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Mass of Thanksgiving for the beatification of Blessed Alvaro at the Shrine of Knock

Blessed Alvaro came as a pilgrim here to Our Lady's Shrine 35 years ago, on the 4th August, 1980. Homily of Archbishop of Tuam, Dr. Michael Neary, for Blessed Alvaro Day.

06/08/2015

HOMILY FOR MASS OF THANKSGIVING FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO

OUR LADY'S SHRINE, KNOCK,
SATURDAY, AUGUST 1ST, 2015.

I welcome you all on this special occasion, this Mass of thanksgiving for Blessed Alvaro del Portillo.

Blessed Alvaro came as a pilgrim here to Our Lady's Shrine 35 years ago, on the 4th August, 1980. I am reliably informed that it was a very wet day when he came to visit, so perhaps he might have some sympathy with us in Ireland this year with the wet Summer we are having!

Blessed Alvaro on the Apparition at Knock

Reflecting on the Apparition he said "this Marian Apparition, though a silent one, has a clear theological message: it speaks to us of the

Eucharist, with the Lamb, the Altar and the Cross and of the home of Mary, since St. Joseph and later St. John both looked after that home. St. John is also the High Priest, centred on the Eucharist and on Mary”

Pilgrims to Knock – Renewal of Consecration to Our Lady

Having prayed the Rosary in the Apparition Chapel, Blessed Alvaro said “this has been a pilgrimage; and the most important thing has been to renew in the name of all the members of Opus Dei consecration of Opus Dei to the most sweet heart of Mary, which our founder carried out for the first time in Loretto in 1951”. Our pilgrimage to Knock Shrine today is inspired by the words of Blessed Alvaro 35 years ago. We too have an opportunity on our pilgrimage to renew our consecration to the mother of God.

Experience of vibrant Faith in the People he met

Blessed Alvaro walked around the Church and having venerated the wall of the Apparition at the traditional spot he met some boy scouts who asked him for his blessing. He asked them if they didn't mind the rain. One of the scouts replied that if it were good enough for Our Lady it was good enough for them. Blessed Alvaro remarked later that that comment indicated signs of having a true spiritual life and he acknowledged that there were many like them in our country. He always had the antennae out for signs of God's grace working in and through the people that he met.

Similarities of the world today and Scripture Times

The readings for today's Mass are very appropriate. The first reading from the letter to the Colossians. At

the time there were those who liked to combine wisdom and knowledge by the use of biblical language from the Jewish religion and Christianity but divorcing it from Jesus Christ. The author of this Epistle confronts these ideas by focusing on the centrality of Christ as the agent and Lord of creation, the conqueror of the elements and cosmic powers, underlining the fact that through him alone comes redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Christ has won freedom for us and this brings with it certain responsibility. The situation with which the author is coping in that Epistle is not unlike the situation facing the Christian in general and the priest in particular in our culture today. Religious language is being used but very often is being emptied of its Christian content with the result that Christ is no longer at the centre. This provides all of us, the baptised faithful, religious and priests with a great challenge and

sometimes with suffering. In the first reading today that suffering is captured in the context of the suffering of Jesus Christ who wants all to be saved and not just the privileged and the initiates of Greek Mystery Religions.

Confidence and Consolation in the Word of God

Confidence is something on which the First Reading focuses, namely Christ as our hope of glory, this is very much to the fore in the Responsorial Psalm, the Lord is my Shepherd, there is nothing I shall want. The Psalm acknowledges the challenge which we face, the way in which our “drooping spirit” is revived. We may experience “the valley of darkness” yet we are reassured by the Good Shepherd, leading, guiding, comforting and consoling us, welcoming us to his table.

Gospel “Connections”

In the Gospel reading there is an unmistakable allusion to the prophet Ezekiel, where God the Good Shepherd cares for the sheep, rescuing them from the places to which they have been scattered, leading them and tending to the weak, the injured and the lost. Identifying himself as the Good Shepherd of Ezechiel 34, Jesus thus identifies himself as fulfilling God’s promise in doing God’s work. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd has a perennial hold on Christian imagination. Some of the most popular pictures of Jesus are those who depict him as a Shepherd leading the flock. This picture of Jesus has influenced the Church’s image of its leaders, so that in many traditions the ordained minister is referred to as the “pastor” and the ministerial care of the congregation is referred to as “pastoral care”.

The Good Shepherd

The image of the hireling or the bad shepherd illustrates that the primary concern is for his own wellbeing at the expense of the flock, resulting in the scattering and the devouring of the flock because of the shepherd's neglect. The Good Shepherd by contrast always in contact with the Father. The Good Shepherd is in constant relationship with his sheep but also with his Father and this presents the challenge and the responsibility for all of us entrusted with shepherding.

Blessed Alvaro – the Shepherd

As a shepherd, Blessed Alvaro was a faithful collaborator and first successor of St. Josemaria, Prelate of Opus Dei from 1982 to 1994. Blessed Alvaro was concerned with the saving mission of the Church and his greatest wish was to have the Prelature serve that mission all over

the world. St. John Paul II said of him, “he began the work of Opus Dei in many northern European countries and encouraged participation in “new evangelisation”.

Bishop Alvaro – Pastor of the Flock

As Bishop he made every effort to embody the characteristics of the Good Shepherd, getting to know his flock, visiting almost every country in which work was active on all five continents. His great concern was to bring the message of Christ to relatives, friends and colleagues, encouraging people so that they would take up the challenge. Blessed Alvaro’s pastoral work was rooted in his deep faith in God. Pope Francis focuses on Blessed Alvaro’s prayer which was sincere and very informative “Thank you; forgive me; help me more!”. These words illustrate what is very often absent in

our culture, namely a sense of gratitude, experience of acceptance and forgiveness by God and, recognising that we are in no way self-sufficient, a call for God's help. In this short prayer Blessed Alvaro underlines the importance of trust in the Lord, our brother, our friend who is always with us will not let us down. This way he encourages us not to be afraid in what is sometimes a very fearful world. He encourages us to launch out into the deep and be prepared to suffer for our proclamation of the Gospel.

Encouragement as Pilgrims today

As we come here on pilgrimage to Our Lady's Shrine we thank God for the inspiration provided by Blessed Alvaro and take encouragement from the fact that, not only was he head of Opus Dei but that as a former pilgrim to this Shrine of Our Lady, he is now numbered among the saints. As

Bishop Javier Echevarria, on the occasion of his beatification said that “Blessed Alvaro is “sending us a very clear message.....telling us to trust in the Lord, as our brother and our friend, who never lets us down and is always at our side. He is encouraging us not to be afraid to go against the current and suffer for announcing the gospel. He is also teaching us that in the simplicity of our daily lives we can find a sure path to holiness”.

Surely that is a message which we all need to hear this time in the history of our country when things are happening over which we at times feel we have no control. When marriage, priesthood, consecrated life and indeed life itself are all subjected to intense opposition. At a time when text messages and the social media encourage brevity surely the three powerful and all embracing statements of Blessed Alvara provide us with an attitude which enables us to come into the

presence of God, realise our dignity and the destiny which the Lord has in store for each of us: “thank you, forgive me, help me more”.

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