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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.

03/09/2014

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Torreciudad, 1 September 2014

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

We have embarked on the final stage before the beatification of our dearly-loved Don Álvaro. How long, and how short, the days from now till 27 September seem to me! The same thing happened to Don Álvaro in the weeks leading up to our Father's beatification. At that time, he wrote some words to us which I make my own in these circumstances: "In order to benefit from the very abundant graces that our Lord and his Blessed Mother desire to pour out into souls (...), prepare very well interiorly: seek God in your hearts and try to speak with him constantly, fulfil the Norms very well, and offer up generously the tiredness and setbacks that you may encounter during your journeys." [1] As you can see, this invitation is totally applicable now.

A little time ago I suggested to you some ways that could help us in our spiritual preparation for this event. Perhaps now each of us individually, in the silence of our prayer, can ask ourselves how we have fostered the desires, shown in specific resolutions and generous daily struggle, to be better disposed to receive the graces that God our Lord will infuse in our souls. In any case, we are still in time to quicken the rhythm for the next four weeks, with an improvement in our personal piety.

Those desires will also be intensified by the feasts of our Lady which we will celebrate this month – almost one a week. 8 September is the feast of Nativity of our Lady, the All-Holy, the creature who was most pleasing in God's eyes, the one who, full of grace from the moment of her Immaculate Conception, continued to grow daily in that fullness, up until the moment of her Assumption into

Heaven body and soul. It is a good day to turn with renewed confidence to our Mother's intercession, asking her that her Son's grace may cleanse us thoroughly from all our failings, even the slightest. For this to happen, let's take particular care of sacramental Confession and let's help other people to prepare well to go to this sacrament of mercy and joy.

On 12 September we have another liturgical commemoration: the Most Holy Name of Mary. What joy comes into our souls as we say that name! If the name of Jesus, as St Bernard says, is "honey in the mouth, song to the ear, jubilation in the heart," [2] something similar can be said of the name of Mary. So I recommend that during these days we put special effort into saying the Hail Mary, most of all in the Rosary. The constantly repeated but ever-new invocation of that sweet name, chosen by God, is like a balm that soothes difficulties,

music that delights the ears of the heart, sweet-tasting food to the palate.

Halfway through the month, on 15 September, we will recall Our Lady of Sorrows, who, *iuxta crucem Iesu*, beside the Cross of Christ, was closely united to her Son's sacrifice and who received us as her children.[3] What can I say but that we should add to our prayers the tasty seasoning of mortification? If we do, it will be easier for us to "move" our Lord to grant us his gifts. It is not for nothing that the Church commemorates Our Lady's Sorrows on the day after the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. This Mother of ours wants to inspire us with ***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, added St Josemaría, say something to our Lord, and also to his Mother. Tell her what we would tell our own mother if we saw her offended and mistreated like that, 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]

In addition, 15 September is the anniversary of Don Álvaro's election as St Josemaría's first successor at the head of Opus Dei. I suggest that you pray his prayer-card frequently, placing the needs of the Church, the Work, the whole world, and each individual under his intercession. Faced with the sad spectacle of a divided world, with nations at enmity with one another and families torn apart by discord, God's promise of peace and unity, announced in the Old Testament and

strongly ratified in the New, is a promise full of hope: it points to a future which God is even now preparing for us. Yet, the Pope explains, 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 which can alter the course of our lives and our history, as individuals and as a people.[5]

Finally, on 24 September, some places celebrate the memorial of Our Lady of Ransom, one of Mary's titles that is closely connected to the history of the Work. Our Father often prayed in front of her statue, particularly in 1946, before his first journey to Rome and on his return. With Don Álvaro's help, and with special confidence, we place the

spiritual fruits of the coming days in her hands.

As I did in last month's letter, I again ask you not to desert the men and women who are suffering or being persecuted because of their faith in different parts of the world. Let's not think that we can't do anything.

Although we are physically far away from them, we can support them in their troubles with our prayer, our sacrifice, and whenever possible our material help, and above all with more unbroken faithfulness to our Christian duties. St Josemaría wrote that ***our apostolic work will contribute to peace, mutual cooperation, justice, and the avoidance of wars, isolation, national selfishness and personal selfishness. Because everyone will realise that they are all part of the great family of mankind, which is intended to aim for perfection by God's will.***[6]

All wars are a scourge of mankind, but those which are waged with the false and blasphemous claim of being in God's name are especially horrendous, as Pope Francis, and his predecessors before him, have often declared. In recent weeks, specifically, the situation of Christians and other religious communities in Iraq, and also in Syria, Nigeria and other places, has become critical. In view of the atrocities being undergone by these brothers and sisters of ours, the Holy Father's reflection in the chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae is fully applicable. **At the present day there are more witnesses, more martyrs in the Church than in the first centuries. Commemorating our glorious ancestors in the Mass here in Rome, we also think of and pray for our brothers and sisters who live in persecution, who suffer and whose blood causes the seeds of many tiny Churches to grow. We**

pray for them and for ourselves as well.[7]

In the month of his beatification, let's pray to Don Álvaro for peace in the world, and especially for the consolation of these Christians and so many other people of good will who are being attacked for their beliefs. As a young man he suffered persecution for reasons of religion, and faced the possibility of martyrdom, being perfectly willing to accept it if our Lord asked it of him, in the early months of the Spanish Civil War, when the militia conducting a search found a crucifix in his pocket. In those times, that carried the risk of imprisonment and a harsh sentence.

The same happened when he was in prison, where he was threatened by the jailors, even having a pistol put to his temple. He abandoned himself in our Lord's hands, without in any way

playing false to the faith and hope that nourished his soul. I am sure that he will be especially effective in bringing this prayer of ours to God. Perhaps we can repeat a prayer that St Josemaría wrote in similar circumstances: ***What a beautiful prayer for you to say frequently, that one of our good friends praying for a priest whom hatred for religion imprisoned: “My God, comfort 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 to these new martyrs of our times with genuine faith. We also ask them to support us from Heaven and help us to be witnesses of Christ's love in our families, in the districts and towns where we live, in our countries and throughout the world, and among the poor and sick. We pray that all of us Christians may learn to be, like them, burning lights

in this world of ours, which is so badly in need of sowers of peace and joy.

I return to the immediate preparations for 27 and 28 September in Madrid, and 30 September in Rome. As the soon-to-be-Blessed suggested to us, “Follow as carefully as possible the few but necessary indications you will be given for the smooth running of the ceremonies and the spiritual benefit of all who are present at them. Above all, my daughters and sons,” he went on, “live through those days with a lot of supernatural sense, and show your piety naturally and simply in the liturgical ceremonies.” [9]

Let’s do our best to pass on these recommendations to all those who will join us for this celebration from near and far. It will give joy to everyone if those attending the Beatification Mass, and the

thanksgiving Masses celebrated in the following days, all respond unanimously and with deliberation to the celebrant's words. "And that their songs – songs of gratitude to God and rejoicing – ring out and rise up to Heaven with the strength of love: *et clamor meus ad te véniat* (Ps 102[101]: 2). This should be," concluded Don Álvaro, "the *only clamour* – that of your prayer and singing – which is heard during the liturgical ceremonies (...), filled with supernatural meaning, a spirit of prayer, and serene joy."[10]

At the same time let's try to put more love and affection into the Vigil before the Blessed Sacrament on the First Friday of the month; and intensify the *apostolate of Confession* which Don Álvaro loved so much, and your prayer for the Pope and his intentions. Yesterday I ordained to the priesthood two Associate

brothers of yours. Pray especially for them and for all priests.

I am especially happy to tell you that, together with every one of you, I was able to stay with my daughters and sons in Venezuela and spend the anniversary of my own ordination to the priesthood there. Abundant fruits will come forth from their apostolate.

I won't prolong this letter any further. I assure you that you are all very present in my prayers, especially those of you who for different reasons cannot be physically present at Don Alvaro's beatification. As I have told you before, we will all be very united in prayer and intentions.

A very affectionate blessing from
your Father

+ *Javier*

[1] Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 27 April 1992.

[2] St 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] St Josemaría, notes of a meditation, 15 September 1970 (*While he Spoke to us on the Way*, p. 312).

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

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

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

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

[9] Bishop Alvaro, Letter, 27 April 1992.

[10] *Ibid.*

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(05/08/2025)