

close to the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist. Then we will all become people who, like our Lady, receive Christ, carry him with us

and make him known to all those we encounter.

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Articles and Interviews

“Holiness: a Vocation for Everybody,” *Palabra*, Spain (August-September 2014)

What is the meaning, the importance of a beatification or canonization? The realization that Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, first Prelate of Opus Dei and successor to Saint Josemaría at the head of this institution of the Church, will soon be raised to the altars spurs us to ask this question. Pope Francis, in referring to the saints, gives us this answer: God chooses certain people so that we might see more clearly the reality of sanctity, so that we might see that it is He who sanctifies . . . This is the first rule of sanctity: Christ must increase and we must decrease (Homily, May 9, 2014).

When the Church declares the sanctity of one of her daughters or sons, she highlights in a special way the mission to which she is called: namely, to lead to Heaven those she has engendered to a new life, through the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every beatification or canonization is an occasion to rejoice for the People of God

still journeying here on earth. As the moment approaches when Don Alvaro will be numbered among the blessed, it is only natural that our joy be shown in thanksgiving to God, from whom all sanctity proceeds.

For the canonization of Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, Cardinal Ratzinger said that people can sometimes have a mistaken concept of sanctity, as though the persons beatified or canonized were “supermen” or “superwomen.” Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: “Heroic virtue does not mean that the saint performs a type of ‘gymnastics’ of holiness, something that normal people do not dare to do . . . Holiness then becomes a thing reserved for some ‘greats’ whose images we see on the altars, and who are completely different from us ordinary sinners. But this is a mistaken notion of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected—and this seems to me the central point—precisely by Josemaría Escrivá” (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in *L’Osservatore Romano*, October 6, 2002).

These words express very well the meaning of the beatification of Bishop del Portillo. Don Alvaro was, certainly, a person to whom God had granted great human and

supernatural gifts. Nevertheless, his daily path was one of ordinary life lived with a strong and joyful faithfulness. He never strove to shine out with his own light, but rather to always reflect the divine light by following loyally the spirit of Opus Dei, which he learned directly from the words and example of Saint Josemaría. Don Alvaro attained sanctity, with God's grace and his own generous correspondence, by putting into practice in an extraordinary way an ordinary Christian life.

His beatification reminds us (and here resides the meaning of this act of the Church) that holiness is truly accessible to all the baptized, if they correspond with complete generosity to their Christian vocation. This calling spurs us to seek identification with Christ, each in our own circumstances and state in life. And it requires the effort to carry the Cross each day: there is no identification with Christ if we don't love the Holy Cross. For the great majority of people, this is an ordinary cross, which they are asked to take up and bear with joy in their daily life: in the heart of the family, in the social and sporting environment, in health and in sickness, in work and in rest. Therefore, it does not involve carrying out extraordinary actions, or possessing exceptional charisms; rather it means following the Master's example by bearing the small hardships of each day.

Don Alvaro put into practice with daily constancy Saint Josemaría's advice to seek God in daily life. As the founder of Opus Dei

once said: There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him . . . Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind (*Conversations*, 114 and 113).

The example of the saints stirs up in our heart the desire to be like them: the eagerness to rejoice eternally in the Blessed Trinity, to belong forever to the great family of God, very close to Jesus and our Lady. "To be holy does not mean being superior to others; the saint can be very weak, with many mistakes in his life. Holiness is this profound contact with God, becoming a friend of God: it is letting the Other work, the Only One who can really make the world both good and happy" (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, October 6, 2002).

Alvaro del Portillo's beatification invites us to see each day as a call to take up once again with new vigor our Christian life, and to thus experience more intensely the joy of the Gospel. The ceremony on the upcoming 27th of September reminds us once again of the universal calling to holiness, preached untiringly by Saint Josemaría Escrivá and reaffirmed forcefully by Vatican II.

✠ Javier Echevarría.
Prelate of Opus Dei.