

Don Alvaro, witness of fidelity

The inaugural session of the tribunal of the prelature of Opus Dei which will conduct the informative stage of the cause of canonization of Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo took place on March 20. The ceremony was held in the Hoffner Hall of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome, with some four hundred persons attending.

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In the course of his address the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, commented on one of the last messages written by Don Alvaro on March 17, 1994, just a week before his death. It was a postcard sent by Bishop Del Portillo from Jerusalem to Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, personal secretary to the Pope. It reads: “Dear friend, I have prayed –we have prayed- a great deal for you, *vir fidelis*, from these holy places. I would be very grateful if you could let the Holy Father know of our desire to be *fideles usque ad mortem*, in the service of the Church and the Holy Father”.

The Prelate of Opus Dei pointed out that “when we read this short handwritten text of Don Alvaro today it is given a particular significance by what happened a few days later. One could say that the Lord took him at his word –*usque ad mortem*- : a few hours after returning to Rome, this

good and faithful servant, as John Paul II described him, would be called to the presence of God. This episode” Bishop Echevarría declared, “provides a fitting context for this ceremony which has as its protagonist a Pastor who left us a witness of fidelity right up to the last moment”.

Bishop Echevarría explained that the many testimonies written in the ten years since his death show that the first successor of Saint Josemaria had left a legacy of admiration and affection. Shortly after his death, he added, “I received many written testimonies that confirmed how widespread was the fame of holiness of Don Alvaro even during his lifetime. They expressed the wish for the opening of his cause of canonization. Amongst these documents were about 200 letters from bishops (35 of them cardinals) from 25 countries”.

For this first phase of the Cause, or diocesan investigation, The Congregation for the Causes of the Saints has approved the establishment of two tribunals of equal legal competence: one of the Vicariate of Rome, and the other that of the Prelature of Opus Dei.

The sessions of the tribunal of the Vicariate of Rome began on March 5 in a ceremony similar to that celebrated March 20 in the University of the Holy Cross. As Bishop Echevarría indicated, the two tribunals would coordinate their work as required in order to carry out the investigative phase of the cause (declarations of witnesses and the gathering of documentary evidence), but they would not issue any verdict: this corresponds exclusively to the Holy See.

The Prelate of Opus Dei also explained that the Vicariate tribunal

would be responsible “for interviewing some witnesses residing in Rome, including me, some members of the Roman Curia, and other members of the General Councils of the Prelature who had worked closely with Bishop Del Portillo for years”.

Bishop Echevarría recalled that when work began on the cause of canonization of Saint Josemaria, Don Alvaro “never missed the opportunity to help us understand that the aim of this decision was not to seek the human glory of Opus Dei, but the good of the whole Church, the good of souls”. The Prelate of Opus Dei expressed his hope that the cause of Bishop Del Portillo would also be the occasion for many souls, through the person of Don Alvaro, “to discover the fatherly face of God, who smiles, encourages, and forgives”.

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