

*Romana* dedicated almost all of its 19th issue (July-December, 1994) to the death of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, with broad coverage of the days immediately after his death, reports of the reactions around the world, and an overview of the pastoral activity carried out by Opus Dei's prelate during his final months.

Since then, the Prelature has received numerous requests for further news about this extraordinary person who was the first, and a most faithful, successor to the founder. As a result, the new bishop prelate of Opus Dei, Javier Echevarria, suggested that the editors of *Romana* publish this Supplement. It is a brief sketch of the salient traits, the human and spiritual dimensions, of the beloved personality of Alvaro del Portillo.

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**Supplement to *Romana*, the semi-annual bulletin of the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, no. 19, year 10.**

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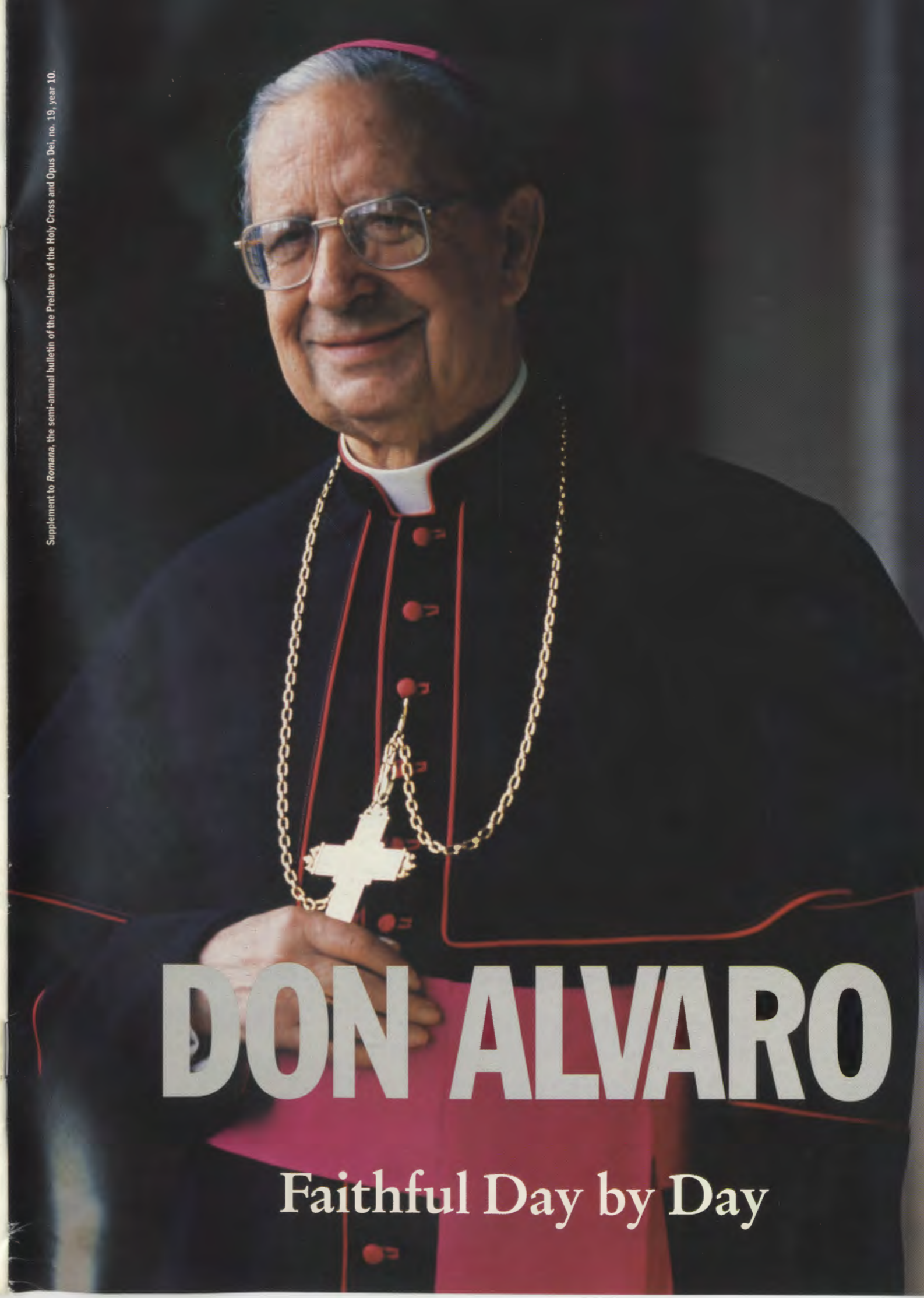
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**AUTHORIZATION FROM THE TRIBUNAL OF ROME,**  
no. 314/86 of  
June 17, 1986.

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# DON ALVARO

Faithful Day by Day

**F**or a man of God it was a perfectly scripted happy ending. After a lifetime of service, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei, died peacefully at the age of 80 upon returning from a long desired pilgrimage to the Holy Land. It was a finale prearranged in every detail, even from the very beginning over half a century ago.

The ever-smiling, gray-haired priest who, in the early morning hours of Wednesday, March 23, 1994, lay dying in his bed surrounded by his spiritual sons, had been at the helm of Opus Dei as the successor to Blessed Josemaria for close to 19 years. He was a bishop and prelate of a worldwide Catholic institution whose spirit is lived by hundreds of thousands of men and women of every age and social condition.

Glancing at a photograph of "Don" Alvaro, as many affectionately called him, one cannot help notice the serenity and slight smile. And therein lies the man. It is not the naive smile of a child who has not yet suffered. Instead it is the knowing smile

of a father made strong by love, a smile arising from the harmonious heart of a rich life and love. It isn't simply good nature. It reflects the soul, an interior state displayed on the face until it becomes a distinguishing feature, a quality even reflected in the wrinkles that had etched around that smile.

Countless persons have lingered on the memories of that smile and glow of affection and peace, as they warmly remember the bishop, their spiritual father, their recently deceased friend. Cardinals, bishops and priests, civil authorities and common folk: all, in tacit agreement, were struck and as it were charmed by the expression of that man.

Even the Holy Father, John Paul II, paid his respects by breaking protocol to make a final visit to his friend's wake in the Prelature's church on Viale Bruno Buozzi in Rome, next to where the prelate and his spiritual sons and daughters worked.

It is not unusual to get to know a man by a physical expression so characteristic of him. Even in day-to-day life, friendships and acquaintances begin that way.

**When a person dies who has loved much and who in turn has been greatly loved—someone who radiated peace and serenity, in short, a man of God—the question arises, what was his secret? How did such a fruitful life begin and develop?**

## **BISHOP ALVARO DEL PORTILLO PRELATE OF OPUS DEI 1914-1994**

### **A faithful father**

"Alvaro is a model, the son of mine who has worked the hardest and suffered the most for the Work, the one who has best known how to grasp my spirit." So wrote Blessed Josemaria Escriva, Opus Dei's founder, in a 1962

letter, introducing the person behind that smile.

Born in Madrid on March 11, 1914, Alvaro del Portillo met Opus Dei in 1935, only seven years after its founding. From that moment he would be at the founder's side, succeeding him as the head of Opus Dei on September 15, 1975, only months after Blessed Josemaria died and went to heaven on June 26.

He was present at the expansion of the institution practically from the

beginning. When he joined, the Work had no more than ten members; at his death there were almost 80,000 members, some 20,000 more than in 1975. Following the death of Blessed Josemaria, and under Bishop del Portillo's direction between 1975 and 1994, Opus Dei began apostolic activities in 20 new countries on five continents, in such places as Sweden, India, Israel, Zaire and New Zealand.

Moreover, under his governance Opus Dei reached two decisive

*Bishop del Portillo at his desk, the same used by Blessed Josemaria Escriva, the founder of Opus Dei.*



milestones: first, the juridical configuration that best corresponded to the foundational charism, namely, Opus Dei's establishment as a personal Prelature by John Paul II on November 28, 1982; and second, Josemaria Escriva's beatification, which the same Pope solemnly proclaimed in St. Peter's Square on May 17, 1992.

These facts alone would qualify the life of the man in the photograph as a great success. And yet it is likely that Bishop del Portillo would smile even more while protesting that these were not personal successes.

The slightest trace of triumphalism or self complacency were alien to him. When he succeeded the founder, he put things in their proper perspective when he said: "I know, with the greatest certainty, that divine assistance will never be lacking me, but I have to correspond to it, so I beg you for the strength of your prayers. Commend me to God, so that, with his grace, I might be good and faithful. If our founder, who was a saint, continually asked for prayers, insisting that we plead for him, imagine how much prayer I need, since I'm far from being holy."



## A simple story

Where does this man's story begin? It all started with a normal but deeply Christian family early in this century.

Alvaro was the third of eight children. He was a boy much like any other. A school classmate, Jose Maria Hernandez de Garnica, later also a member of Opus Dei (†1972) remembered him as "a strong fellow of excellent character." He added a supporting observation: "He was a tough and loyal fullback on his class soccer team, very much feared by the opposing forwards."

Bishop del Portillo (right) and the founder. He was continually at his side, from 1935 to 1975.



He was also an excellent student, to such an extent that following high school he embarked on a very demanding course of studies. Because it was allowed, he pursued

two degrees at the same time: *Asistente* in public works and *Laureado* in civil engineering. The first degree, requiring three years of school, would allow him to begin



A 1989 meeting of Bishop del Portillo with faithful of the Opus Dei Prelature and their friends in Barcelona. "Catechetical visits," as he liked to call them, were a constant part of the prelate's activity.

working right away, thus sparing his family the financial burden of his remaining engineering studies. Earning his first degree in 1934, he began to work as a specialist with the bridges and building unit of the department of public works.

That is how he was found in the 1930s, a decade full of historic events for Spain and Europe. And then, almost as if by chance, unexpected



This tapestry depicts Josemaria Escriva, Opus Dei's founder, as it hung in St. Peter's Square on May 17, 1992, the day of his beatification.

The Prelature of Opus Dei has close to 80,000 lay faithful, spread throughout the world. Most of them are married and seek to draw close to God by fulfilling their ordinary duties, in the place and culture where the divine call reached them. In the photo, Bishop del Portillo poses with a family from Nairobi, Kenya.

opportunities arose in Alvaro's life: meeting a young priest, an unknown institution, a new message, a calling from God, something unsought but for which life had prepared him well.

This is what Blessed Josemaria said about that episode some 36 years later: "For years I had prayed for Alvaro. One of his aunts had told me about him. She was already an elderly lady who volunteered her time to work in an apostolic initiative in Madrid to which I also contributed my efforts. From time to time she



Alvaro del Portillo at age three.

would boast about her nephew, Alvaro, who was studying for two degrees at the same time. He was just beginning his studies, or if I remember correctly, just about to begin, but she was already speaking fondly and enthusiastically about his heavy load. She was one of those older unmarried ladies there seem to be in every family. So then I began to pray for Alvaro. I had a taste of disappointment when I realized that he would not come that easily! But then it would not be true to say that he resisted that much either."

## The Prelate of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei

**O**pus Dei was founded in Madrid on October 2, 1928, by the Spanish priest Josemaria Escriva (1902-75) with the purpose of spreading throughout society a profound awareness of the universal call to personal and apostolic holiness in daily life, especially through work. The institution aims to offer training (doctrinal, spiritual, apostolic) to ordinary Christians, tailored to the particular civil, family, professional and social situation of each. They can thus more effectively strive to "sanctify the world from within" by drawing all human affairs as well as their colleagues closer to God.

From the outset Opus Dei has had the support and approval of the Church's hierarchy. Its establishment as a personal Prelature by Pope John Paul II with the Apostolic Constitution *Ut sit* of November 28, 1982, gave Opus Dei a juridical configuration in complete conformity with its foundational charism and the pastoral phenomenon that such a foundational grace had given rise to in the Church.

On May 17, 1992, in St. Peter's Square, the same Pope beatified the founder, Josemaria Escriva.

The Prelature of Opus Dei is governed by a prelate whose election is confirmed by the Pope. After the death of Bishop del Portillo, Msgr. Javier Echevarria was elected as prelate and consecrated as a bishop by John Paul II on January 6, 1995.

The Prelature is made up of its own clergy and laity, men and women, single and married, of every social class and condition. According to the *Annuario*

*Pontificio* (1995) it has 1,533 secular priests, 370 seminarians, and 77,867 lay faithful. The faithful of the Prelature—priests and laity, fully sharing the same divine vocation—strive to convert their ordinary daily occupations into prayer and effective Christian witness, bringing the Gospel's light to bear on all sectors of society.

In temporal affairs (professional, financial, cultural, political, and so on) each enjoys the same complete freedom of choice as any other Catholic, tempered only by living in accordance with the dictates of Christian faith and morals.

The primary apostolate of Opus Dei is that which each member carries out with family, friends, and acquaintances. The Opus Dei Prelature, as such, offers pastoral orientation to a variety of initiatives promoting human and social development throughout the world.

Ordained members of Opus Dei make up the Prelature's clergy. They work exclusively to foster its pastoral goals and act under the prelate's jurisdiction. With ordination, they also belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, an association inseparably united to Opus Dei and presided over by the same prelate.

Besides these priests, other secular priests—those incardinated in a diocese—can belong to the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross in response to a specific vocation that inspires them to live according to Opus Dei's spirit. They remain under their bishop's jurisdiction in everything pertaining to the exercise of their ministry.

Opus Dei also has cooperators, among whom are non-Catholics and even non-Christians. Without belonging to the Prelature as such, these cooperators help out its apostolic undertakings with their prayer, work and financial support.



With his sister Teresa in 1927.

At last Alvaro came around. Two of his classmates invited him to teach the Catholic faith in one of the poorest slums of the Spanish capital. It was fairly common for Catholic students to volunteer for works of charity such as this. Alvaro was no exception. He thus heard about a priest who was going out of his way for others, traveling on foot from one end of Madrid to the other, who spoke with enthusiasm about the prospect of both men and women finding God in daily tasks and especially in their work.

Sooner or later he was sure to meet him. Some time later friends invited him to a day of recollection preached by that priest, Josemaria

University students surround Opus Dei's founder. They are some of the men who frequented the university residence Blessed Josemaria opened in Madrid. Alvaro is standing to the far right.

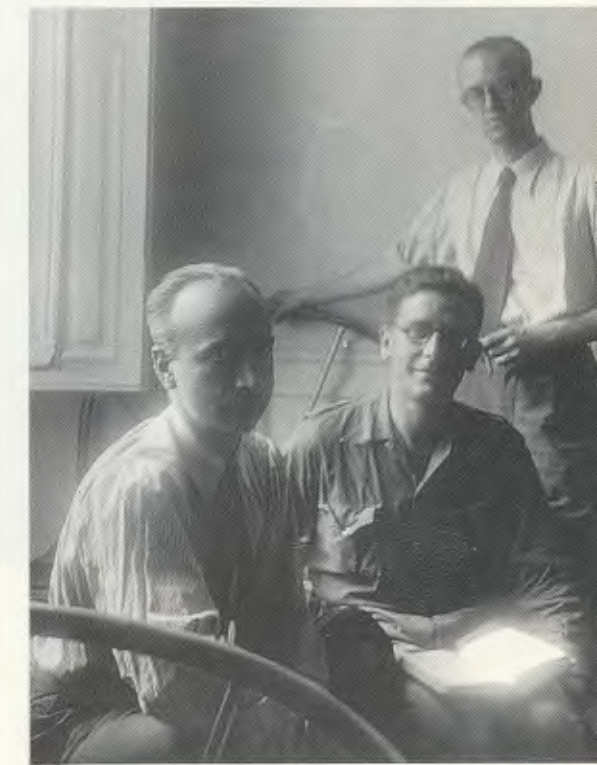
Escriva. It took place the day before Alvaro was to leave for his summer vacation, July 7, 1935.

What was destined to happen occurred in the space of a single morning. Alvaro recalled that occasion: "During that morning of recollection the Father preached a meditation on love for God and for the Virgin Mary that hit me like an earthquake. Then there was a second meditation. The Father had told the fellow who brought me to invite me to join the Work that afternoon. But the fellow jumped the gun and asked me that very morning and I said 'yes.'"

There is always something striking in a personal spiritual call, usually referred to as a "vocation," whether it takes place suddenly, as with Paul of Tarsus, or over time—the more usual case—in answer to an uneasiness deep in one's soul. The history of "vocations" is as varied as the persons involved, because "vocation," the call, is always something personal and not repeatable.

In the case of young Alvaro it was something sudden. But as his prompt response to God's call attests, the surprise did not rob him of his peace. The seriousness and thoughtfulness

of his reaction cannot be doubted. His life from that moment on shows he made the right decision. God himself offers the best guarantee of trustworthiness and steadiness in the early periods of a vocation. God never betrays those who trust in him. Clearly,



This 1939 photo shows Alvaro del Portillo near the end of his engineering studies. He is flanked by two other members of Opus Dei: Jose Maria Albareda (left), Francisco Botella (right).





Fr. Escriva near Madrid in January, 1935. The two members accompanying him are Ricardo Fernandez Vallespin and Juan Jimenez Vargas.

## Falling in Love

**T**o speak about God, to proclaim that the divine pathways of the earth have been opened up, there's no need for courage: the very nature of love takes over. If we're enamored of God, as our founder was—is—then we'll know how to lace all our conversations with an apostolic sense, with the same spontaneity and simplicity with which Msgr. Escriva spoke. Each of you will do so according to the circumstances of your job, age and walk in life, but everyone with a 'priestly soul, everyone with words of fire, without any shame of witnessing to the truth that God is our Love, our very All.'

From a letter of Msgr. del Portillo to the Prelature's faithful, September 24, 1978.

it was such a confidence that spurred the university student to give his immediate assent and never to go back on his word.

## Next to the founder

From July 7, 1935, Alvaro del Portillo's life underwent a profound change. The vocation had its effects. Nonetheless, in keeping with the specific reality of a call to Opus Dei, the change was much more internal than external.



Opus Dei's founder in civilian clothes, made necessary during the Spanish civil war (1936-39) because of virulent religious persecution.

His external activities remained almost unchanged: he continued to study, spend time with family and friends, play sports. But on the inside, the new outlook that had hit him like an "earthquake" was gathering strength, inspiring him to a greater,



Alvaro del Portillo in 1937. On the back he had written: "Photo for leaving the Honduran Legation," which refers to the months when he took refuge there with the founder.

more specific love for God in daily life. Work and study thus changed into special occasions to seek union with Christ without abandoning his normal position in life. New and loftier reasons arose for loving friends, family and neighbors; they are souls whom God loves, to be drawn closer to him. Everything is the same, yet everything has changed.

As is natural there was a new visible component to Alvaro's life—he lived close to Fr. Josemaria and other members of Opus Dei. He often dropped by the small apartment where he would meet the founder. Soon he moved in, because this had become his new family. Alvaro was 21 years old but he quickly proved himself to be a solid support for Blessed Josemaria and Opus Dei.

The founder personally oversaw his spiritual-theological training, as he did with all members of Opus Dei at that time. Regarding those early days, his schoolmate, Jose Maria Hernandez y Garnica, remarked: "It was surprising, when you think of it, to see how quickly Alvaro progressed in those months. It was surely a fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit,

## God Can Ask

**I**suggest that you be courageous and generous and say 'Yes' to God. Look, my son: I will tell you again that God enters the soul little by little. In the Old Testament we read that at times he appears as a whisper you hardly notice, as a light breeze. At other times, with Moses, he appears as a burning bush. It need not be a big thing, but still, the infinitely great, the infinitely beautiful, the infinitely powerful God is there....

"To you and to all others who find yourselves in a similar situation, God for a time has been asking you

for slight things. With his grace you have said 'Yes'; now perhaps he is asking for more. This "something more" is still something small in comparison with what he gives you. For example, he could ask that we give him everything. Be generous, my sons! Realize that God is much more generous than we are. When he asks for something, he floods us with grace, so we can say 'Yes' and hand over to him whatever he asks of us."

From a meeting with university students in Rome, 1991.

especially the gifts of piety and love for God. I could sum up my impression in one idea, in just a word: consistency. His behavior was in perfect accord with his beliefs. It might not seem like a very important virtue, yet Alvaro wins the honor of being that good and faithful man—that son—who best understood our spirit and who gave the most help to our founder." This help was shown above all by his remaining close to

him, like a good son, with unwavering support. But it was also shown in his direct and effective collaboration in the new institution's growth in Madrid and other Spanish cities.

December 3, 1937: Father Josemaria and other Opus Dei members in Andorra after a perilous escape through the Pyrenees Mountains. Alvaro del Portillo, having remained in Madrid, would join him later.



Castle of Manzanares, near Madrid, 1939. The war had just ended and Alvaro (center) is still in uniform. Also with the founder are Ricardo Fernandez Vallespin, also in uniform, and Francisco Botella.



### Children, Sculptures of God

**D**on't be afraid of children. They are always a blessing from God. At the moment of conception, God creates the soul, which is immortal, and he entrusts it to the parents, so that they raise up a new human being fit to carry out its mission. And the main mission of humanity is to reach heaven and enjoy God's company forever and ever. To help them reach heaven, God entrusts them to

their parents. He puts that soul, a new-born child, in their hands to protect it, to mold it like a sculptor who forms a figure from a clump of clay. Children should be like sculptures of God; they should resemble him. To do so, my children, they have to resemble you, because you want to imitate Christ.

*From a get-together with families in Sydney, 1987.*

Blessed Josemaria and Alvaro del Portillo in Valencia, September 1939. With them, in army fatigues, is Jose Manuel Casas.

## The civil war

The civil war that devastated Spain from 1936 to 1939 was a trying time, but it neither checked the expansion of Opus Dei nor weakened Alvaro's resolve. On the contrary, it spurred his spiritual growth. Even though religious persecution was

April 1942 at El Escorial (outside Madrid). To the right is Ricardo Fernandez Vallespin, also one of the first to join Opus Dei.



raging in Madrid (just being recognized as a priest could mean immediate death), Blessed Josemaria did the impossible to carry out his ministry and to maintain contact with many people who needed his help. Alvaro, never far away, had clear proof of the founder's zeal and his total availability for whatever God willed, even if it meant risking his life.

But the youthful del Portillo also took risks. In the first months of the war he was thrown into prison and

Evidence can be found, from among other places, a letter the founder sent him on March 23, 1939. Blessed Josemaria used the biblical metaphor of a rock, *saxum*, revealing to Alvaro how much hope he had in his faithful strength to fulfill God's plans: "May Jesus protect you, *saxum*. And I know that you are. I see that God has given you strength and has made my words come true: *saxum*! Thank him and always be faithful."



Para mi hijo  
fo Alvaro, que  
por servir a  
Dios, ha tenido  
do que torrear  
tantos toros.  
(Roma, día de la Na-  
lividad de Nuestra Se-  
ñora, 1949  
Mariano

A handwritten note from Opus Dei's founder (signed 'Mariano,' his third name). It reads: "To my son Alvaro who has had to fight a lot of bulls to serve God. Rome, our Lady's Birthday, 1949."

Alvaro del Portillo with some colleagues from the Department of Civil Engineering.

nearly executed by one of the many firing squads that had among their aims eradication of belief in God. Later he found refuge with others in the Honduran Legation in Madrid. There he stayed with Opus Dei's founder and a small group of other young followers. Some months later, in October 1938, after Blessed Josemaria had successfully escaped across the border to a part of Spain free from anti-religious violence, Alvaro fled in circumstances that were clearly providential.

Reunited with the founder, he spared none of his energy in resuming the apostolate in Spain, which Blessed Josemaria had been preparing during the war with prayer and sacrifice. Although he was drafted into the army like others his age, Alvaro's role in the Work's development must have been considerable.

## Many bullfights

There is a Spanish saying that Blessed Josemaria liked to apply to Alvaro del Portillo: "This son of mine has seen many a bullfight." The comparison with the popular Spanish spectacle well demonstrates the attitude Alvaro showed throughout his life, in the 40 years he spent next to the founder and the next 19 as his successor.

Patience is a decisive trait for a bullfighter. He has to know when and how to wait until the bull—an animal of impressive strength—has

been subdued. The expert bullfighter is a man who, while aware of the risks, has learned to face his challenge with composure, without trembling nor confusing courage with recklessness.

To be sure, the "bulls" Alvaro had to face were strong and numerous. Hardly had the civil war and the term of his enlistment ended when he again took up his studies leading to a degree in civil engineering in 1941. He began working shortly afterward. With the founder's encouragement, he also began to study for yet a third degree, this one in history.

Meanwhile, the apostolic needs became ever more demanding. Already in 1940, at age 26, Alvaro del Portillo was Opus Dei's secretary general, which meant he was Blessed Josemaria's closest collaborator. In that capacity he shared all his

hopes, but also all his worries: from the start-up in various Spanish cities to planting the Work in other countries; from the growing numbers of vocations to the mounting financial needs to support such development.

Then too bitter calumnies rained down upon the Work. They demonstrated the need to obtain official approval from the Church as soon as possible. All this had to be done in conformity with the requirements of canon law.



Alvaro in 1944. His suit is not an army uniform but the formal dress of engineers at the time. So attired, he was received in an audience by Pope Pius XII in 1943. There he explained to the pontiff this new reality for lay people: Opus Dei.

One day in the early forties the founder made another request of Alvaro. Would he be willing to be



1943: Alvaro del Portillo in Rome, alongside the Tiber River, with another member of Opus Dei, the historian Jose Orlandis.

ordained a priest? Alvaro gave an immediate "yes," forsaking a promising professional career, a career that divine providence apparently did not have in store for him.

The lack of priests in Opus Dei was becoming a concern. It was evident the founder couldn't take care of everyone. The organic collaboration of priests and laity, who form part of the Church's basic structure, is indispensable to Opus Dei from both the sacramental and institutional points of view. Experience had shown that such priests must be imbued with the same spirit they are called to transmit.

Alvaro del Portillo would become a priest; that much was certain, even if the founder still did not know how Opus Dei's current juridical configuration could accommodate clergy. Meanwhile, those first three studying for the priesthood took the courses required by the Church from the best professors available. Besides Alvaro, there were two other young engi-



neers: his former classmate, Jose Maria Hernandez y Garnica, and Jose Luis Muzquiz.

On February 14, 1943, while celebrating Mass, God showed the founder the solution to the problem of including priests in Opus Dei. On that day the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross was born. It was to be inseparably united to Opus Dei. As soon

as possible, Blessed Josemaria sent Alvaro del Portillo to Rome, with the agreement of the bishop of Madrid, to inform the corresponding Vatican authorities of this development.

Alvaro departed for Rome on May 25, 1943, with World War II raging around him. He wasn't quite 30 years old. The trip was a success. In addition to being received by Pius XII, to whom he explained the new reality of Opus Dei, he established his first contacts with the Vatican curia. On October 11 the Holy See granted the *nihil obstat* allowing the bishop of Madrid to establish the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross on December 8 of that same year.

The next year would be a busy one for Alvaro. While he kept working as an engineer and helping the founder govern the Work, he earned his doctorate in history (with



June 25, 1944. Madrid's Bishop Leopoldo Eijo y Garay ordains Opus Dei's first three priests, all engineers. From the left, Alvaro del Portillo, Jose Maria Hernandez de Garnica and Jose Luis Muzquiz.

honors), while completing his studies for the priesthood. That led to the year's most momentous event.

On June 25 he and the other two members of Opus Dei were ordained to the priesthood in the chapel of the bishop of Madrid.

## Move to Rome

An obvious result of his ordination was that Alvaro left his engineering profession for good. Still, he always did his best to keep abreast of developments in his field. Throughout his life he would greet other engineers as "colleagues." But from June 25, 1944, onward, his exclusive occupation was to be a priest of Christ. The founder



This snapshot, taken at a new Madrid center on June 26, 1944, shows Fr. Alvaro giving a blessing to Opus Dei's founder.

the founder died; another 800 by 1994, when Bishop del Portillo rendered his soul to God.

## Seeking God is Easy

It's easy to talk with God. Opus Dei's founder taught us to find him in the midst of ordinary work, in every honest endeavor aimed at perfection. There are noble human reasons to work well: those of a father out to support his family or those of a mother who tries to make the home cozy and welcoming for her husband and children.... However, we must add a supernatural reason: to do those very things for God. Then work is transformed into the sacrifice of Abel, something greatly pleasing to God; then our life is turned into prayer. Down with that kind of madness, really a split personality, of giving God just a half hour each week—Sunday mass, when that—and then keeping the rest of the week for ourselves."

From a get-together with families in Mexico City, 1983.

At Castelgandolfo (Rome), May, 1948. Many of the young men surrounding Fr. Alvaro are Italian students, introduced to Opus Dei by some of their fellow students who had come to be with the founder in Italy.

Salvador Canals (left) and Jose Orlandis (right) with Fr. Alvaro at a Roman park in April 1946. They were among the first Opus Dei members to move to the eternal city.



Blessed Josemaria and Fr. Alvaro in Florence, 1948, on one of their frequent trips to spur the apostolate.



This Roman villa, located on Viale Bruno Buozzi, was acquired by Blessed Josemaria in 1946 (the photograph was taken shortly thereafter). Renamed 'Villa Tevere,' it now serves as the headquarters for Opus Dei's prelate and his advisory councils. Inside Villa Tevere, in the Church of our Lady of Peace, the founder and Alvaro del Portillo are buried.

## The Wings of Love

**M**y daughters and sons: be optimists, with a supernatural optimism that is rooted in faith, is nourished by hope and takes on wings from love. We have to infuse a Christian spirit into every corner of society. But don't stop at just the wish. It's right there where each of you works that you must give a divine dimension to

all you do, being concerned with praying, with self-denial and doing your work well. Thus you improve yourselves and help other souls to improve in the Truth of Christ, so that we all proclaim him as Lord of all earthly occupations."

From a letter to faithful of the Prelature, December 25, 1985.

Fr. Alvaro's apostolate after his ordination largely resembled what he had been doing since the war—traveling from one corner of Spain to another, alone or with the founder, giving spiritual orientation to all those who sought to live the spirit of Opus Dei.

The founder himself had to intervene directly. So, in June he joined Fr. Alvaro. After months of fervent prayer, intense work and many meetings with officials of the Roman curia, Opus Dei obtained the "decree of praise" from the Holy See on February 24, 1947, thus becoming an

institution of pontifical right.

From 1946 onward the founder and his closest collaborator lived in Rome. Fr. Alvaro studied canon law in the pontifical University of St. Thomas, where he obtained a doctorate. He also continued to help the founder in whatever contributed to Opus Dei's growth.

At the Forte dei Marmi, in Toscana, Italy 1959.

A trip to London in 1958. Here it was that Blessed Josemaria clearly understood the range and hardships of the apostolic work that Opus Dei was to carry out. Facing this burdensome prospect, God spoke to him interiorly: "You can't, but I can."



But the new center of operations had become Rome. Blessed Josemaria had decided to move to the See of Peter as soon as possible, because the central offices of a Catholic and universal institution such as Opus Dei could only be located in the eternal city.

At the beginning of the 1970s Opus Dei's founder intensified his pastoral visits. These took him to various European countries, Mexico, Central and South America, where he met with tens of thousands of persons who came to hear him speak about God. Bishop del Portillo was close at hand. Here we see him in a family-style get-together in Venezuela, in February 1975.



In February 1946 Fr. Alvaro had returned to the Vatican to request a pontifical approval from the Holy See consistent with the Work's secular character. Until June he worked earnestly to explain the institution's defining features to the relevant prelates. But the response to the new charism that Opus Dei represented was somewhat discouraging. One baffled curial prelate remarked: "You have come a century too soon."



With a group of university students in Rome, 1972.

The times were not easy. Added to the general level of discomfort in a country struggling to rebuild itself from the ravages of war, was the poverty endured by the Work's first members in Rome. Privation was no less than a matter of simple survival.

In spite of this, Blessed Josemaria trusted in God's help. With the advice of Msgr. Montini, later to become Pope Paul VI, he sought a spacious building as soon as possible. It would house the Work's definitive headquarters, plus, for a time, hundreds of members who would receive thorough training at his side.

Blessed Josemaria tells the story: "It was the same old problem. We had no money. But Alvaro, truly gifted in persuading people, sought out the owner of a villa. I remember prayerfully waiting up for him to the wee hours of night, to find out whether we could make a down payment with just a few gold coins, the rest to follow in a month or two. He agreed. And we paid! We had nothing, but we paid, because we had great faith." For the record, those providential gold coins had been a gift to Blessed Josemaria, who had



### When Suffering Comes

**W**hen the moment of suffering comes—illness, misunderstanding, humiliations, the burden of your own mistakes or whatever—face up to the situation with the certainty of faith, because there Christ awaits you. He continues his passion in the members of his body, for the salvation of many. And, just as at Golgotha, be certain then that Mary is at your side, to help us offer up that sacrifice for humanity's redemption."

From a letter to the faithful of the Prelature, September 1, 1988.

planned to melt them down to make a gold chalice or some other liturgical object.

Waiting for the building to be vacated, a group of some 20 fellows moved into the porter's house, which had only one bed. It was reserved for whoever might get sick. The rest just slept on the floor.

In a get-together with families in Spain, November 1972.



Fr. Alvaro provided constant support for Blessed Josemaria. He shouldered both big and small tasks, from finding funds for the new headquarters and its later complete remodeling, to seeing to the Work's direction and expansion in Italy and abroad.

For Opus Dei was rapidly spreading. The Work went beyond Spain in 1945 to Portugal; then came Italy and England in 1946; Ireland and France in 1947; the following year to Mexico and the United States; Chile and Argentina in 1950, and so on the

March 5, 1960, with Pope John XXIII.

world over. The result was that the founder was soon traveling again to be near his children who, usually with very little money, willingly went to the earth's four corners to spread the Work's message. At his side was always Alvaro.

Fr. Alvaro and Blessed Josemaria in 1968.



## The founder's shadow

From 1946 to 1975 Fr. Alvaro's life was closely linked with Blessed Josemaria's. He was his alter ego, the person in whom the founder confided (he was his confessor and spiritu-

al guide from 1944 onward) and on whom he relied for all sorts of work.

Fr. Alvaro took it all in stride with the same serenity that marked his "yes" to that first invitation in 1935. He did everything with such discretion and quiet efficiency that one hardly noticed his presence. Nevertheless, the founder well knew how indispensable was his "good and faithful" son. In 1972 he remarked: "Alvaro is a most faithful son, as are you all. Many times he has offered his own back to spare me the

A Christmas visit to John Paul II in 1978. To the left is Msgr. Stanislaus Dziwisz, the Pope's private secretary. In the center is Msgr. Javier Echevarria, now Bishop-Prelate of Opus Dei. On the right, Msgr. Joaquin Alonso, a close collaborator of both Bishop del Portillo and the current prelate.

lashes; he has greeted the blows and insults with a smile, even recently...." It was doubtful that such an attitude

## Working for God

**"M**y children, demand of yourselves at work. The authenticity of your apostolate and interior life depends on it. Never forget what our founder continually preached: 'We can't offer God junk.' You can't be satisfied with carrying out your tasks in a routine, slipshod or indifferent manner. You must work, at whatever it might be, because every endeavor, with the exception of dishonest or sinful occupations, is beautiful and useful to dedication. Be desirous of improving, be enterprising, with a view to the long-term; try to be useful; care for the details and be professionally competent. When you thus offer that work to God, each of you from his own place will contribute to the well-being of those around you, to solving the social problems where you live. You'll make society progress and, thanks to grace, further Christ's work of redemption."

*From a letter to faithful of the Prelature, September 24, 1978.*



could only stem from Alvaro's character; such virtue doesn't come easily. There was a deeper source: Alvaro's belief that one must answer God's call down to the dregs, utterly open to what God asks every day.

One can understand how valuable it was for Fr. Alvaro and others to be near the founder. It was not simply human admiration, but the desire not to waste any of the spiritual treasure God had bestowed on humanity through that good and faithful servant. For his part, Alvaro had nothing to add. He did not impose his own personality or seek any independence.

His task required complete availability, fanning the spark of the spirit the founder was giving to all the members. As his immediate collaborator, his task was to help pass on this spirit, something he did with such impeccable refinement that Opus Dei members (even those living in the same house) saw Fr. Alvaro only as a smiling priest, always behind the founder, quietly in the background.

Whoever might be tempted to think otherwise has but to look at photographs or films of the founder's get-togethers. Fr. Alvaro can be spotted in the background, alongside others, but his is the most attentive

*Bishop del Portillo during a family get-together in 1977.*

and alert face. How many times had he already heard what Blessed Josemaria was saying? Yet he listened as if for the first time.

Since Bishop del Portillo's death in 1994, the public has gradually learned more about how much he accomplished through his quiet, unassuming efforts. The biographical sketches point to a man of uncommon energy and talent, who could have done so many things but who instead dedicated himself to serving the Church and Opus Dei. He tirelessly accepted assignments from the Holy See over a period of four pontificates, from Pius XII to John Paul II.

A few tasks stand out: during the Second Vatican Council, he headed a preparatory commission on the laity, and served on other commissions; he was a Council *peritus* plus secretary of the commission on the discipline of the clergy and Christian people, as well as a consultor to other conciliar commissions. Until he died, he was a consultor to various pontifical Congregations and a member of the Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops.

Soon after the Council he published two books, *Faithful and Laity in the Church and Consecration and Mission of the Priest*. They remain important reference works in order to understand the Council's mind on central aspects of the Church's mystery.



*Milan, January 1981. Bishop del Portillo continued the tradition of "catechetical visits" begun by the founder.*

## The Mass: the Center and Root of the Spiritual Life

**"D**o not forget that if our entire existence has to be co-redemptive, then it will be at Holy Mass that it acquires that dimension. There our mission to co-redeem will be fortified and demonstrated in a particular way. Therefore, the Mass is the root of our interior life. We have to be closely united to this root, and this unity depends very much on our response. Paraphrasing our founder, let me point out that our

dedication is worth what our Mass is worth. Our life will bear fruit, from a supernatural perspective, to the extent that we believe in, and are devoted to, the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Altar, or to the degree that we participate in it, making ourselves one with Jesus and his redemptive zeal."

*From a letter to the faithful of the Prelature, April 1, 1986.*

To confirm the quality of the man and his work, one can point to the countless testimonies and letters full of affection and praise that poured into the Prelature's Roman headquarters after his death. There were letters from public figures, both ecclesiastical and secular, and from ordinary people of every age, social condition and country.

## The first successor

When Msgr. Josemaria Escriva suddenly died in June 1975, nobody was surprised that Alvaro del Portillo was

unanimously elected as his first successor. More than an election, it was confirmation of an obvious fact. Already the founder had said: "I did not choose [Alvaro]. It was God who placed him at my side." The succession took place on September 15, 1975, in Rome at the Work's headquarters.

His achievements while at the head of Opus Dei have already been sketched: growth in members, geographic expansion, hundreds of vocations to the priesthood, Opus Dei's canonical crowning as a personal Prelature. This last feat required much dedication, prayer and study. Through it all, Alvaro del Portillo's faithfulness to Blessed Josemaria's spirit and wishes stood out. Finally, there was the founder's beatification in 1992.

In the solemn funeral for Bishop del Portillo that took place on March 25, 1994, in the Roman basilica of St. Eugene, his successor Msgr. Javier Echevarria (now a bishop) affirmed: "Bishop Alvaro del Portillo was—and I cannot hide the deep filial affection I had for him—a giant in the Church's firmament in the second half of this century."

The fulcrum of such feats had been the same person who in 1935 at the age of 21, in a brief morning, gave a radical turn to his life. The fruits that



A get-together in Rome in 1976, with college students from various countries.

appear today in all their sweep were born of his unwavering adherence to God's will.

If at the outset a vocation is a call whereby God says, "Come with me," in the long run it resembles a road—straight or curved, short or long, difficult or easy, narrow or wide—that nevertheless is continually marked by signs confirming and specifying the initial call. Evidently, it did not matter to Alvaro del Portillo which road God proposed to him. In

## Service

**T**he only desire of the Work and each of her members is to serve. Since we only want Christ to reign, we should serve the Church right where we are. Our founder said it clearly: "If the Work does not serve the Church, it's good for nothing. That's why it was born, that's why God wanted it."

From a homily, January 7, 1991.



Near the Pyrenees with some members of Opus Dei at Torreciudad, Spain, where there is a Marian shrine built by Blessed Josemaria.

June 1976: Bishop del Portillo in the robes of the Grand Chancellor of the University of Navarre, located in Pamplona, Spain. An idea of Opus Dei's founder, this university is a corporate apostolate where academic and scientific research and profession of the Catholic faith are made to harmonize.

On March 19, 1983, in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene's, Msgr. Romolo Carboni, Apostolic Nuncio in Italy, promulgated and solemnly co-signed the Apostolic Constitution *Ut sit*, by which the Holy Father established Opus Dei as a personal Prelature. In the document, Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo was named its prelate.



## Does Your

**P**rofessional work, an essential part of our divine calling, should always be tied to improving one's spiritual and apostolic life. If we were to neglect this vital and intimate connection, we could not sanctify it. Work would cease to be part of our vocation and finally would lose its fullest human meaning. It would wind up a disordered attachment, a sad idolatry; that work would no

## Job Lead to God?

longer serve as 'bait to fish men' (*The Way*, no. 372). Sooner or later it would degenerate into self-serving. So be courageous and check if your work is really leading you to God, if it spurs you to bring souls closer to Christian life. Bravely examine yourself to see if, contrary to God's will, your work has become a hindrance."

From a letter to the faithful of the Prelature, September 1, 1986.

all probability he would have committed himself from the start and followed it to the end with all his might.

did not hesitate to dedicate himself to a spiritual enterprise at God's behest, so Bishop del Portillo followed the founder down to the last detail, convinced that he was thereby fulfilling God's will.

A few months after being chosen to head Opus Dei, a letter reached Rome, one of many to welcome the new "Father" (a family "title" born with the founder). This letter came from a woman member of the Work who observed in all simplicity: "They told me that the founder died. But it isn't true. From what I can see, Alvaro is the one who died; the Father is still with us, identical to the first." Bishop del Portillo often told this story, using it as an example of love for, and faithfulness to, the founder.

## The founder has not died

There is a striking similarity between Opus Dei's founder and his first successor, since both sought to identify themselves completely with God's will. Just as Blessed Josemaria



These words make an excellent summary of Bishop del Portillo's years at the helm of the Work. His was a never-ending effort to identify himself with the founder. The mission entrusted to him far outweighed any personal interests. Fulfilling that charge became his only interest. With love and determination he plunged into the demanding role of being father to a huge family spread throughout the world. The role was the more demanding because he followed a saint. Of that, he was totally convinced.

When Bishop del Portillo was buried, Msgr. Echevarria summed up his life: "What can I say? The Father was that *vir fidelis* (faithful servant) praised in sacred scripture, a faithful son who spent himself entirely in

serving as our founder's support and aid. Thanks to his fidelity and direction, the Work has kept to the path marked out by our founder without the slightest deviation, pause or gap. Thank you, Father! Now we can voice our thanks, with the holy pride of having had such a Father. His only concern was for the holiness of the Church's members and especially that of his daughters and sons. Following in our founder's footsteps, he sought to pass unnoticed.

"And how well he did so! Blessed as the shadow of Blessed Josemaria, he made him present wherever he went. Our founder spoke to us through his voice and through his heart. Overflowing with supernatural and human kindness, he continued



Surrounded by children, after a get-together with Irish families in Dublin, 1980.

## Youth

**L**et's especially pester the archangel Raphael, begging him to accompany all the young men and women attracted to the Work's warmth, plus all young people the world over. Thus did he help Tobias on his long journey, keeping dangers at bay and winning all sorts of blessings for him. I pray to God that each of us, regardless of age or circumstances, may foster the daily desire to help out in some way in this apostolate with young people, one of our dearest apostolates, 'the apple of our eye,' as our founder used to say."

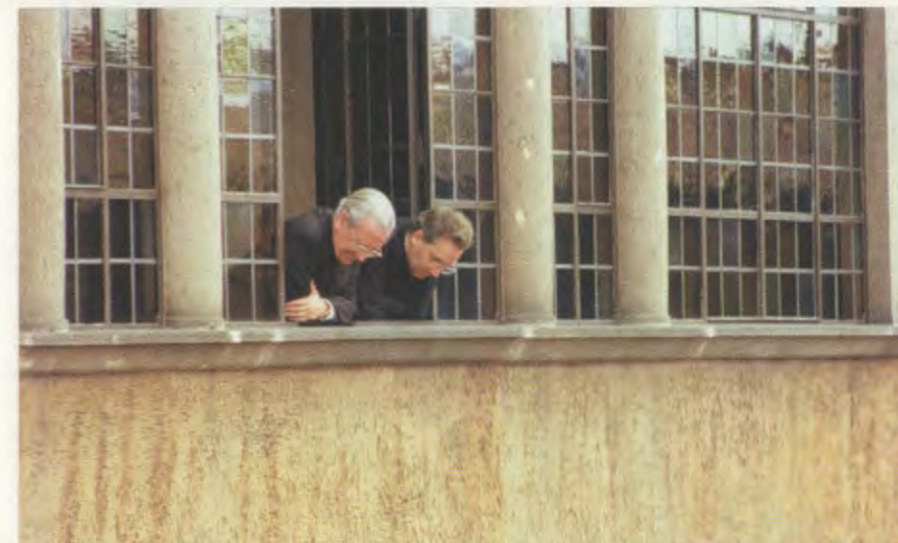
From a letter to the faithful of the Prelature, October 2, 1988.

A snapshot taken in January, 1978 during a crowded get-together with families.

## Twice at St. Peter's

During Bishop del Portillo's 19 years as the Father to Opus Dei, thousands of people got to know him and wish him well. When in Rome, he was usually available for whoever asked to see him: families or individuals, whether members of Opus Dei or not. He would often receive non-Catholics and non-Christians—Jews, Muslims as well as non-believers. He considered any-

On the English Channel in 1980.



From a balcony at the Prelature's headquarters, 1987.

one worthy of his time, for it offered him a chance to share with others some of the joy and love for God overflowing from his heart.

Following in the founder's footsteps, moreover, Bishop del Portillo traveled from one end of the earth to the other, throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, America and the Pacific rim. The trips combined family gatherings with basic Christian teachings. Thereby he could meet his distant children, plus their families and

May, 1983: arrival at the airport in Medellin, Colombia.



to love the world. And with his strong and paternal arm he directed the whole Work, each one of us, during these 19 tough and intense years—seasons full of joy and peace, sorrows and happiness."



In Toronto with some families of Canadian cooperators of Opus Dei.

all in the Work, tailoring his advice to their needs and encouraging one and all to grow in the spiritual life. Thus could he share his own feelings with his daughters and sons. These timely letters reached every center of the Prelature the world over at the start of each month.

There were two occasions when the affection of thousands—not just the Prelature's faithful, but also those throughout the world who appreciate and live its spirit—coalesced in a spe-

friends, who in turn opened up their hearts to him. Often, tens of thousands of persons gathered around that smiling priest in get-togethers that combined spontaneity with family intimacy. Whoever so desired could ask a question on any topic and would receive a kindly answer from a Catholic priest who wished only to be useful to them and to draw them closer to Christ.



Besides traveling and receiving a continual flow of people, his "job" as Father more than filled his and his staff's day, dealing as they were with a worldwide institution. His correspondence was immense; he read all the letters he received. Many he answered personally. But since it just wasn't possible to answer them all, he began to send a monthly letter to

On January 6, 1991, John Paul II consecrated Alvaro del Portillo as a bishop in St. Peter's Basilica. The two photos capture moments of the ceremony.

cial way around Bishop del Portillo. Both events linked him to the heart of Christianity, St. Peter's Basilica.

The first happened on January 6, 1991, when Pope John Paul II consecrated Msgr. del Portillo a bishop in the Vatican basilica. Among the thousands of faithful who filled the majestic nave of St. Peter's at this annual rite of creating new bishops were many children and friends of Bishop del Portillo. Closely accompanying him in prayer were many more around the world.

A little over a year later—May 17, 1992—the second occurred. Close to 300,000 people gathered in the Square that day from every part of

the world to attend the beatification of Josemaria Escriva and Sister Josephine Bakhita, a Canossian sister. Solemn to be sure, the event was also radiant, as even the sun shared the Church's joy for the papal proclamation recognizing both as Blessed.



One of the last times Bishop del Portillo ordained faithful of the Prelature to the priesthood. During the 19 years at the head of Opus Dei, he called nearly 800 men to the priesthood.

In accord with Christian teaching, the Pope recognized the two as powerful intercessors before the heavenly court, while God in turn points to both as worthy of imitation. Next to the Holy Father, from the open-air altar on the church's steps, Bishop del Portillo rejoiced in the official

On the steps of St. Peter's, May 17, 1992, the day Josemaria Escriva was declared blessed.

## Starting Over as God's Friend

"S in deeply grieves God, and only he can pardon it. God is so good that he wanted to give an outward sign to show that he grants forgiveness. Thus it is Jesus himself who, through the priest, absolves and advises us. The soul comes out clean, filled with gladness and supernatural strength, because it has returned to God, determined to be Christ's apostle. That's why Confession is the sacrament of joy, the sacrament of friendship with God. How it unburdens us. A person steeped in sin might be reluctant to approach this sacrament, but, once received, it's as if he had sprouted wings: he's blissful and freed from the weight of sin. My children, bring lots of people to Confession!"

From a get-together with families, in Abidjan (Ivory Coast), 1989.

recognition of a truth he had witnessed for years: the holiness of Opus Dei's founder and, with it, a peerless confirmation of how fruitful for Christian life is the message he taught and lived.

On the following day, on the same altar, Opus Dei's prelate celebrated the first solemn Mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria. The crowd of pilgrims was nearly as large. There immediately followed a warm audience with the Roman pontiff.

How easy to imagine Bishop del Portillo's joy on seeing recognized the greatness of the man to whom he owed everything since 1935. But the bliss did not end there. "There's no doubt that the beatification of our founder," he said in the homily, "also signals the beginning of a new stage in Opus Dei's life that must have repercussions in each of her members. It is time for deeper love for God, more assiduous dedication to apostolate, more generous service to the Church and all humanity. In short, a new stage of greater faithfulness to the spirit of sanctification in the world that our founder bequeathed to us."



## Trip to the Holy Land

On March 11, 1994, Bishop del Portillo celebrated his eightieth birthday. John Paul II sent him a personally signed letter. "In expressing my lively appreciation," it reads, "for his faithful work in service of the Church and imploring abundant graces from heaven for a long-lasting and fruitful ministry, I heartily impart a special Apostolic Blessing and affectionately extend it to all the priests and lay members of the Prelature of Opus Dei." The prelate was also preparing to celebrate his golden anniversary as a priest on June 25.

Meanwhile, he set out on March 14 for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to retrace Christ's footsteps. As with so many prior trips, he was fulfilling a desire the founder had been unable to carry out personally. But at the same time, the Prelature's faithful saw in it a most fitting gift for the two milestones. In turn, he asked all members and friends to accompany him with prayer. Joined in heart, it



would be a pilgrimage of everyone.

No one could have known it would be his last trip. He spent ten joyful yet intense days, recollected in prayer, in the land of Jesus' life and

May 18, 1992: Bishop del Portillo enters the square of St. Peter's to begin the solemn mass in honor of Blessed Josemaria, the day after the beatification. Afterward, the Holy Father would receive the pilgrims in an audience in the same square.



A view of St. Peter's on May 17, 1992, crowded with some 300,000 pilgrims.

death. A few members of Opus Dei went with him: Msgr. Javier Echevarria, Vicar General of the Prelature; Msgr. Joaquin Alonso; and Dr. Jose Maria Araquistain, a doctor in cardiology and internal medicine. A few others, who had begun the apostolic work in Israel just months earlier, eagerly

On March 11, 1994, the Pope's greeting to Bishop del Portillo on the occasion of his 80th birthday.



*Al venerato e caro Fratello Alvaro del Portillo, che con animo grato a Signore celebra il suo ottantesimo genestlaco, nell'esprimere vivo apprezzamento per il fedeli lavoro compiuto a servizio della Chiesa e nell'invocare copiose grazie celesti per un ministero ancor lungo e ricco di frutti, imparto di cuore una speciale Benedizione Apostolica, estendendola con affetto a tutti i sacerdoti e laici della Prelatura dell'Opus Dei.*

*Dal Vaticano, 11 marzo 1994.*

*Joannes Paulus PP. II*

### Attractive Virtue

"My daughters, virtue needs to be attractive. But how can it be so, if you look disagreeable or slovenly? So, take care of yourselves, and make sure your husband dresses well, with his suit pressed and a matching tie.... We must do all we can to make virtue pleasant, winning. Think how agreeable Jesus' appearance must have been, how attractive his glance. Let's also imitate him there, drawing souls ever closer to God, out of love for them."

*From a get-together with families in Boston, 1988.*

During the papal audience. The embrace of John Paul II, accompanied by lengthy applause, was the final joy for Bishop del Portillo in and around the beatification of the person he knew better than anyone else.



Following Christ's footsteps in the Holy Land was the Prelate's last trip. He is seen here next to the new Sanctuary of the Beatitudes, which overlooks the Sea of Galilee.

John Paul II prays before the mortal remains of Bishop del Portillo on the afternoon of March 23, 1994.



of Muslims, Christians and Jews gathered for questions, stories and laughter; in short, a family get-together.

The final day was particularly poignant. Bishop del Portillo celebrated Mass—his last on earth—in the church of the Cenacle. There Christ instituted the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood, there Pentecost happened, the birth of the Church. According to those present, he was more recollected and moved than usual. Shortly after, they departed for Rome.

He reached home at 9:45 in the evening of March 22. Having greeted Jesus in the tabernacle, he spent a few cordial moments with those awaiting him. He remarked how happy he was, having carried out the pilgrimage with all of them in mind. "We'll talk tomorrow!" he said as he went off to bed.

The last Mass on earth of Bishop del Portillo took place in the church of the Cenacle, where Jesus instituted the Eucharist and the ministerial priesthood.

greeted him. Later in Bethlehem he met with persons acquainted with the Prelature's formative activities. Noteworthy was the joint presence

Returning to Rome's airport on the evening of March 22, 1994, Opus Dei's prelate was delightfully surprised to find some of the Prelature's faithful with their children waiting to welcome him.



Shortly after 3:00 am he felt ill. He was suffering from an irregular heart-beat and shortness of breath. He called for Javier Echevarria, who in turn called his physician. Despite all their immediate efforts, it was clear the end was near. Msgr. Echevarria sacramentally anointed and absolved him, as was Bishop del Portillo's heartfelt desire. He remained conscious, surrounded by still more of his spiritual sons, who accompanied him in prayer. Although struck with sorrow, they were moved by the

headquarters where Bishop del Portillo lived and worked, his wake took place in the church of our Lady of Peace. Since dawn there was a steady stream of people, telegrams and flowers.

How to summarize the tokens of affection, esteem and regard expressed for Bishop del Portillo? The moments were sorrowful yet serene, in some way even joyful, for it was obvious to all that Don Alvaro had definitively embraced the Jesus he loved so much. Who could think otherwise? A



peace with which he greeted death. Around four in the morning of March 23, 1994, his heart stopped.

## A final caress

Within hours, the news of the sudden death of Opus Dei's prelate had circled the globe. At Villa Tevere, the

sudden and sweet death on returning from the Holy Land, his last Mass in a place so closely linked to Christ and the Church—weren't these but facets of God's homecoming caress to a good and faithful son? Just like the founder, without fuss or bother, he died the way he had lived.

While Masses for the repose of his soul succeeded each other, people crowded the church where Alvaro del Portillo was laid out in state. Men, women and children; Romans and travelers: All day long until early the next day they paid their last respects

## Saintly Priests

**T**oday, just as yesterday and forever, as we face the challenges of each epoch, the question, "What kind of priest does the Church and the world need today?" must have this answer: the Church and world need saintly priests. Needed are priests who, fully aware of their own limits and defects, decisively struggle to travel the road to sanctity, the perfection of charity, identifying themselves with Christ. This is not a new answer, but one that is always up-to-date, always necessary, always decisive."

Discourse, April 20, 1990.

to a man they loved, to whose holiness they felt drawn. Naturally, many of his relatives soon arrived.

The list of bishops and cardinals who came to testify to their friendship with him and to recognize his service to the Church is very long. Among them were the heads of various pontifical congregations, many archbishops and bishops from the Roman curia and other dioceses. There were also very many religious, both men and women, from orders and congregations, as well as a great number of national and international civil figures.

The most significant visit was that of the Holy Father himself during the late afternoon of March 23. John Paul II, after kneeling for more than ten minutes in silent prayer before the remains, stood up and led those present in the Hail Holy Queen, three Glory Be's and a Response for the Dead. He knelt again for a final farewell.

Bishop Javier Echevarria, then the Vicar-General of the Opus Dei Prelature, presided at the solemn public funeral for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, which took place in the Roman Basilica of St. Eugene's on March 25, 1994.

Upon leaving the church, Msgr. Echevarria, the vicar general, told the pontiff that Bishop del Portillo had offered his last Mass for the Church and the Pope, as was his custom. He then thanked Christ's Vicar for his visit, so consoling to the Prelature's faithful. The Pope simply answered, "He deserved it, he deserved it."



## Only one tombstone

Bishop del Portillo was buried in the crypt of the church at Opus Dei's headquarters. The funeral took place in late afternoon on March 24, in the intimacy of a family. Some 300 members of Opus Dei who reside in Rome stood in for their brothers and sisters the world over.



Alvaro del Portillo with Javier Echevarria, who was named by the Pope as Opus Dei's new prelate on April 20, 1994. Bishop Echevarria, like his predecessor, had spent many years with the founder.



In this tomb, where Opus Dei's founder had lain until his beatification, the body of Bishop del Portillo now lies. The tombstone and inscription are the same, but a new memorial plaque bears witness to the change.

His final resting place is, tellingly, the tomb that held the remains of Blessed Josemaria until May 17, 1992. Even the tombstone is the same. Added to the words "El Padre," with the dates of the founder's birth and death, is a simple plaque that reads in Latin: "Where the sacred

body of our most beloved founder had been buried, now lies Alvaro del Portillo, bishop and prelate of Opus Dei, the first successor to our founder, who lived from March 11, 1914, to March 23, 1994." Even in this he was united to Blessed Josemaria, whom he had followed so faithfully.

On March 25, in the Basilica of St. Eugene, the solemn public funeral was held. The crowd was moved, but by no means sad. The same spirit prevailed in the hundreds of packed Masses for the repose of his soul that took place throughout the world in those same days. The "gift of the smile" of Bishop del Portillo, so to say, continued to work its charm.

And so too today, among the multitudes who quickly turn to his intercession, asking for favors big and small, spiritual and material. Already thousands of accounts of "fa-

vors received" have reached Opus Dei's central offices, reflecting the spread of this private devotion among the people of God.

What moves people to call on him? The answer is largely found in what has been recounted here. Undoubtedly, Alvaro del Portillo can be counted as an eminent figure of contemporary spirituality, a man who spent his many talents in serving the Church and thereby submissively reaching heaven.

But perhaps there are those who turn to him for something more personal. Many cannot help seeing in Bishop del Portillo the university stu-

dent who, in that long ago morning, not only said "yes" to God immediately and courageously, but then did everything within his power to be faithful to that commitment.

Alvaro del Portillo was not the founder. It was not to him that God had shown Opus Dei. He it was, however, who perfectly completed that path to holiness amid the world to which every Christian is called, whoever one is, whatever the setting. It is a path trod each day in the loving company of a God who is no stranger to exquisitely carrying out the most ordinary tasks, with a winning smile.

## Prayer for Private Devotion

**O** God most merciful Father, you granted your servant Alvaro, Bishop, the grace to be an exemplary pastor in the service of the Church and a most faithful son and successor to Blessed Josemaria, the founder of Opus Dei. Help me to respond faithfully to the demands of my Christian vocation and teach me to turn every moment and circumstance of my life into an occasion of loving you and serving the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Deign to glorify your servant Alvaro, and through his intercession grant me the favor I ask of you... (make your request). Amen. Our Father. Hail Mary. Glory be.

*In conformity with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII, we declare that there is no intention of anticipating in any way the judgment of the Church, and that this prayer is not intended for public use.*

