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"We are on the threshold of Holy Week"

March 23 is the twenty fourth anniversary of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo's death. An excerpt from a letter he sent to the faithful of the Prelature on April 1, 1993.

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We are on the threshold of Holy Week. In a few days we will take part in the liturgical ceremonies of the solemn Easter Triduum. We will

share in the final hours of our Lord Jesus Christ's earthly life, when he offered himself to the Eternal Father as Priest and Victim of the New Covenant, sealing with his Blood the reconciliation of mankind to God. It is a drama we can never grow accustomed to: the Innocent One laden with the faults of sinners, the Just One dying in place of the unjust! Nevertheless, the tragedy of Holy Week is a source of immense joy for Christians. *O happy fault, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!*^[1] the Church sings in the Easter Proclamation, referring to our first parents' sin. And we would like to say the same about our own daily faults, when these lead us to amend our lives with a sorrow born love and contrition.

My daughters and sons, during the approaching holy days strive to foster in your heart many acts of reparation and sorrow—a sorrow

born of love. Ask God's forgiveness for your own failings and those of all men. In your thoughts and desires, place yourself next to Christ during his bitter Passion, and console him with your loving words, your faithful deeds, your generous mortification and penance, above all by fulfilling your duties at every moment. If you do so, you can be sure that you will help Jesus to carry the Cross: the Cross that weighs, and will continue to weigh until the end of time, on Christ's Mystical Body; and you will be co-redeemers with him. You will share in the glory of his Resurrection, because you will have suffered with him.[2] And you will be filled with joy: a joy that nothing and no one will be able to take from you. [3]

My daughters and sons, never forget that the *gaudium cum pace*, the joy and peace God has promised us if we are faithful, doesn't depend on

material well-being, or on having things work out as we want. Nor is it a matter of good health or worldly success. Such happiness would in any case be short-lived and precarious, whereas what we aspire to is eternal bliss. The deep joy that completely fills the soul stems from union with our Lord. Remember those words of our beloved founder in one of his last get-togethers: "If you want to be happy, be holy; if you want to be happier, be holier; if you want to be very happy (even here on earth), be very holy."[4]

My daughter, my son: the prescription is a proven one. Our holy founder, who suffered so much for God, was extremely happy on earth. Or rather, precisely because he was intimately united to Christ on the holy Cross (for sanctity consists in identifying oneself with Christ crucified), he received the reward of joy and peace.

Listen to what he confided to us in a meditation on Good Friday in 1960. Recalling how his life had been a forge of suffering, he encouraged us not to be “afraid of pain or dishonor, to lay aside our pride. When God calls someone to be his, he makes that person feel the weight of the Cross. Without setting myself up as an example, I can tell you that throughout my life I have suffered pain, bitterness. But in the midst of everything I have always found happiness, because you, Lord, have been my Simon of Cyrene.

“Throw off your fear of the Cross, my child! How can you look at Christ nailed there, and still seek only your own pleasure? That's not the way! Don't you remember that the disciple is not above his Master (cf *Mt* 10:24)?

“Lord, once again, we renew our acceptance of everything ascetical theology calls 'tribulation,' although I

don't like that word. I had nothing: neither age, nor experience, nor money. I found myself humbled. I was... nothing, nothing! And some of that suffering spilled over onto those close to me. They were terrible years, yet I never felt I was unfortunate. Lord, may my children learn from my experience. Despite my wretchedness, I never became embittered. I have always been happy! Happy, despite the tears; happy, despite the suffering. Thank you, Jesus! And forgive me for not learning more from the lesson."[5]

Meditating on these words of our Father we reach a clear conclusion: we should never, under any circumstance, lose the supernatural joy that springs from being God's children. And if we were ever to lose it, we should immediately have recourse to prayer and spiritual guidance, and make a good examination of conscience, so we can

discover the cause and apply the right remedy.

It's true that cheerfulness can be lost owing to illness or tiredness. Then the Directors have a serious obligation to help their brother or sister to rest and be looked after; they should be watchful that no one reaches a point where, through overwork, lack of sleep, exhaustion, or for whatever reason, their interior life is adversely affected.

As our Father pointed out, at other times a loss of cheerfulness can be traced to an ascetical cause. Do you know the most common one? Excessive concern for oneself, always thinking about oneself. Considering how unimportant we all are, how is it, my daughter, my son, that sometimes you make yourself the center of things? "If we have a disordered love for ourselves," writes our Father, "of course we'll be sad: so

many failures, so much pettiness! Seeing ourselves so wretched is enough to make us sad and discouraged. But if we love God above all things, and others and ourselves in God and for God, how many reasons to be joyful!"[6]

Such was the example set by the Master, who gave his life for us. Let us do the same, out of love for him and all men and women. Let us rid ourselves of any personal worries about what the day might hold in store for us. And if any worries persist, let us entrust ourselves with complete confidence to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Sweet Heart of Mary, our Mother, and thus we will find peace. My daughters and sons, the only things that should "preoccupy" us, or better put, "occupy" us, are the concerns of God, which are the concerns of the Church, the Work and souls. Don't you realize that thus we come out

ahead even humanly? Besides, only thus will we always be filled with *gaudium cum pace*, with peace and joy, and attract many others to our way.

[1] Easter Vigil, *Praeconium Paschale*.

[2] Cf *Rom* 8:18.

[3] Cf *Jn* 16:22.

[4] Saint Josemaria, Get-together, June 7, 1975.

[5] Saint Josemaria, Meditation, April 15, 1960.

[6] Saint Josemaria, *Letter*, March 24, 1931, no. 25.

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