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Letter from the Prelate (September 2014)

Bishops Javier Echevarria suggests going to our Lady's help to prepare well for the beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, and asks for prayers for those suffering religious persecution throughout the world.

09/03/2014

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My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

We have begun the final stretch before the beatification of our dearly beloved Don Alvaro. How long and yet how short the days seem to me that still remain before September 27! Don Alvaro had the same experience in the weeks right before our Father's beatification. He sent us some words then that I make my own in the present circumstances: "In order to benefit from the abundant graces that our Lord and his Blessed Mother wish to pour into souls . . . prepare yourselves very well interiorly. Seek God in your heart and strive to talk with him constantly. Fulfill the Norms very well, and generously offer up the tiredness and setbacks that might occur during the trip." [1] As you can see, this invitation is completely current.

Some time ago I suggested various ways that could help us to prepare spiritually for this event. Perhaps now, in the silence of your prayer, each of you might ask how you have fostered, through specific resolutions and generous daily struggle, the desire to prepare yourself better to receive the graces that God will infuse into your soul. Whatever the case, we still have time to intensify the pace in the next four weeks, by deepening our personal piety.

The feasts of our Lady that we will celebrate during September, nearly one each week, will help give wing to these desires. The 8th is the feast of the Nativity of Mary, the All Holy, the creature most pleasing in God's sight, who was full of grace from the moment of her Immaculate Conception and grew daily in that fullness until her Assumption into heaven, body and soul. This will be a good moment to turn to our Mother's

intercession with renewed confidence, asking her for her Son's grace to deeply cleanse all of our wretchedness, even the very slightest. To make this a reality, let us take great care of sacramental confession and help others to approach this sacrament of mercy and joy well prepared.

On the 12th we have the liturgical commemoration of the Holy Name of Mary. What joy we experience in pronouncing it! Saint Bernard said that the name of Jesus is "honey in the mouth, melody in the ear, jubilation in the heart." [2] We can say something similar about the name of Mary. Therefore I recommend that in the coming days we make a special effort in praying the Hail Mary, especially in the rosary. The repeated but ever fresh invocation of this sweet name chosen by God is like an ointment that soothes setbacks, a melody delighting

the ears of the heart, a tasty morsel for the tongue.

At mid-month, on the 15th, we will recall the sorrowful Virgin, *iuxta crucem Jesu*, close beside the Cross and intimately united to her Son's sacrifice, where she received us as her children.[3] What else can I tell you but that we must join to our pleas the savory spice of mortification? For thus we will more easily move our Lord to grant us his gifts. It is not an accident that the Church commemorates the sorrows of our Lady on the day after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. Our Mother the Church wants to inspire in us "a great devotion to Christ crucified, and a tender, filial devotion to Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, who stands upright and firm beside the Cross, alone or practically alone, her soul pierced with grief.

"My children, for your part, say something to our Lord, and also to his Mother. Tell her what we would tell our own mother if we were to see her offended and mistreated in this way, the object of malicious stares. She endures all of this out of love for her Son. She lets herself be crucified in desire, accepting all the shame and humiliation."[4]

The 15th is also the anniversary of the election of Don Alvaro as Saint Josemaría's first successor at the head of Opus Dei. I suggest that you often pray the prayer of his prayer card, placing under his intercession the needs of the Church, of the Work, of the world, and of each person. In the face of the sad spectacle of a divided world, where peoples are enemies of one another and families are torn by discord, the divine promise of peace and unity, announced in the Old Testament and forcefully ratified by the New

Testament, “is for us a promise full of hope: it points to a future which God is even now preparing for us. Yet this promise is inseparably tied to a command: the command to return to God and wholeheartedly obey his law (cf. *Dt* 30:2-3). God’s gifts of reconciliation, unity and peace are inseparably linked to the grace of conversion, a change of heart that can alter the course of our lives and our history, as individuals and as a people.”[5]

Finally, on the 24th, the memorial of Our Lady of Ransom will be celebrated in some places. This advocacy of our Lady is closely united to the history of the Work. Our Father prayed before her image on many occasions, and especially in 1946 before his first trip to Rome and on his return. With the help of Don Alvaro, we place in her hands with special confidence the spiritual fruit of the approaching days.

As in last month's letter, I once again ask that you not leave on their own the men and women who are suffering or persecuted for their faith in various parts of the world. Let us not think that we can do nothing about it. Even though we may be physically distant, we can support them in their suffering through our prayer, our sacrifice, and whenever possible our material services. And above all by a more focused faithfulness to our Christian duties. Saint Josemaría wrote that "our apostolic efforts will contribute to peace and cooperation among mankind, to justice, to avoiding wars and isolation, to preventing national selfishness and personal selfishness. For all will realize that they belong to the great human family, which God wants to lead to perfection."[6]

All wars are a scourge for mankind, but they are especially horrifying when they are provoked by the false

and blasphemous excuse of God's name, as Pope Francis and his predecessors have often denounced. Specifically, in recent weeks the situation of Christians and other religious communities in Iraq, Syria, Nigeria and elsewhere has become especially dramatic. Faced with the atrocities to which these brothers and sisters of ours are being subjected, the Holy Father's reflections during a morning homily in the Casa de Santa Marta take on new relevance. "There are more witnesses, more martyrs in the Church today than in the first centuries. So during this Mass, remembering our glorious ancestors here in Rome, let us also think of our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted, who are suffering and who by their blood are nourishing the seed of so many small Churches that are being born. Let us pray for them and also for ourselves." [7]

In the month of his beatification, let us ask Don Alvaro for peace in the world, and especially for consolation for the Christians and other people of good will who are being attacked because of their beliefs. In his youth he suffered religious persecution and faced the possibility of martyrdom, completely ready to receive it if God were to ask it of him. During a search in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, militiamen discovered a crucifix in his pocket, which in those times was reason enough for imprisonment and a severe sentence.

The same thing happened to him when he was in jail, where he was threatened by some of the guards, even having a pistol held against his temple. He abandoned himself in God's hands without making a single gesture out of accord with the faith and hope that nourished his soul. I am sure that he will bring this prayer of ours to God with special efficacy.

Perhaps we might repeat a prayer that Saint Josemaría wrote in a similar situation: “what a beautiful prayer for you to say frequently: that of a friend who was praying for a priest imprisoned out of hatred for religion. ‘My God, console him, since it is for you he suffers persecution. How many suffer because they serve you!’”[8]

At the same time, let us commend ourselves with authentic faith to these new contemporary martyrs. Let us ask them also to support and help us from Heaven to be witnesses to Christ’s love in our families, in the neighborhoods and cities where we live, in our nation and in the entire world, and among the poor and the sick. May all of us Christians know how to be, like them, beacons of light in this world of ours so in need of sowers of peace and joy.

I come back again to the immediate preparations for September 27 and 28 in Madrid and September 30 in Rome. As the new Blessed suggested to us, “follow as well as possible the indications you are given, few but necessary for the ceremonies to go well and to make it easier for everyone present to benefit spiritually. Especially, my children, live those days with a lot of supernatural spirit; let your piety be seen in the liturgical ceremonies with naturalness and simplicity.”[9]

Let us strive to make this advice known to all the people who will be accompanying us in this celebration, whether close at hand or from a distance. It will be a cause of joy for everyone to see that all those attending the beatification Mass and the thanksgiving Masses celebrated the following day respond in unison and without hurry to the celebrant's words. “And let your songs, songs of

gratitude to God and of jubilation, resound and rise up to Heaven with the strength of love: *et clamor meus ad te veniat* (Ps 101 [102]: 2). Your prayers and songs,” Don Alvaro stressed, “should be the ‘only clamor’ heard in the liturgical ceremonies . . . filled with supernatural sense, a spirit of prayer and serene joy.”[10]

We should also try put more affection into the first Friday Vigil this month. And let us intensify the “apostolate of confession,” so dear to Don Alvaro, and our prayer for the Pope and his intentions. Yesterday I ordained two Associate brothers of yours to the priesthood. Pray especially for them and for all priests.

I am especially happy to inform you that, along with all of you, I was able to accompany my daughters and sons in Venezuela and spend the anniversary of my priestly

ordination there. Abundant fruit will come from their apostolic efforts.

I will end here. I assure you that you are all very present in my prayers, especially those who for various reasons cannot be physically present at Don Alvaro's beatification. As I have already told you, we will all be closely united in prayer and in intentions.

With all my affection, I bless you and remember you very especially.

Your Father

+ Javier

Torrecciudad, September 1, 2014

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[1] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, April 27, 1992.

[2] Saint Bernard, *Sermon 15 on the Song of Songs*, III, no.6 (“Opera Omnia,” ed. Cister, 1957, I, p. 86).

[3] Cf. *Jn* 19:26-27.

[4] Saint Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, September 15, 1970.

[5] Pope Francis, Homily at Seoul, August 18, 2014.

[6] Saint Josemaría, *Letter*, January 9, 1932, no. 38.

[7] Pope Francis, Homily, June 30, 2014.

[8] Saint Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 258.

[9] Don Alvaro, *Letter*, April 27, 1992.

[10] *Ibid.*

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