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Anniversary Mass for Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

A homily given by Opus Dei's Prelate during a Mass celebrated in Rome on the anniversary of the death of St. Josemaria's first successor. In the homily Bishop Echevarría speaks about the family and about divine filiation.

03/23/2007

Homily in the 13th Anniversary of the “Dies Natalis” of the Servant of God Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. I would like to begin by suggesting that we thank God wholeheartedly, because throughout the world many thousands of people are gathering today to thank Heaven for don Álvaro del Portillo, our most beloved Bishop, Prelate of Opus Dei, and for the apostolic effectiveness of his life.

There still resound in our ears Jesus' words: **At that time Jesus declared, I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will (Mt 11, 25-26).**

Among the truths revealed by Christ, the truth about our divine filiation

fills our hearts with joy every time we pause to meditate on it. In fact, in the Baptismal font, Our Lord Jesus Christ has made us true children of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit. From that moment, made partakers of the divine nature, we have begun to belong to God's family. St. Paul's words to the Romans have reminded us of this truth: **For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, «Abba, Father!»** (*Rom 8, 14-15*).

To be a child of God in Christ is the distinctive mark of the Christian, the essential condition of being a follower of Christ. As you well know, St. Josemaría received from God a most lively awareness of his divine filiation, not only to live it personally but also to teach it to others. This

truth was always in his preaching: «All men and women — he wrote — are children of God. But a child can look upon his father in many ways. We must try to be children who realize that the Lord, by loving us as his children, has taken us into his house, in the middle of the world, to be members of his family, so that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his, and to develop that familiarity and confidence which prompts us to ask him, like children, for the moon!»[1].

2. This message, ever relevant, becomes more urgent during the weeks of preparation for Easter. By his Death and Resurrection the Lord has won for us the adoptive divine filiation: an immense dignity that the human mind could never have imagined. The Fathers of the Church, when presenting this truth, never fail to express their wonder. «What is more wonderful —St. Peter

Chrysologus, for instance, asked himself— that God give Himself to the Earth or that He give us Heaven? That He unite Himself to our humanity or that He introduce us into the community of his divinity? That He assume death or that He call us out of death? That he be born as a slave or that He engender us as His children? That He adopt our poverty or that He make us His heirs, co-heirs of His only Son? Yes, what causes us to wonder most is to see the Earth converted into Heaven, man transformed by the divinity, the servant with a right to his Lord's inheritance.»[2].

Faith in our divine filiation in Christ should provoke, every time we stop to consider it, great amazement and intense joy in each one of us. We should never get used to this reality! This is how Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo lived, especially from the beginning of his vocation to Opus Dei, when he

learned and then experienced fully the practical consequences of the truth of our divine filiation. Our most beloved don Álvaro assimilated perfectly the teachings of St.

Josemaría; he made them flesh of his flesh and life of his life. Those of us who knew him will always remember the serenity, the peace, the trusting abandonment in God's hands that he managed to convey — at times just with a glance or by his mere presence— precisely as a result of knowing, and feeling, himself to be a son a God.

This trait, so distinctive in his life, is an example for us to follow. From Heaven he invites us to recall our divine filiation at all times, and especially when the circumstances of our life may try to push us into the dark pit of sadness or discouragement. Let us listen to some of his words from a pastoral letter. «The knowledge that we are beloved

children of God will move us in a powerful way. In fact, frequent meditation on this truth brings with it very precise consequences for the interior life, for our work and for the apostolic effort; in sum, for all our behavior. Propelled by filial piety, faith becomes unshakable, hope secure, charity ardent. No difficulty, from within or without, can take away our optimism, even when externally we find everything arduous. And as an inseparable token of this most precious gift, the *gaudium cum pace*, the joy and peace so characteristic of God's children, enters our soul so that we may sow it abundantly all around us.»[3].

3. Many of you participating in this Holy Mass have come to Rome for the International Family Congress. You are here to give witness, once again, to the beauty of the family — founded on matrimony— and to contribute to finding a solution to

some of the problems facing today's society. Aware of your divine filiation, and fully in accord with your Christian faith, you know perfectly well that there are some issues, which we ought to defend and to promote strongly and perseveringly for the good of all. What moves us to act in this way is our loyalty to God's law, and consequently, the desire to sow joy and peace in all souls.

Our Holy Father Benedict XVI speaks often about these matters, tirelessly pointing out that it is not licit to give in regarding these important issues, because what is at stake is the future of society. Recently, Benedict XVI has recalled once again these issues in his apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist. Speaking about *being true to the Eucharist*, the Pope writes: «Worship pleasing to God can never be a purely private matter, without consequences for our relationships

with others: it demands a public witness to our faith.»[4]. Among those issues to which we ought to give witness and defend, Benedict XVI indicates some fundamental values: «Respect for human life, its defense from conception to natural death, the family built upon marriage between a man and a woman, the freedom to educate one's children and the promotion of the common good in all its forms. These values are not negotiable.»[5].

Life, family, freedom: three great issues of concern for men and women of good will, because these issues are rooted deeply in human nature. Obviously, in some of these matters it is up to married people to provide a human and Christian response both in deed and word. I invite you, therefore, to intensify your efforts and to join many other people — even non-Catholics and non-Christians — who feel

themselves threatened in their deepest convictions, to overcome the onslaught of a secularized and relativist mentality.

4. This effort of citizens to defend the Christian roots of our society was very much loved by don Álvaro. I recall his promptness and determination to follow always the Pope's directives. For instance, I am thinking now of his pastoral letter of December, 1985, written to encourage all the faithful and all the cooperators of the Prelature of Opus Dei to take an active part in the new evangelization of society. In that letter, after presenting the dangers threatening a society that does not acknowledge God's primary role, my beloved predecessor encouraged everyone to take concrete and incisive action, while indicating that the most effective remedy is the interior life, each one's personal union with God, and as a necessary

consequence of that union, personal apostolate through one's ordinary life in the workplace and among family and friends.[6].

As we offer this Holy Mass as a suffrage for don Álvaro, on the thirteenth anniversary of his departure from this world, let us ask him to intercede for these intentions. We entrust them especially to Her who has carried in her womb Life with a capital «L», the Son of God made Man. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and our Mother, Queen of the family, help us to carry out this apostolate that is so crucial today in the world and in the Church. Amen.

Rome, Basilica of St. Eugene, March 23, 2007 [1] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, n. 64.

[2] St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon* 67.

[3] Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo, *Pastoral Letter*, May 1, 1988.

[4] Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, February 22, 2007, n. 83.

[5] Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, n. 83.

[6] See Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo, *Pastoral Letter*, 1 December 25, 1985, n. 9.

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