



## PRAYER

*O God, merciful Father, you granted your servant Bishop Álvaro the grace of being 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 serve the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Deign to glorify your servant Álvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favour I request ... (here make your petition). Amen.*

*Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory be to the Father.*

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We would be grateful if our readers would send us names and addresses of others who might be interested in receiving this Newsletter or the prayer card of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo.

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Prelate of Opus Dei

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# Alvaro del Portillo



Vocation to the Work  
It's a question of love

Favours received through  
Don Álvaro's intercession

In the service of  
the universal Church

Newsletter no.2  
2006



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Bishop Álvaro del Portillo was born in Madrid, Spain, on March 11, 1914. A civil engineer who held doctorates in philosophy and canon law, he became a member of Opus Dei in 1935. On June 25, 1944, he was ordained a priest, and two years later he took up residence in Rome, where he worked closely with St. Josemaría Escrivá the founder of Opus Dei. His service to the Church was also shown in his dedication to the tasks that the Holy See entrusted to him, especially his active participation in the work of the Second Vatican Council. In 1975, after the death of St. Josemaría, he was elected to succeed him in governing Opus Dei. On January 6, 1991, he was ordained a bishop by His Holiness John Paul II. The pastoral government of the Servant of God was characterized by fidelity to the spirit of the founder and zeal to extend the apostolates of the Prelature and the call to sanctity in ordinary life throughout the whole world.

On the morning of March 23, 1994, a few hours after returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, our Lord called this good and faithful servant to himself.

That same day, the Holy Father John Paul II came to pray before his mortal remains, which now repose in the crypt of the Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace in Rome.

# EDITORIAL

After years of struggling to attain an intense and unbroken prayer life, our Lord granted his servant Álvaro del Portillo a deep intimacy with him. On February 9, 1988, in San Francisco, during his thanksgiving after Mass, he exclaimed: "How easy it is to be contemplatives, when we have you within us, Lord, when you are the Sun of our soul and you grant us life in order to love you!"

But Don Álvaro also insisted that union with God required that each person strive to correspond to the action of grace. He also said that day: "Lord, how good you are, to give yourself to us in this way! We want to be faithful. We want to say yes at every moment, but you know very well our weakness. Give us strength to enable us to subject our temperament and our pride, to control our senses and to work diligently . . . being always aware of your love. Seeing how good you are towards us, we want to correspond by giving you our entire being."

And he concluded: "*Tempus breve est*, the time for loving you is short. Help us to use it well, not getting mired in our petty miseries, to follow you closely. . . . My God, may we realize that it is worthwhile giving our lives completely, because you give us yourself as a reward."



## WAS COMPLETELY OVERWHELMED

Meeting St. Josemaría and deciding to dedicate himself to God in Opus Dei, on July 7, 1935.



During the 1934/1935 academic year, Don Álvaro helped out in the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. God made use of his generosity towards the poor to guide him to Opus Dei. Through his friend Manuel Perez

Sánchez, who accompanied him in this work in the poor neighbourhoods of Madrid, he met Father Josemaría Escrivá in the month of March, shortly after his 21st birthday. Their conversation was very brief. "Are you a

- Page 4, the Servant of God in 1937.
- Below, with his sister Teresa.
- At right, a metal plaque designed by St. Josemaría, which was installed on the door of the Academy: "The first corporate work was the academy that we called DYA, *Derecho y Arquitectura* (Law and Architecture), because classes were given in those subjects. But for us the letters meant *Dios y Audacia*: (God and Daring)."

—St. Josemaría  
*Meditation, March 19, 1975*



nephew of Carmen del Portillo?" Father Josemaría asked him. Carmen del Portillo, who was in fact Don Álvaro's aunt, had for years been helping out in the Foundation for the Sick, a social work of the Apostolic Ladies of the Sacred Heart. Father Josemaría knew her quite well, since he had been chaplain of the Foundation for the Sick from 1927 to 1931. Father Josemaría made an appointment to see Álvaro several days later, but was unable to keep it. "He stood me up," Don Álvaro said jokingly, many years later. "It seems he had been called to the bedside of a dying person, and he couldn't notify me because I hadn't given him my phone number."

At the beginning of summer 1935, Don Álvaro went to the DYA university residence on Ferraz Street where Father Josemaría was living. He thought it would be impolite to leave for his vacation without at least saying good-bye to him. Father Josemaría received him with his usual cordiality and they spoke for quite some time. They talked at length about prayer. Father Josemaría asked discreetly about his family and friends, and suggested new horizons of Christian life and concern for others. Finally he invited him to the day of recollection that was being held at the residence on the next day, Sunday, and Don

Álvaro accepted.

Actually Don Álvaro at that moment had very different plans in mind. He had gone to say good-bye to Father Josemaría precisely because on the following day he was going to leave for a vacation with his family outside of





Madrid. To go to the day of recollection meant upsetting a carefully-arranged plan. But his strong supernatural outlook and the positive impression St. Josemaría had made on him led him to accept the invitation. “In the recollection, the Father gave a meditation about love for God and love for our Lady, and I was completely overwhelmed,” Don Álvaro recalled. That Sunday he heard explained for the first time, in broad outline, exactly what the Work was, and that same day he decided to join Opus Dei. It was July 7, 1935. “It was evidently a divine call, because such an idea was the furthest thing from my mind. . . . My only plan had been to become an engineer and start a family.”

From that point on, the biography of the one who would become Bishop Álvaro del Portillo shows a continuous growth in love for God and the Church and in fidelity to his Christian vocation in Opus Dei. St. Josemaría took personal charge of Don Álvaro’s first steps in the spiritual life and organized a course of formation just for him. In addition, with examples taken from ordinary life he taught him to sanctify his daily work, to transform it into an instrument of union with God and an occasion of service to others.

*Don Joaquín Alonso*

- In the top photo, taken in 1954: with St. Josemaría and Father José Luis Masot.
- Centre: the first three faithful of Opus Dei to be ordained priests, after their ordination by Bishop Eijo y Garay.
- Below, the Servant of God listens attentively to St. Josemaría in a get-together in Venezuela, in 1975.



• Celebrating Holy Mass in the Grotto of the Annunciation in Nazareth, March 15, 1994

## IT'S A QUESTION OF LOVE

The Holy Eucharist: centre and root, each day, of his interior life

Don Álvaro renewed the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar for the last time in the church of the Cenacle in Jerusalem. It was a caress that our Lord bestowed on his good and faithful servant. A few days later, Mgr. Javier Echevarría, his successor as Prelate of Opus Dei, recalled: “I can assure you that those were very intense moments, lived with a true madness of love.”

Throughout his whole life Don Álvaro strove to grow in his love for the Eucharist and to transmit this love to everyone around him by his words and example. Each day, right up to

his last day on earth, was an occasion to grow in his devotion, in his hunger for the Eucharist.

“God is infinitely powerful, infinitely beautiful. We cannot imagine what he is like. The sweetest music, the most sublime symphony, the most radiant colours, the entire world, the whole universe is nothing beside him. And this God, infinitely great, infinitely powerful, infinitely beautiful, is hidden beneath the appearance of bread so that we can draw close to him with confidence.”

These words of Don Álvaro show clearly his

passionate love for the Eucharist, a love that led him to remain for hours in prayer before the tabernacle, and to celebrate the liturgical ceremonies with the greatest reverence. He always strove to ensure that the places and objects used for worship were as dignified as possible, and he was deeply grieved and made generous reparation when he learned of an outrage committed against the Eucharist.

Don Álvaro expressed his love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament through constant small details. When once he received the gift of a small bottle of expensive perfume, he indicated that each time the tabernacle in one of the oratories in the central house of Opus Dei was cleaned, the Oratory of Pentecost, a drop of the fragrance should be left inside. He was very happy to see old liturgical objects once used for worship “rescued” and refurbished, and he warmly expressed his gratitude to those who assisted in this effort. He was convinced that, thanks to their valuable work, popular piety would be re-enchanted and our Lord would be surrounded and loved by a greater number of



• Pall used by Don Álvaro the last time he celebrated Holy Mass, on March 22, 1994, in the church of the Cenacle in Jerusalem. Made of silk brocade of an ivory colour. A medallion of St. Joseph with the Child in his arms is in the centre.

Recalling that Mass a few days later, Mgr. Javier Echevarría said: *One could sense his deep piety while celebrating the Mass. He also showed signs of fatigue, due to physical tiredness and perhaps also to the emotional impact of that holy place.*



• **God asks and insists that we each be Eucharistic souls**, to be able to sanctify our work and all the activities that we carry out in the midst of the world. If we do so, he assures us that he will draw all things to himself. He will do everything, if we are faithful. We can never forget that the influence of each person's holiness reaches much farther than the limited sphere we move in and the people we know: it extends to the whole world, to all souls. We can't limit the scope of our self-giving or measure its effectiveness only by the immediate fruits we manage to discern. God allowed our Father to contemplate the triumph of Christ drawing all things to himself. We too, with eyes of faith, can and should see Christ's triumph each time we truly place him at the summit of our work. This is what we must strive to do each day, being demanding on ourselves without making excuses."

*Letter, March 1, 1991.*

• **We have to be Eucharistic souls**, my children, otherwise, we won't achieve anything good. Eucharistic souls, contemplatives in the middle of the world, with a heart that reaches out towards Jesus, because... for us he is the magnet that attracts us, the fountain of our life, the Light for our darkness, the motor that will bring our efforts to a safe harbour.

*Bishop Álvaro del Portillo  
Meditation, July 20, 1986*

• **Foster a great love for Jesus in the Eucharist.** Thus we exercise faith in his real presence, which will lead us to make many spiritual communions, and we will grow in the virtue of charity. And at the same time we are filled with hope. So the three theological virtues are in play. God, who is so good, has been waiting for us (...) for twenty centuries—waiting for us to be born and to reach the age for receiving First Holy Communion. And he continues waiting, until the end of time, for each soul. What a marvel of love!"

*Bishop Álvaro del Portillo  
A get-together, September 25, 1984.*



people. Salvador Bernal, who lived alongside the Servant of God for some time, described in his book, *A Memoir of Álvaro del Portillo*, how his Mass “impressed me above all by his intensity at the moment of consecration: the slow pronunciation of the words, natural and solemn at the same time; his elevation of the Body and the Blood, with his eyes fixed upon the Eucharistic species, while raising his hands as high as possible (I sensed an almost physical union between heaven and earth at that ineffable moment). And then his careful genuflection, following an old counsel of St. Josemaría.” As Don Álvaro himself wrote: “The Holy Mass is the root of supernatural life, and therefore of the eternal youth of our soul.

“Like our beloved Father, I too try to go up to the altar each day with a hunger to identify myself with Jesus. . . and to renew the divine Sacrifice of Calvary with the ardour of a person in love.

“Strive to live the Mass in this way, my daughters and sons. And even though the years go by, you will always be young, with the perennial youthfulness of Love.”

Don Álvaro was always young in Love, also because he always strove to make the tabernacle the centre and reference point of his life, speaking with Jesus in the Bread and in the Word, in the Eucharist and in prayer.

*Fr. Carlo Pioppi*

For more information on Don Álvaro:  
[www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org)

## FAVOURS RECEIVED THROUGH DON ÁLVARO'S INTERCESSION



### I recovered my vision

About the year 1994, or early 1995, I noticed a distortion in my vision and consulted a specialist who diagnosed my condition as dry macular degeneration. Another specialist confirmed the diagnosis.

A few months later, I visited the crypt where Bishop Alvaro del Portillo is buried in Rome and obtained a card with an intercessory prayer to him. I said that prayer daily asking his intercession for a cure of my macular degeneration. I prayed to no other saint for the cure though I must confess that there were days when I forgot to say it.

After a few months I woke one day to find my vision was as good as ever, the distortion had disappeared. Speaking to the doctor I

was told that these things happen. And while *miracle* may not fit this case, I am sure that Bishop Alvaro's intercession had its effect before God, and I give this testimony in gratitude.

*J. O'M., New York*

### "Everything happened between the 22nd and 23rd of March"

I have been attending days of recollection and talks offered by the Prelature of Opus Dei in London for several months.

One day I picked up a prayer card of Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. I didn't know much about him at the time.

On Monday, March 22, after saying my prayers, I picked up the prayer card of Don Álvaro, but I did not say the prayer. Instead I looked at his photograph and told him: "Don Álvaro, a short time ago God led me to your Prelature, and St. Josemaría is helping me a lot in everything. But I still don't know you very well. I know from the members of the Prelature that your process of canonization has begun, but I haven't gone to your intercession."

I had been looking for work for some time, but at that moment I didn't ask him for a job or any other favour. I only wanted to speak with him, as if he were present.

On the following day, Tuesday, March 23 (the anniversary of the death of Don Álvaro, as I learned later), I received an e-mail about an offer of a position which previously, in a moment of confusion, I had rejected. They told me I should begin working on a specif-

ic date in the near future. I called them right away, thinking they had made a mistake.

They listened to me very cordially and confirmed that they wanted me to start working for them.

I could not get over my surprise. I am completely sure that Bishop Álvaro del Portillo interceded for me.

*G. E., Surrey, England*

### "The little girl was very sick and the doctors were on strike."

Two months ago, an employee of ours gave birth to her fourth child, a daughter.

A few days before the baptism, she called to tell me that the baby was very ill and that she could not come to work.

A severe viral infection over the weekend had got worse, and they had to bring her to the hospital close to her village.

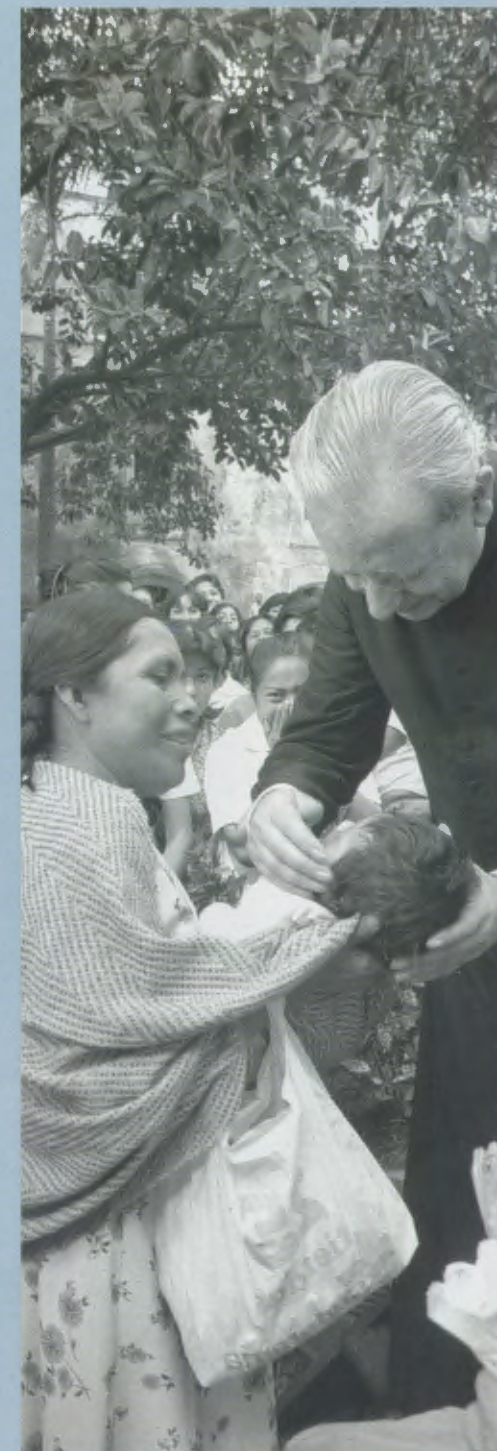
A strike by doctors was then taking place. Therefore they refused to admit her in the local hospital and in the hospital in the capital city. So we decided to take her to a private clinic, where they diagnosed bronchitis and prescribed several drugs.

The doctor said that they must try to ensure that it did not turn into pneumonia.

But the strike continued over the weekend and the baby received no medical attention.

On Monday morning the employee called to tell me that the child was worse, with her chest congested. The baby could hardly breathe and had not eaten in two days because of a heavy cough.

I asked our Lord to save the child and began saying the prayer for Don Álvaro's intercession over and over throughout the day. At 5 p.m. I received another call from my employee telling me that on returning





*M.T.J., San Salvador, El Salvador*



home after going into the village to call me, she had found the child much better.

Surprisingly her daughter had begun to breathe regularly and even wanted to eat something. Only a slight cough remained.

We were sure that our Lord had saved her life.

### He helped me find my car keys

One morning I went for a run through the “Hülser Weg,” a large forest near Krefeld.

I put the car keys in the pocket of my tracksuit and started running along the grassy paths through the forest.

About halfway through my planned run, I noticed that the keys were no longer in my pocket.

Upset with myself for not having closed the pocket well, I began to retrace my steps, while asking Don Álvaro for help. I realized it would be practically impossible to find the keys in the thick grass.

When I had gone about two miles I stepped on a hard object under some leaves.

It was my keys.

I am sure I owe this small favour to the intercession of Don Álvaro.

*G.K., Kempen, Germany*

## IN THE SERVICE OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross was started under the impetus of Don Álvaro del Portillo in 1984



“As the years go by, with God’s grace and the efforts of all of us, it will bear mature fruit both here in Rome and throughout the whole world. It is good that you dream, because our Lord will, as always, make those dreams fall short. You are the pioneers in a marvellous human and supernatural adventure which will have—and I repeat myself on purpose—an enormous impact with the passage of the years. We must try to do it very well, with the

desire that it be the seed of a future university.”

Time has made a reality of these words of Don Álvaro spoken back in 1984 at the beginning of the academic activities of what was then the Roman Atheneum of the Holy Cross. The seed has sprouted and become a large tree, rich in fruits of service to the universal Church and the particular Churches, through the study and teaching of the Church’s doc-



trine and laws, as Don Álvaro also said in 1984 when pointing out the purpose of that initiative that was still in its first steps.

In 1998, with the current Prelate of Opus Dei as Chancellor, the Atheneum was erected as a Pontifical University. Thanks to God and to the fidelity of Don Álvaro, another dream of St. Josemaría's was fulfilled.

At present the university has four departments (philosophy, theology, canon law and institutional communication), and an Institute for Advanced Religious Studies. More than five thousand students have already passed through its classrooms.

The multiplying effect of the effort of so many men and women who, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "strive to seek and promote the truth, with intellectual honesty and respect for Revelation, is a motive of hope for the Church in the twenty-first century."

Don Álvaro set in motion not only the university itself but also other institutions linked to it, such as the Sedes Sapientiae International Ecclesiastical College, a residence for seminarians who come, sent by their bishops, to study at the university.

In the 2004/2005 academic year, twenty years after Don Álvaro spoke those words back in 1984, 1,335 students from 65 different coun-

• **I am thinking too of those responsible** for priestly formation, whether academic or pastoral. I encourage them to pay special attention to the . . . preparation of those who will proclaim the Gospel to the men and women of today and, even more, of those who will devote themselves to theological research and teaching. . . . The grave responsibility to provide for the appropriate training of those charged with teaching . . . in seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties must not be neglected. Teaching in this field necessarily entails a suitable scholarly preparation, a systematic presentation of the great heritage of the Christian tradition and due discernment in the light of the current needs of the Church and the world.

John Paul II, Encyclical *Faith and Reason*, 105

For more information about the Pontifical University  
of the Holy Cross:  
[www.pusc.it](http://www.pusc.it)

tries were studying at the university.

To help many others take part in this adventure, organizations have been set up in various countries to promote the university.

One of these is the Roman Academic Centre Foundation, which has been active for fifteen years and is assisted by benefactors from all over the world.

"Without their help, great or small, which is always the fruit of love for God and veneration for the priesthood, we would not be able to carry out the good that is being done in the service of the Church," Bishop Javier Echevarría, Prelate of Opus Dei, said recently in regard to those who assist the university financially.



• The Apollinare Palace seat of the Holy Cross Pontifical University.



• **The Sedes Sapientiae International Ecclesiastical College** is a seminary established by the Holy See for the formation in Rome of candidates for the priesthood from dioceses all over the world. Sedes Sapientiae fulfills a desire of St. Josemaría Escrivá, who, moved by love for the Church and the Pope, dreamed of establishing a residence for the formation of seminarians close to the See of Peter. The Servant of God Álvaro del Portillo made this long-cherished vision a reality. The Sedes Sapientiae College is located in a building of the St. Pascal Baylon Conservatory in the Trastevere section of Rome. The students, sent by their respective bishops, after completing their ecclesiastical studies return to the dioceses where they are incardinated. Life in the seminary is characterized by an atmosphere of trust and freedom, order and fraternity, study and piety.