

The Roman Pontiff

Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the Prelate of Opus Dei on the Occasion of the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo (June 26, 2014)

Dear brother,

The beatification of the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo, faithful collaborator of St. Josemaría Escrivá and his first successor at the head of Opus Dei, is a moment of special joy for all the faithful of the Prelature, and also for you, who were for so long a witness to his love for God and others, and his fidelity to the Church and to his vocation. I too wish to unite myself to your joy and to thank God, who embellishes the face of the Church with the holiness of her children.

His beatification will take place in Madrid, the city where he was born and spent his childhood and youth. Here his life began to take shape in the simplicity of family life, through friendship and service to others, as when he went to outlying districts to help provide human and Christian formation to so many people in need. And in this city, above all, there took

place the event that definitively marked the course of his life: his meeting with St. Josemaría Escrivá, from whom he learned to fall more in love with Christ every day. Yes, to fall in love with Christ. This is the path to holiness that every Christian has to follow: to let ourselves be loved by the Lord, to open up our hearts to his love, and to allow him to be the one who guides our lives.

I like to recall the aspiration that the Servant of God would often repeat, especially for personal celebrations and anniversaries: "Thank you; forgive me; help me more!" These words bring us closer to the reality of his interior life and his relationship with the Lord, and can also help to give a new impulse to our own Christian life.

In the first place, Thank you. This is the soul's immediate, spontaneous reaction on experiencing God's goodness. It cannot be otherwise. He always goes ahead of us. However hard we try, his love always arrives first, touches and caresses us first. He takes the initiative and is always waiting for us. Alvaro del Portillo was aware of the many gifts God had given him, and thanked God for that manifestation of his fatherly love. But he did not stop at that: his recognition of our Lord's love awakened in his heart desires to follow him with greater commitment and generosity, and to lead

a life of humble service to others. Especially outstanding was his love for the Church, the Spouse of Christ, whom he served with a heart devoid of worldly self-interest, far from discord, welcoming towards everyone and always seeking in others what was positive, what united, what was constructive. He never spoke a word of complaint or criticism, even at especially difficult times, but instead, as he had learned from St. Josemaría, he always responded with prayer, forgiveness, understanding and sincere charity.

Forgive me. He often confessed that he saw himself empty-handed before God, incapable of responding to so much generosity. But to admit our poverty as human beings is not the result of despair but trusting abandonment in God who is our Father. It means opening ourselves to his mercy, his love, which is able to regenerate our life. His love does not humiliate us, nor cast us into the depths of guilt, but embraces us, lifts us up from our prostration and enables us to go forward with more determination and joy. The Servant of God Alvaro knew the need we have of God's mercy, and devoted a lot of his own energy to encouraging the people he met to go to the sacrament of Confession, the sacrament of joy. How important it is to feel the tenderness of God's love, and discover that there is still time to love!

Help me more. Yes, the Lord never abandons us, he is always at our side; he journeys with us, and every day he expects new love from us. His

grace will not fail us, and with his help we can take his name to the whole world. The heart of the new Blessed beat with the desire to bring the Good News to all hearts. And so he traveled to many countries to foster new projects for evangelization, undeterred by difficulties, moved by his love for God and his brothers and sisters. One who is very immersed in God is able to be very close to other people. The first condition for announcing Christ to them is to love them, because Christ loves them before we do. We have to leave behind our selfish concerns and love of comfort, and go out to meet our brothers and sisters. That is where our Lord is awaiting us. We cannot keep our faith to ourselves: it is a gift we have received to give away and share with others.

Thank you, forgive me, help me! These words express the pressing concern of a life that is centered on God. It is the life of someone who has been touched by the greatest Love and who lives totally on that love; someone who, while experiencing their own human weakness and limitations, trusts in God's mercy and wants all mankind, their brothers and sisters, to experience it too.

Dear brother, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo is sending us a very clear message. He is telling us to trust in the Lord, that he is our brother, our friend, who never lets us down and is always at our side. He is encouraging us not to be afraid to go against the current and suffer for announcing the Gospel. He is also teaching us that in

the simplicity of our daily lives we can find a sure path to holiness.

I ask all the faithful of the Prelature, priests and lay-people, as well as all those who take part in its activities, to please pray for me. At the same time, I give them all my Apostolic Blessing.

May Jesus bless you, and may the Holy Virgin watch over you.

Fraternally,
Franciscus

Address at a General Audience (November 19, 2014)

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good morning,

One of the great gifts from the Second Vatican Council was that of recovering a vision of the Church founded on communion, and grasping anew the principle of authority and hierarchy in this perspective. This has helped us to better understand that all Christians, insofar as they have been baptized, are equal in dignity before the Lord and share in the same vocation, that is, to sainthood (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 39-42). Now let us ask ourselves: what does this universal vocation to being saints consist in? And how can we realize it?

First of all, we must bear clearly in mind that sanctity is not something

we can procure for ourselves, that we can obtain by our own qualities and abilities. Sanctity is a gift, it is a gift granted to us by the Lord Jesus, when He takes us to Himself and clothes us in Himself, He makes us like Him. In his Letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul states that “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her” (5:25-26). You see, sainthood truly is the most beautiful face of the Church, the most beautiful face: it is to rediscover oneself in communion with God, in the fullness of his life and of his love. Sanctity is understood, then, not as a prerogative of the few: sanctity is a gift offered to all, no one excluded, by which the distinctive character of every Christian is constituted.

All this makes us understand that, in order to be saints, there is no need to be bishops, priests or religious: no, we are all called to be saints! So, many times we are tempted to think that sainthood is reserved only to those who have the opportunity to break away from daily affairs in order to dedicate themselves exclusively to prayer. But it is not so! Some think that sanctity is to close your eyes and to look like a holy icon. No! This is not sanctity! Sanctity is something greater, deeper, which God gives us. Indeed, it is precisely in living with love and offering one’s own Christian witness in everyday affairs that we are called to become saints. And each in the conditions and the state of life in which he or she finds him- or herself. But you are consecrated. Are you consecrated? — Be a saint by living out