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Sanctity: Everyone's Vocation

An article by the Prelate of Opus Dei published in "Palabra." "The ceremony on the upcoming 27th of September reminds us once again of the universal calling to holiness, preached untiringly by Saint Josemaria Escriva and reaffirmed forcefully by Vatican II."

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What is the meaning, the importance of a beatification or canonization?

The realization that Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, first Prelate of Opus Dei and successor to Saint Josemaria at the head of this institution of the Church, will soon be raised to the altars spurs us to ask this question. Pope Francis, in referring to the saints, gives us this answer: *God chooses certain people so that we might see more clearly the reality of sanctity, so that we might see that it is He who sanctifies . . . This is the first rule of sanctity: Christ must increase and we must decrease* (Homily, 9 May 2014).

When the Church declares the sanctity of one of her daughters or sons, she highlights in a special way the mission to which she is called: namely, to lead to Heaven those she has engendered to a new life, through the action of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, every beatification or canonization is an occasion to rejoice for the People of God still journeying

here on earth. As the moment approaches when Don Alvaro will be numbered among the blessed, it is only natural that our joy be shown in thanksgiving to God, from whom all sanctity proceeds.

For the canonization of Saint Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer, Cardinal Ratzinger said that people can sometimes have a mistaken concept of sanctity, as though the persons beatified or canonized were “supermen” or “superwomen.” Cardinal Ratzinger wrote: *Heroic virtue does not mean that the saint performs a type of “gymnastics” of holiness, something that normal people do not dare to do . . . Holiness then becomes a thing reserved for some “greats” whose images we see on the altars, and who are completely different from us ordinary sinners. But this is a mistaken notion of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected—and this seems to*

me the central point—precisely by Josemaria Escriva (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 October 2002).

These words express very well the meaning of the beatification of Bishop del Portillo. Don Alvaro was, certainly, a person to whom God had granted great human and supernatural gifts. Nevertheless, his daily path was one of ordinary life lived with a strong and joyful faithfulness. He never strove to shine out with his own light, but rather to always reflect the divine light by following loyally the spirit of Opus Dei, which he learned directly from the words and example of Saint Josemaria. Don Alvaro attained sanctity, with God's grace and his own generous correspondence, *by putting into practice in an extraordinary way an ordinary Christian life.*

His beatification reminds us (and here resides the meaning of this act of the Church) that holiness is truly accessible to all the baptized, if they correspond with complete generosity to their Christian vocation. This calling spurs us to seek identification with Christ, each in our own circumstances and state in life. And it requires the effort to carry the Cross each day: there is no identification with Christ if we don't love the Holy Cross. For the great majority of people, this is an ordinary cross, which they are asked to take up and bear with joy in their daily life: in the heart of the family, in the social and sporting environment, in health and in sickness, in work and in rest. Therefore, it does not involve carrying out extraordinary actions, or possessing exceptional charisms; rather it means following the Master's example by bearing the small hardships of each day.

Don Alvaro put into practice with daily constancy Saint Josemaria's advice to seek God in daily life. As the founder of Opus Dei once said: *There is no other way. Either we learn to find our Lord in ordinary, everyday life, or else we shall never find Him . . . Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind* (Conversations, 114 and 113).

The example of the saints stirs up in our heart the desire to be like them: the eagerness to rejoice eternally in the Blessed Trinity, to belong forever to the great family of God, very close to Jesus and our Lady. *To be holy does not mean being superior to others; the saint can be very weak, with many*

mistakes in his life. Holiness is this profound contact with God, becoming a friend of God: it is letting the Other work, the Only One who can really make the world both good and happy (Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in L'Osservatore Romano, 6 October 2002).

Alvaro del Portillo's beatification invites us to see each day as a call to take up once again with new vigor our Christian life, and to thus experience more intensely the joy of the Gospel. The ceremony on the upcoming 27th of September reminds us once again of the universal calling to holiness, preached untiringly by Saint Josemaria Escriva and reaffirmed forcefully by Vatican II.

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