

At the Beatification of a Universal “Madrileño” *La Razón*, Spain (September 28, 2014)

On September 27, Madrid was transformed into the site of the beatification of a universal “Madrileño”: Alvaro del Portillo. Cardinal Amato, as the delegate of our beloved Pope Francis, inscribed him in the list of the Church’s blessed, before thousands of people gathered in Valdebebas.

This celebration has both a universal and a local savor at the same time. The new blessed has deep roots in this country and especially in Madrid, where he was born. Here he studied first in the school of the Marianists and afterwards in the School of Highway Engineers. He received his first Holy Communion in the Church of the Conception, recently raised to the status of a basilica. The Retiro Park was the scene of his childhood games and his comings and goings as a student from his home to the Engineering School. And the slums on the outskirts of Madrid in the thirties were witnesses to his concern for the poorest and most needy.

At the same time, this beatification has a universal dimension, because Alvaro del Portillo

spread the seed of the Gospel throughout every continent. That explains why people from over eighty countries have been present. What does this beatification mean for the Church? In the first place, it is an act of thanksgiving to the Most Blessed Trinity, for all the gifts we have received. One of these gifts is the life in the Church of holy women and men. While being a cause of joy for Christians, the Church wants above all that it serve as a spur for all the baptized, ordinary Christians, to strive with personal responsibility to illuminate civil society with the life-giving light of Christ’s teachings, since the faith of Christians should never be separated from their daily work and activity.

The new blessed lived and taught the spirit of Opus Dei, which he received directly from St. Josemaría. We all have a calling from God, a mission that fills our lives with meaning. We are all called to discover the loving solicitude of God, who awaits us in our family, in our work, in our friendships, in our social relationships, etc. As Alvaro del Portillo reminded us, holiness does not mean attaining a level of “perfection” that places us above others, but rather in growing in the love that places us at the service of all those around us.

The Church desires that beatifications be for all who attend, and for all who follow

them through the means of communication, an opportunity for a personal encounter with God and a stimulus for their Christian life.

God granted the new blessed notable intellectual qualities. Besides being a Highway Engineer, he had doctorates in History and in Canon Law. He worked intensely in various commissions during the Second Vatican Council and had close ties to three exceptional twentieth century Popes: St. John XXIII, St. John Paul II, and the soon to be Blessed Paul VI. The latter was his first friend when he arrived in Rome back in the 1940s. And the fact that John Paul II went to pray before his mortal remains on the very day of his death shows his great esteem for this new blessed.

Alvaro del Portillo dedicated his life to the service of God and souls, with a free and generous response to God's grace day after day. For, as St. Josemaría wrote in *The Way*, no one is born with the "stuff of saints," or without it. God calls everyone without exception to the fullness of charity, and he wants to produce, with the poor ingredients of our life, a work of art, the fruit of grace and of the personal response of each and every one of us. If we let him, God wants to draw out of us, evoking the words of a poet, "our best I." This "best I" means being fully identified with Christ, letting oneself be molded by grace,

and seeking in every moment to fulfill the divine command to love our neighbor.

Alvaro del Portillo was faithful to God, to the Church, and to St. Josemaría and his charism, with a creative and renewing fidelity. His human gifts, placed at the service of his profession and the Church, did not separate him from other people. On the contrary, his simplicity, his humility, his naturalness, his friendly good humor and spontaneity made it easy for him to connect with others, and to establish from the first moment a relationship of trust and friendship with so many people.

Therefore, for many of those who knew him, attending his beatification bears the mark of gratitude. These are people who had heard from him personal advice or words of encouragement in difficult moments, who felt strengthened in their faith when everything seemed to be toppling around them, sustained by his prayer and human affection.

People in the most varied settings of the world heard him speak about God: in Nagasaki, Texas, Lima, Nairobi, Tallinn and Sydney; in various countries of Africa, or while walking by his side through the streets of Rome. From then on, Don Alvaro's example and words remained in their souls like a sowing of love for God and a constant stimulus to serve our Lord and their fellow men and women.

His years spent close to St. Josemaría made him an heir to his great love for the whole Church. Afterward, as Prelate of Opus Dei, he continued the Work's expansion in communion with the bishops. His affection and veneration for the religious life are also well known. Religious men and women held a very special place in the heart of the soon to be blessed, while he constantly urged the laity to be present in all sectors of society, with the desire to build up, side by side with their fellow citizens, a world that was more united, more just and more human.

Along with his faithfulness to God's will, I would like to emphasize Don Alvaro's deep sense of mercy. His Christian heart prompted him to constantly endeavor to solve, to the extent that he could, the human and social problems that he encountered throughout his life. His deep Christian charity, united to a demanding sense of justice, far from mere laments and accommodating attitudes, gave birth to numerous works of social and educational assistance throughout the world, in favor of the most needy.

As a young man he dedicated many hours to assisting poor families and abandoned children in Madrid. And he made these efforts compatible with studying for an engineering degree and his job as a "Public Works Assistant," in order to help support his family.

He learned from St. Josemaría to never be unmoved when confronting the bitter face of poverty, misery or injustice. I had the privilege of being a witness to how he reacted, during his catechetical trips throughout the world, to those living in situations unworthy of human dignity. After speaking to them with affection, and praying for them, he used all the means within his reach to move the hearts of people there and encourage them to find a just—and thus Christian—response to those challenges. And thus there came about—the result of his encouragement and of the work of so many people, believers and non believers—hospitals, clinics in poor areas, centers for professional training and for the assistance of underprivileged women, initiatives to care for the elderly and for street children, food banks, care for the abandoned sick...

In these times filled with great difficulties and great hopes, I would like all the people who take part in the beatification of Alvaro del Portillo to experience the joy of a Church that is alive, young and beautiful in the example of its saints, and to discover the joy of following Christ in the midst of the ordinary circumstances of each day.

✠ Javier Echevarría
Prelate of Opus Dei