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Meditations: May 12, Blessed Alvaro del Portillo

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on May 12, the feast day of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

- Trusting in God's grace
- A humble and smiling loyalty at the service of others
- Blessed Alvaro was a good shepherd

TODAY WE CELEBRATE the liturgical memorial of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo. This is also the anniversary

of his First Holy Communion, accompanied by over a hundred classmates at his school. Don Alvaro later recalled that in order to prepare himself well he had first gone to confession and that “he had left the confessional with great peace and joy.”^[1] From that day on, he regularly approached the sacrament of forgiveness. Likewise, after receiving our Lord in the Eucharist for the first time, he continued to attend the Mass celebrated in the Pilar school several days each week.

The simple piety of that young boy did not attract anyone’s attention. But it is impressive to see how Blessed Alvaro always kept in his heart an ardent, grateful and growing love for the sacraments of Confession and the Eucharist. In 1983, for example, he confided: “For sixty-two or sixty-three years now I have been receiving Communion daily and it is like a caress from

God.”^[2] And in September 1993, during a family gathering, he responded to a question about what his greatest joys had been in life: “My greatest joy, my son, is to receive God’s grace: each time our Lord forgives me in Confession, each time He comes to me in Communion.”^[3]

Although he was gifted with great human qualities, Blessed Alvaro “knew that God’s grace could do much more in his life than he was capable of imagining.”^[4] Hence he often prayed an aspiration that reflected his trust in God’s strength: “Thank you, sorry, help me more.” “These words express gratitude for what we do not deserve, recognition of our personal weakness, and a humble request for the strength needed to reach the greatest happiness possible, union with God. These are also among the first words that mothers teach their young children. Let us ask God for a

childlike heart, knowing ourselves incapable of anything without the help of Our Father God.”^[5] —

JULY 7, 1935 was a decisive day in Don Alvaro’s life. On that date, after a brief day of recollection, he decided to give himself to God in Opus Dei. His life then became an ongoing example of fidelity. “He lived an unquestioned fidelity to God, carrying out his will promptly and generously; fidelity to the Church and the Pope, fidelity to his priesthood, and fidelity to his vocation as a Christian in every moment and circumstance of his life.”^[6] — At the beginning, our Lord rewarded his prompt response to his vocation, by granting him an overflowing joy and great enthusiasm. But soon, as he matured spiritually, that joy became deeper

and more reflective. The feeling of enthusiasm gave way to a mature and firm security, based on trust in God. And he acquired the strength needed to be an essential support for the founder of the Work and, later, to become his first successor.

“If you ask me, Has he ever been heroic?, Saint Josemaria said, referring to Blessed Alvaro, “I will reply: yes, he has often been heroic, very often: with a heroism that seems something ordinary. I would like you to imitate him in many things, but above all in loyalty. In the long years of his vocation, there have been many occasions, humanly speaking, for getting angry, for becoming irritated, for being disloyal. But he has always had a smile and an incomparable fidelity.”^[7] —

Our Lord expects each of us to be faithful to the Gospel, to be women

and men of faith who contribute a supernatural vision to all areas of human existence: in the family, friendships, work, and in collaborating with others to bring forward apostolic initiatives. We are called to foster a smiling fidelity, the fruit of humility, simplicity, serenity and peace, qualities that filled the heart of Blessed Alvaro and that, even without meaning to, he spread to those around him.

On his feast day, we can ask God, through Don Alvaro's intercession, to instill in our hearts the same sentiments that Christ Jesus had (cf. *Phil 2:5*). Thus our fidelity will be reflected in an always welcoming and understanding attitude, in a service to others that, among other things, will lead us to share with many people the gifts we have received from God.

ON SEPTEMBER 15, 1975, Don Alvaro was named the first successor of Saint Josemaría. On November 28, 1982, Pope John Paul II erected Opus Dei as a personal prelature and named him Prelate. In 1991, he conferred episcopal ordination on him. In the almost twenty years that he spent at the head of the Work, Blessed Alvaro was a “faithful and prudent servant” (*Lk 12:42*) who gave himself completely to the mission God had entrusted to him, exemplifying the virtues of the good shepherd. “He always sought to guide souls to eternal life, showing – also with his own spiritual and human struggle to walk close beside the Master – the path that leads to holiness. His concern extended not only to the faithful of the Prelature, but also to so many people who asked him for advice or a few words of encouragement for their spiritual life or for the community to which they belonged. Don Alvaro offered

his prayers and his human and spiritual wisdom to everyone, with a concern for the good of souls and of the Church. How much he prayed, asking God for light to know how to guide his own flock and the people who came to him!”^[8] —

On the occasion of his beatification, the Pope wrote: “Especially outstanding was his love for the Church, the Spouse of Christ, whom he served with a heart devoid of worldly self-interest, far from discord, welcoming everyone and always seeking in others what was positive, what united, what was constructive. He never spoke a word of complaint or criticism, even at especially difficult times, but instead, as he had learned from Saint Josemaría, he always responded with prayer, forgiveness, understanding and sincere charity.”^[9] —

We can ask our heavenly Mother to obtain for us from our Lord an ever deeper love for souls, for the Church and for the Pope. The desire to always grow in that love was deeply rooted in Blessed Alvaro's heart, as we see in his prayer before our Lady of Fatima during a pilgrimage in 1989: "I know that you always hear us, but still we have wanted to come from Rome to tell you what you already know: that we love you, but want to love you more. Help us to serve the Church as she wants to be served: with our whole heart, with complete self-giving, with loyalty and faithfulness."^[10] —

^[1] — Javier Medina Bayo, *Álvaro del Portillo. Un hombre fiel*, Rialp, Madrid, 2012, p. 45.

^[2] — *Ibid.*

^[3] — Blessed Alvaro, Notes from a family gathering, 15 September 1993.

[4] Fernando Ocariz, Homily, 11 May 2019.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Decree on the Heroic Virtues of the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo, 28 June 2012.

[7] Saint Josemaría, Words during a family gathering, 11 March 1973.

[8] Javier Echevarría, Homily, 13 May 2016.

[9] Francis, Letter to the Prelate of Opus Dei for the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, 16 June 2014.

[10] Blessed Alvaro, Prayer before Our Lady of Fatima, 25 January 1989.

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blessed-alvaro-del-portillo/ (04/10/2026)