.

Blessed Alvaro's pilgrimages the next year, 1979, were largely visits to images of our Lady in churches not named after her: to the **Madonna in the apse of the Santi Quattro Coronati**, for example, and to the **Madonna of the Rosary** in the Basilica of San Clemente, the **Nunziata** near Via della Conciliazione, the **Madonna del Buon Aiuto** in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and the **Madonna di San Gaetano** in Sant'Andrea della Valle. Our tour takes us next to two images of our Lady in the **Basilica of St. John Lateran**: the Madonna and Child with Saints and Our Lady of the Apocalypse.



And at the end of November, Blessed Alvaro went to pray before a reproduction of the **Madonna of the Miraculous Medal in the Leonine College** in Via Pompeo Magno.



(Click on the churches above to see their pictures.)

Blessed Alvaro visited some shrines more than once because of their special significance, and it is fitting that our tour nearly draws to a close with three of these.

The church of San Salvatore in Lauro holds an image of the **Virgin of Loretto** which reminded Blessed Alvaro of Saint Josemaria's 1951 pilgrimage to Loretto, and the facade is sculpted with beautiful iconography. (While



Blessed Alvaro didn't live to see it, in 2009 an image of Saint Josemaria was installed in one of the side chapels.)

Similarly, Alvaro visited the **Church of our Lady of Guadalupe** (just beyond the limits of this map), thinking of Saint Josemaria's 1970 trip to Mexico.

Finally, he was one of many Catholics devoted to the **Madonna del Divino Amore**, and visited the sanctuary just outside of Rome. Rome's salvation during the war is attributed to her, and the Pope had called for a novena and processions through the city streets with the image.

(Click on the churches above to see a picture.)

Lastly, our pilgrimage takes us to the **edicole** and Marian statues around the city, beautiful expressions of popular devotion to our Lady.

Saint Josemaria and Blessed Alvaro often visited the **Immaculate Conception in Piazza di Spagna** on December 8, for example, and the **Madonna and Child in Via del Pellegrino** is so beautiful that Saint Josemaria had it reproduced on a terrace in the headquarters of Opus Dei.



There was a small edicola that St. Josemaría particularly liked in **Piazza delle Cinque Lune** on a facade of the Palazzo dell'Apollinare (recently transferred to Via della Scrofa).

Finally, in the outskirts of Rome, **just outside Genzano** at the junction to Nemi, there is another edicola with the inscription "Cor meum vigilat." Of this image Blessed Alvaro said, *This representation of the Virgin Mary is very beautiful. The child sleeps on her arms and the Virgin is watching. Cor meum vigilat.*

(Click on the churches above to see their pictures.)