

priestly ordination. For thousands of people from countries all over the world, it will be an opportunity to visit the places related to the birth of Opus Dei, founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928 by Saint Josemaría. Moreover, the numerous faithful and friends of the Prelature who live in Madrid will be happy to assist in welcoming participants from other places. Although this news has been published in some of the media, I must specify that only now have we known of the approval received from the Holy See.

3. And for those who live in Rome or in Italy?

Rome is also the city of Don Alvaro, where he lived the greater part of his life (from 1946 to 1994) and where he worked as shepherd of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

We are studying with the competent authorities the possibility that, during the days following the beatification, Don Alvaro's body (which rests in the crypt of the prelatric church of our Lady of Peace in Rome) will be taken temporarily to the Basilica of Saint Eugene. Thus that those who so desire, certainly quite a large number of people, will be able to pray before the mortal remains of the new Blessed. Also being organized is the possibility that, on the Wednesday after the beatification, many faithful will have the opportunity to take part in Pope Francis' Wednesday audience, to show in this way their union with

the Roman Pontiff and their filial gratitude for the beatification.

4. What about the collection that has been announced to assist several social initiatives in Africa?

The moment I received news of the future beatification, the desire came to mind that it also be an occasion to help needy people. Specifically, to ask each participant for a small sacrifice, to offer a donation to assist four social services projects in the African continent that arose from the inspiration and direct impulse of Bishop del Portillo. *Harambee* (an NGO born on the occasion of the canonization of Saint Josemaría) was asked to coordinate this effort. I am sure that, from Heaven, Don Alvaro will look with joy at this "gift," which seeks to assist African initiatives for education and the fight against poverty.

**"Francis Gives Us
a Joyful Mission,"**
Catholic Herald,
London,
(March 7, 2014)

"We become fully human when we become more than human, when we let God bring us beyond ourselves in order to attain the fullest truth of our being. Here we find the source and inspiration of all our efforts

at evangelization. For if we have received the love which restores meaning to our lives, how can we fail to share that love with others?" These words by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) (no. 8) evoke our divinization, the raising-up of our nature that is granted to us as a gift by God. In Christ we discover who we are as human beings, and the greatness of our vocation (see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). Our encounter with Jesus gives rise to a desire to share our joy with others (see EG no. 3). Pope Francis is inviting us "to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the 'peripheries' in need of the light of the Gospel" (EG no. 20).

The "going forth" to which the Pope is inviting us has traditionally been called "apostolate" and "evangelization" in the Church. This apostolate is characterized by, among other things, absolute respect for freedom, and is totally different from the negative meaning that the word "proselytism" has acquired, chiefly in the twentieth century. This is what the Pope says at no. 15 of *Evangelii Gaudium*: "It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but 'by attraction.'" Christ's teaching clearly excludes any approach that does not respect other people's freedom and personal dignity. God wants to be loved truly, and that implies a free choice. Every vocation is a love story and a meeting of two freedoms: God's call and the human person's response

The key that defines a genuinely Christian attitude is Love. The words used by Pope Francis show this clearly: "I invite" (EG nos. 3, 33 and 108), "let me say this" (EG no. 3); he talks about a "brimming heart" (EG no. 5) and encourages us to enter into "this great stream of joy" that is the Christian community; he urges people not to place unnecessary conditions on the reception of Baptism or the Sacrament of Confirmation.

"Entering." Jesus Christ rebuked the scribes and Pharisees: "you neither enter yourselves, nor allow those who would enter to go in" (*Mt* 23:13). Allowing people to enter, letting them in, inviting them to enter: the force that attracts people is, as St Josemaría said, "abundance of light," human friendliness, prayer and personal sacrifice, Christ's presence in Christians. "True love means going out of oneself, giving oneself" (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 43). This is the real meaning of Christian apostolate, and the original meaning of the word proselytism as traditionally understood in the Church, stemming from a Hebrew form rendered into Greek. Lacordaire expressed it in a lapidary phrase: "Just as there is no Christian without love, so there is no Christian without proselytism."

Person-to-person apostolate means spending time with our neighbor, and its strength is nothing other than prayer,

charity-filled patience, understanding, friendship, and love for freedom. It means coming out of ourselves to be concerned about others and share with them the truest and most beautiful thing we have: our Christian vocation. Christ's command "Follow me," far from exerting force, respects each individual's freedom. This is shown eloquently—and sadly—in the dialogue of Jesus with the rich young man. And today? Pope Francis says: "At a time when we most need a missionary dynamism which will bring salt and light to the world, many lay people fear that they may be asked to undertake some apostolic work and they seek to avoid any responsibility that may take away from their free time" (EG no. 81).

The light of the Gospel is "luminous and attractive" (EG no. 100), because it is the law of love that invites us to do good (EG nos. 100-101). On seeing Christians' good works, our neighbour is led to give glory to God (see *Mt* 5:16) – to realize and praise God's boundless love; it is a divine light, not a merely human one. In this sense, apostolate – a holy zeal for souls – consists of bearing witness to the light, as St. John says (*John* 1:7). It means spreading an abundance of light, without the slightest hint of imposing things upon people but with the utmost respect. And this is so because God only wants love, and so he acts gently – gen-

tly and strongly (see *Wisdom* 8:1). In his Message for the 20th World Day of Prayer for Vocations (February 2, 1983), Blessed John Paul II said, "We should have no fear in proposing the Lord's call directly to a young or less young person. It is an act of esteem and confidence. It can be a moment of light and grace." Timidity in this regard could betray a lack of faith and of humility, and is overcome with the light of Christ that each Christian is called to pass on to others.

What light? Pope Benedict XVI said at the end of his first encyclical: "Love is the light—and in the end, the only light—that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practice it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world" (*Deus Caritas Est*, no. 39). In perfect continuity with this message, Pope Francis says in his first encyclical that "The movement of love between Father, Son and Spirit runs through our history, and Christ draws us to himself in order to save us (see *John* 12:32)" (*Lumen Fidei*, no. 59).

The polar opposite of the false type of proselytism that does not respect the human person, is apostolate conceived of as attraction. In other words, bringing

people, transparently and respectfully, to face the possibility of generous self-dedication, which is exactly what the Pope describes. This apostolate includes witness that is fully aware of the other person's freedom and dignity, and enables the Christian heart to share in the divine and human love of Jesus. And when it does, that heart is filled with an uncontrollable desire to pass on the joy of the Gospel to others.

✠ Javier Echevarría
Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei

“Thank You, Holy Father,” on the first anniversary of Pope Francis’s pontificate, Various news agencies (March 12, 2014)

The conference for the centennial of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo’s birth, which we are beginning today, coincides with Pope Francis’ annual retreat and with the first anniversary of his election to the see of Peter.

Therefore I would like to begin these three days of reflection with the deepest gratitude to the Holy Spirit for his continual assistance to the People of

God. Naturally, we also want to thank Pope Francis for the apostolic dynamism he is spreading around him and his great concern to draw close to each person.

His encouragement is a spur to all Christians to strive to bring Christ’s love and mercy to the furthest corners of the world. Many people have seen in Pope Francis a priest who prays a lot and who is always ready to listen to those he is with. All this is a reason for great filial joy and thanksgiving to heaven.

A central point of the preaching of Alvaro del Portillo was precisely fidelity to the Church and love for the Pope. Wherever he went, Bishop del Portillo asked people to pray for the intentions of the Roman Pontiff. He was always moved by the desire to bring “Rome to the outposts of the earth” and “the outposts to the Pope,” as St. Josemaría said (*The Forge*, no. 638).

Following Venerable Alvaro del Portillo’s example, let us be closely united to the Pope and his intentions on his retreat in Ariccia, as he asked of us in his Sunday Angelus.

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