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**Pope Francis:
Blessed Alvaro loved
and served the
Church with a heart
devoid of any
worldly interest”**

Alvaro del Portillo, first successor of the founder of Opus Dei was beatified in front of people from eighty different countries. During the ceremony, Cardinal Amato: “the new blessed invites us to an amiable, merciful, affable, meek and humble holiness”.

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Madrid, 27 September: The beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, the first successor of St. Josemaria as head of Opus Dei, took place this morning before a massive crowd, in a ceremony presided over by the delegate of Pope Francis, Cardinal Angelo Amato, who was accompanied by Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco, emeritus archbishop of Madrid and the bishop prelate of Opus Dei, Javier Echevarria.

A message from Pope Francis opened the ceremony

The ceremony began with the Vicar General of Opus Dei, Fernando Ocariz reading a message sent by Pope Francis. The Holy Father pointed out that “Blessed Alvaro del Portillo teaches us that simplicity and

ordinary life are a sure path to holiness”, reminding everyone that Blessed Alvaro “went to many countries, fostering projects of evangelization without being inhibited by difficulties, moved only by his love for God and for his brothers and sisters. Whoever is very immersed in God knows how to be close to other people” (full text at: www.alvarodelportillo.org).

Immediately following the solemn act of beatification by Cardinal Amato at 12:24 h an image of the new blessed was revealed to the faithful. His feast day will be celebrated on May 12 every year in the diocese to be determined by the Holy See.

Another key moment was the transfer of the relics of Alvaro del Portillo to the altar, borne by the Ureta Wilsom family, whose son Jose Ignacio was miraculously cured

thanks to the intercession of the new blessed.

A massive and international participation

The universal nature of the new blessed was manifested by the presence of hundreds of thousands of faithful from more than 80 countries and especially the participation of 18 cardinals and more than 150 bishops from all over the world.

Among those on the front row at the ceremony were more than 200 people with some form of disability or the other, as well as representatives of the many social initiatives promoted by the new blessed, particularly in Africa and in Latin America. There were also many families and some Spanish and international civil authorities.

From very early in the morning, 1,600 big buses and a bus shuttle service took the more than 300,000 people from the Metro stations to the 185,000 square meters of Valdebebas. They were thus able to wait for the start of the ceremony watching some audio-visual programs on 26 giant screens. They prepared themselves spiritually either by praying in the 13 chapels available or by receiving the sacrament of penance in one of the 80 confessionals spread throughout the area.

The homily laid emphasis on his faithfulness to the Gospel, to the Church and to the Pope

In his homily Cardinal Amado illustrated some virtues which the new blessed “lived in a heroic manner”, such as his “faithfulness to the Gospel, to the Church and to the Magisterium of the Pope”. According

to the cardinal, Alvaro del Portillo “fled from all kinds of self-seeking because he transmitted the truth of the Gospel and not his personal opinions”. Among other things, “he stood out for the prudence and uprightness of intention in the way he valued events and persons. He also stood out through the respect he had for the honour and freedom of others”.

Cardinal Amato continued: “Today Blessed Alvaro del Portillo invites us to an amiable, merciful, affable, meek and humble holiness. The saints invite us to put into the womb of the Church and of society the pure air of the grace of God which renews the face of the earth”.

The huge turnout of the faithful was marked by piety and the joy of singing that was accompanied by the 200-voice choir of the last World

Youth Day.1,200 priests distributed communion in Valdebebas.

Msgr. Echevarria: a special prayer for those who suffer persecution as a result of their faith

At the end of the celebration, Monsignor Javier Echevarria, Prelate of Opus Dei spoke some words of gratitude to God, to the Church and to Pope Francis, as well as to Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, to Cardinal Amato and to the Archdiocese of Madrid, the choir, the volunteers and the media, all of who have made possible the ceremony that has been followed by many throughout the world.

The prelate continued: “the raising of Alvaro del Portillo to the altars reminds us anew of the universal call to holiness, proclaimed with great fervour by the Second Vatican Council”.He also made reference to the “joy that St. Josemaria Escriva

would undoubtedly feel in seeing this most faithful son of his proposed as an intercessor and model for all the faithful”.

Monsignor Echevarria asked those present to pray in a special way “for our brothers and sisters who suffer persecution for their faith, including martyrdom in different parts of the world”.

The Diocese of Madrid is proud of its son

In his closing remarks Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco wished to point out the bond that exists between Alvaro del Portillo and the city of Madrid."Not only for historical reasons but also because of the influence which his life and writings have had on the hearts of so many faithful of this Archdiocese.His footprints are also felt through the spiritual and social good done by the

very many initiatives that owe their inspiration to him”.

In conclusion, Cardinal Rouco said “Blessed del Portillo, who was born here in Madrid, is ours in a unique way and so sends us special blessings from heaven”. “As a diocesan Church” he added, “we are very proud of the faithful help he lent to St. Josemaria in spreading the message of Opus Dei throughout the world and for the contributions he made to the Second Vatican Council”.

At the end of the ceremony the more than 3,500 young volunteers helped participants to leave Valdebebas on their way back to Madrid. While some returned to their places of origin, others will come back tomorrow for the traditional Mass of Thanksgiving which will be presided over by Bishop Javier Echevarria, the prelate of Opus Dei.

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