

On the Anniversary of the Women's Section and of the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, Prelatic Church of Our Lady of Peace, Rome (February 14, 2023)

We would like to begin this day of thanksgiving – and also this time of prayer – by renewing the resolution that our Father advised: “*Ut in gratiarum semper actione maneamus*,”^[1] that we should always be giving thanks. And this is so because we always, continually, have reason, Lord, to thank you for so much, for so much..., for much more than we know; because in all our life – also in those moments that in one way or another may seem negative to us because of difficulties – God's love has always been caring for us, protecting us.

And today, especially, we thank our Lord for our vocation, for that February 14, 1930 and February 14, 1943. A double anniversary of those very special graces from God for the world, for the Church, for each one of us. Because we have to see it this way, not as wonderful events in the past, but as events that have a very clear influence on our personal life, and not only since the year when we joined the Work, but always, for God was always thinking of us and we were present in those dates.

We thank you, Lord, because you think of us, because you take care of us constantly. And we give special thanks for the women in the Work, for the priests in the Work. And especially today we would like to thank you, Lord, for our unity: men, women, priests, laity. It is a small part of the Church, but it has a great unity within the variety: a unity of vocation, a unity of apostolic work – with the separation that you want, Lord, but always with a unity that is proper to a family. Today we also remember the anniversary of February 14, 1938, when our Father said that we should begin to pray the *Oremus pro Patre* in the Preces. Filiation, fraternity: the reality of the unity of the Work is a great gift of God. And when giving thanks to God on this double anniversary, we also thank you, Lord, for unity. And we thank our Father. And certainly our Lady, through whom all

graces reach us, including that of our vocation, the grace of the Work of God itself: willed by God, brought about by God's will through our Father but – as with every grace – with the intercession of our Blessed Mother Mary, who is the Mother of Opus Dei, Queen of Opus Dei.

And we give thanks to our Father for being a faithful instrument. That, from the very first moment and even before, when he had an inkling, when he felt, sensed, this desire of God without knowing what it was, he employed all the means; and afterwards all the means needed to bring the Work forward in such difficult times. Amid a terrible war, with few people to rely on, having to start all over again, even materially. Always being faithful.

Here, next to his mortal remains, we are going to thank our Father on this day especially for his fidelity, for employing all the means of prayer, work, mortification and apostolic drive to bring the Work forward, to bring us forward. Perhaps we sometimes think about what our life would be like if we hadn't been in the Work. And perhaps sometimes we are so foolish as to think it would be great – but it would be a disaster compared to what we are now. Whatever difficulties we may encounter, whatever experience we may have of our limitations, we thank you, Lord, for the Work, for the women's section, for the priests, We thank you for our personal vocation, because it is an immense gift, an immense gift. *Gratias tibi Deus, gratias tibi!* May today be a day on which this awareness, this certainty of being filled with God's love, with God's gift, with God's call, moves us to a more intense thanksgiving. Not only with words: also with words, but above all with the sentiments of our soul, with the joy of knowing that we are loved by God, chosen by God. Our joy shouldn't be grounded on our virtues, on our abilities, but on God's gift.

Unity of the men, women, priests, laity; each one in his or her place, but all with the same vocation, with the same apostolic mission, with the same spirit. A unity that we have to live by being a family, being a family.... Therefore this unity is a unity –like all true, human unity – based on charity. How often our Father insisted and told us forcefully: "Love one another, love one another!"^[2] And sometimes he reminded us of St. John's words in one of his epistles: "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren."^[3] It is an echo of our Lord's words,

of the new commandment: “That you love one another; even as I have loved you.”^[4]

We have received the treasure of the Work in our hands, and it is up to each one of us to ensure that this treasure is preserved: that it bear fruit in so many souls and is preserved faithfully throughout time. Of course, this also depends on our preserving something so essential as the family atmosphere, affection, charity and unity. St. Paul writes to the Ephesians – and he says this to us too – when he had been put in prison: “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.”^[5] The vocation leads us to live with great hope and spurs us to care for unity. A unity grounded on Lord, who is the one who gives us the capacity to truly love others, without distinctions. He gives us the strength to always foster what unites and to reject what separates. We also remember how our Father wanted to place in the oratory of the Council here in Rome, in Villa Tevere, those words of our Lord: “*Consummati in unum.*”^[6] And he remarked: “We are all with Christ one single reality.”^[7] Today is a wonderful day to ask our Lord to help us sense that we are one, and to behave accordingly. May everything that concerns the others be very much our own; we can’t let anyone in the Work feel the bitterness of indifference. And may we never be so foolish as to feel an indifference towards us that does not exist, because we are loved and understood, just as we try to understand and love the others.

Ut omnes unum sint! The unity of a family, but a family open to others, that wants to develop, that wants to grow. Hence it is a unity that continually overflows in apostolic zeal. Our Lord wanted the Work, both in the year 1928 and in the year 1930 (and in some way also in 1943, but especially in 1928 and 1930), he wanted it to be born in very difficult times for the world – specifically for Spain, where he wanted the Work to be born, although already with a spirit, with a reach that was universal. They were difficult times. And we should never be frightened by such moments. The current situation is also difficult. There will always be difficulties: for the apostolate, in one place or another, our personal difficulties as well, but

we should never be frightened, much less discouraged by the difficulties that the Work, that we, each one of us personally, may encounter in our life, in our apostolic efforts, in our work. Seeing so many difficult situations, even tragedies in the world, as there are now and always have been, in one way or another. let us never see them as something that doesn't affect us. Earthquakes, wars, persecutions. Everything is ours, everything is ours. And this doesn't lead us to become discouraged, but rather to pray, to intensify our union with our Lord, our eagerness for souls, to make reparation. And to do so always with joy, never losing hope. Knowing that we will always have the great weapon of prayer. The great weapon of work turned into prayer. The great weapon of *Deus nobiscum*: the knowledge that God is always with us. The weapon of prayer to carry out the Work. So many times we have recalled – as our Father frequently said – that we have no other weapon than prayer to carry out the Work. That is why today is also a day for each of us, feeling the joyful responsibility of doing Opus Dei in our personal lives, to see how we are using that weapon, the only one we have: prayer. Knowing, moreover, that prayer must also be prayer of the senses, a spirit of penance, mortification. We know very well that it is not a mere coincidence, but rather God's providence that our Lord wanted to give the Work the seal of the Holy Cross on that February 14, 1943. We know how our Father, right from the beginning, mortified himself so much to carry out the Work, with very strong mortifications, so strong that he said we should not do so much, but that the spirit had to remain the same, the constant mortification in small and ordinary things.

The first reading for today's Mass, from the Book of Sirach, contains some words attributed to the wisdom of God, seen as referring prophetically to our Lady and the Church: "I am the mother of fair love... and the mother of holy hope."^[8] We need to have hope when we think about the Work, about the world, also amid the difficulties that exist everywhere. Filled with hope, turning to our Lady who is the Mother of Hope because she is the Mother of Christ, and He is our hope. Our hope is not placed in our own strength, in our possibilities; it is placed in our Lord, because He is our hope. And our Lady is the Mother of Hope, the Mother of Christ, our Mother.

God is the foundation of our hope, Christ our Lord. The hope for each one of us to be faithful, to be saints, to become what our Lord wants us to be: truly saints. So often the experience of our limitations, of our defects, can make us think (if not in an explicit way, then as an underlying attitude) that it is a beautiful goal, but saints we will never be. And we are wrong, because only saints enter Heaven, perhaps through purgatory, but we have to be saints. Our Lord wants this and gives us the means, this is his will. Let us never be discouraged by our personal limitations. We can say – not with an act of pride, but with trust in our Lord– the same thing the apostles did: “*Possumus!*”^[9] We can! I can. Each one of us can say: Lord, I can be holy! Each one of you can say: I can be holy! I will be a saint because God wills it, because he has given me the means, because holiness will not consist in arriving at the end of life ready to be put in a “museum,” without any defects. We will always have defects, but we can always grow in love. Our Father told us that a saint is a person who struggles. We can achieve what our Lord has wanted with the Work: our holiness, that of so many people, also through our endeavor, our work.

The hope to be saints and also hope for the world, apostolic hope. We have an immense mission ahead of us, and those words of our Father need to often resound in our thoughts: “Heaven is determined that the Work be carried out.”^[10] When we experience difficulties: heaven is determined that the Work be carried out. And we too, Lord, want to be determined. First of all, with our faith, with our hope. That faith St. Paul speaks of with these words (our Father even wanted to engrave them in stone on one of the doors of these buildings): “*Semper, scientes quod labor vester non est inanis in Domino.*”^[11] We must always be convinced that our work is never useless before God, that nothing is lost (our Father also said this), nothing is lost. May we have hope.

Let us ask our Lady, through our Father’s intercession, that we may be people of hope, that we may not lose heart. And with St. Paul we pray: “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”^[12] We make this prayer our own. The God of hope: God is the God of hope, the one who gives us hope. He is our hope. It is not our merits, our virtues; the Lord is our hope. May the God of hope fill us with all joy, we ask him; may

he fill us with all joy and peace in faith, in security, with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Joy and peace, *gaudium cum pace, gaudium cum pace...* We ask you Lord, through the intercession of our Father, today, now, for us, for all our sisters, for all our brothers: joy and peace. A joy and peace grounded on our Lord, on our Lady, who is the Mother of Holy Hope.

And as we read in the first reading, our Lady is also *Mater pulchrae dilectionis*, Mother of Fair Love. But the sacred text adds that she is also Mother of sorrow. A beautiful love that goes hand in hand with sorrow. The Gospel for the Mass today is the episode when our Lord remains in the Temple without telling our Lady and St. Joseph. When the time came to leave, they thought that the Child – now 12 years old – would be with friends in the caravan, but they did not find him. They began to look for him and could not find him anywhere. Three days searching. We have meditated on it so many times. And when they find him, our Lady is surprised: “Why have you treated us so?”^[13] For they find him and it is not that he was lost, but that he had stayed there because he had wanted to stay there, so calmly. And his answer to that question is even more incomprehensible: “How is it that you sought me?”^[14] The Gospel tells us clearly: our Lady and St. Joseph did not understand our Lord.^[15] We also ask you today, Lord, that we are not surprised when sometimes we do not understand you. When we do not understand God’s providence – your plans, what happens in the world, what happens in our own life – may we do what our Lady did: transform this into a reason for prayer,^[16] into love. To love what we do not understand. As Mary is the Mother of Fair Love, she teaches us to love even without understanding. Because then a greater knowledge is attained. Our Father used to say (you will remember it well) that “love is most wise.”^[17] When we love, we end up understanding, with an understanding that perhaps is not a purely intellectual understanding, but it is an understanding of spiritual attunement. We are in tune with God, even if we do not understand. And it is a great wisdom to be in harmony with God’s plans when we do not understand them. Mother of ours, Mother of Fair Love, help us to have the love that enables us to understand, to have an understanding that leads us to not be disconcerted, to not be distressed by what we do not fully understand, by what humanly disconcerts us at first.

Mother of Fair Love, also help us to love; may our love too be a beautiful love, a self-sacrificing love, a love that fills us with joy, that is poured out in fraternity, in understanding, in a spirit of service. May this beautiful love – Mother, you have to obtain it for us – may it increase more and more, a love granted to us by our Lord, by the Holy Spirit. A beautiful love that leads us to understand better, and also to forgive. May the time come – we have so often considered this in our life – when we do not need to forgive because we never feel offended. Therefore, may we love others, may we never feel offended. Our Father told us this, you remember it well, when he said: “I haven’t needed to learn how to forgive, because our Lord has taught me how to love.”^[18]

Lord, we ask you, through our Father’s intercession, to teach us to love. May our Lady obtain for us from our Lord the beautiful love that is fraternity, that is self-giving – that is not sentimentalism but a spirit of service, truly feeling the needs of others as our own. Our Mother, Mother of Holy Hope, Mother of Fair Love, fill us, as a gift from God, with an ever greater hope and a beautiful love, which leads us to always be very happy giving ourselves to others, sacrificing ourselves for others.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Sixth Station, 4.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, 454.

^[3] *1 Jn* 3:14.

^[4] *Jn* 13:34.

^[5] Cf. *Eph* 4:1–4.

^[6] *Jn* 17:23.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *Letter September 29, 1957*, no. 83.

^[8] Cf. *Sir* 24:24.

^[9] *Mt* 20:22.

^[10] St. Josemaría, *Instruction*, March 19, 1934, no. 47.

^[11] *1 Cor* 15:58 (“Knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain”).

^[12] *Rom* 15:13.

^[13] *Lk* 2:48.

[14] *Lk* 2:49.

[15] Cf. *Lk* 2:50.

[16] Cf. *Lk* 2:51.

[17] Javier Echevarría, *Memoria del Beato Josemaría Escrivá (Entrevista con Salvador Bernal)*, Rialp, 2nd ed. Madrid 2000, p. 261.

[18] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, 804.

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Homilies

Mass on the Feast of Blessed Alvaro, Basilica of St. Eugene, Rome (May 12, 2023)

Today we celebrate the feast of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. We have begun this Holy Mass with some words in the Entrance Antiphon that could well be applied to Don Alvaro: “This is the steward, faithful and prudent, whom the Lord set over his household.” As shepherd of the family of Opus Dei, his overriding concern was to care for his daughters and sons. In this way he served the Church, and also reached a multitude of other souls.

The Mass readings show us the figure of the Good Shepherd. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, assures his people that, despite the difficulties, He will never abandon them. “I myself will search for my sheep . . . I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep . . . I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak” (*Ez* 34:11-16). It is God who guides us. It is God who saves us. And Don Alvaro knew this very well. He was aware that he had many talents and, even more, that he had received them from our Lord to assist in the fatherly care of the people entrusted to