

HOMILY AT THE MASS OF THANKSGIVING
FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei

Madrid, September 28, 2014

This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you (Jn 15:12).

Dear brothers and sisters, these words of the Gospel echo today in my heart with new joy at the thought that the mass of people gathered yesterday in this very place, in close communion with Pope Francis, and together with all who accompanied us from the four cardinal points, was not so much a crowd but rather a family gathering, united for love of God and love of one another. This very love is strengthened today in the Eucharist, in this Mass in thanksgiving for the beatification of our beloved Don Alvaro, Bishop, Prelate of Opus Dei.

1. Our Lord, by instituting the Eucharist, gave thanks to God the Father for his eternal goodness, for the creation that sprung from his hands, for his mysterious plan of salvation. We give thanks for that infinite love made manifest on the Cross and anticipated in the Upper Room. And we ask our Lord: how can we learn to love as you have loved us, to love as you have loved Peter and John, each one of us, as well as Saint Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro?

Contemplating the holy life of Don Alvaro, we discover our Lord's guiding hand, the grace of the Holy Spirit, the gift of love that transforms us. And we make our own that prayer of Saint Josemaría that the new Blessed repeated so often: "Give me, Lord, the Love with which you want me to love you,"¹ and that way I will know how to love the others with your Love, and with my poor effort. In my life, the others will discover the goodness of God, as was the case in the daily path walked by Don Alvaro: it was already here in this beloved Madrid that divine mercy could be seen in his solidarity with those who were most poor and abandoned.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us give thanks to God by asking him for more love. In the prime of his youth, when he was 25 years old, Don Alvaro was *saxum*, rock, for Saint Josemaría. From the depths of his humility, he responded by letter to the Founder of Opus Dei with these words: "In spite of everything, I hope that you can place your trust in one who, rather than rock, is clay without any solidity whatsoever. But, our Lord is so good!"² Our entire existence ought to be soaked in that trust in divine goodness. We prayed in the Responsorial Psalm, *I thank you, Lord, for your faithfulness and love (Ps 137 [138]: 2)*. And our gratitude rises up to the Holy Trinity, because God continues to be with us, through his Word, Jesus Christ Himself (cfr. *Col 3:16*), and through his Spirit, who fills us with joy (cfr.

1 Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Forge*, no. 270.

2 Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Letter to Saint Josemaría, Olot, July 13, 1939.

Jn 15:11; Lk 11:13) and enables us to cry out to God, filled with confidence, *Abba, Pater*: “Father! Daddy!”

2. “The *trinity* on earth will take us to the Trinity in Heaven,”³ Don Alvaro, following the teaching and experience of the Founder of Opus Dei, would often repeat. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph bring us to the Father and the Holy Spirit. In the sacred humanity of Jesus we discover, inseparably united to it, his divinity.⁴

The Holy Family! With words from the first reading, we bless our Lord *who fosters men’s growth from their mother’s womb, and fashions them according to his will* (*Sir 50:24*). The sacred text tells us that even before our birth God loved us. This reminds me of a poem with which Virgil addresses a new-born: *Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem*⁵: “Little child, learn to recognize your mother by her smile.” Upon birth, a child begins to discover the universe; in his mother’s face, full of love, in that smile of hers that receives him, the new being just barely come to the world discovers a reflection of the goodness of God.

On this day, which our Holy Father Francis has dedicated to prayer for the family, we unite ourselves to the pleas of the whole Church for the *comunio dilectionis*, the “communion of love,” the “school”⁶ of the Gospel that is the family, as Paul VI said at one point in Nazareth. The family, with the “interior and profound dynamism of love,”⁷ has great “spiritual fecundity,”⁸ open to life at all times, as taught by Saint John Paul II, to whom Blessed Alvaro was united by a filial friendship.

In giving thanks to Don Alvaro, we give thanks to his parents who received him into this world and educated him, who prepared in him a simple and generous heart to receive God’s love and respond to his calling. Don Alvaro did just that: he was a man whose smile gave glory to God, who *has done wondrous things* (*Sir 50:24*), and who chose him to serve the Church by spreading Opus Dei, as a faithful son of Saint Josemaría.

We pray that there may be many families that form “bright and cheerful homes, as was that of the Holy Family,”⁹ in the words of Saint Josemaría. We lift up our gratitude to God for the gift of the family, a reflection of eternal trinitarian love, a place in which each person knows himself to be loved for his own sake, just the way he is. And now we also give thanks to all the mothers and fathers that have gathered together here, and to all those persons that care for children, the elderly, and the sick.

Families: our Lord loves you, our Lord is present within your marriage, image of Christ’s love for his Church. I know that many of you dedicate yourselves with great generosity to helping other marriages along their path of fidelity, to helping many other homes march onwards in a social context that often times is difficult and even hostile. Keep

3 Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Pastoral letter, September 30, 1975, no. 26.

4 Cf. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, Pastor letter on occasion of the Golden Anniversary of the foundation of Opus Dei, September 24, 1978, no. 51.

5 Virgil, *Eglogue IV*, 60.

6 Venerable Paul VI, Address in Nazareth, January 5, 1964.

7 Saint John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, no. 41.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 22.

at it! The whole world needs your work of witness and evangelization. Remember that, as beloved Benedict XVI said, “Faithfulness over time is the name of love.”¹⁰

3. *Be thankful*, Saint Paul exhorts us (*Col 3:15*). Blessed Alvaro, considering his indebtedness to Saint Josemaría, stated that “good use of gifts received is the best show of gratitude.”¹¹ In his preaching, in family gatherings, in personal encounters, in all places, he never ceased to speak about apostolate and evangelization. To abide in the love of God that we have received, we must share it with others; God’s goodness tends to spread. Pope Francis said that “it is in prayer that the Lord makes us understand this love, but it is also through so many signs that we can recognize in our life, in the many persons he sets on our path.”¹²

It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you (Jn 15:16). Our Lord after having insisted that the initiative is always his and in the primacy of his love, sends us forth to spread his Love to all creatures: *I have appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain (ibidem)*. To bear fruit that also sets down deep roots, it is necessary to remain in the Lord. Jesus had just said so to his disciples: *Abide in me and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me (Jn 15:4)*.

The stupendous multitude of people these days, the millions of persons throughout the world, and so many who await us in heaven, bear witness to the fruitfulness of Don Alvaro’s life. I encourage you, brothers and sisters, to abide and grow in God’s love: through prayer, through Mass and frequent Communion, through sacramental confession, so that, with the force of divine predilection, we may know how to transmit what we have received, and implement it through an authentic apostolate of friendship and confidence.

In the letter which Pope Francis wrote me on occasion of yesterday’s beatification, he told us that “we cannot keep the faith to ourselves, it is a gift that we have received to give it and share it with others;”¹³ and he also said that Blessed Alvaro “encourages us to not be afraid of going against the grain and suffering so as to proclaim the Gospel,” and furthermore that “he also teaches us that in the simplicity and in the daily affairs of our life we can discover the sure path of sanctity.”¹⁴

Along this path, together with many angels, we are accompanied by the Blessed Virgin. Mary is daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse and Temple of God the Holy Spirit. She is the Mother of God and our Mother, the Queen of the family, the Queen of Apostles. May our Lady help us, as she did Don Alvaro, respond to the invitation of the Successor of Peter: “to let oneself be loved by the Lord, to open one’s heart to his love, and allow Him to guide our life,”¹⁵ a desire which Saint Josemaría entrusted on so many occasions to the Virgin of Almodena, so loved and venerated in this Archdiocese. Amen.

10 Benedict XVI, Homily in Fatima, May 12, 2010.

11 Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, pastoral letter, July 1, 1985.

12 Pope Francis, Speech, July 6, 2013.

13 Pope Francis, Letter to Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, for the beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, 26 June 2014.

14 *Ibid.*

15 *Ibid.*