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The fisherman and the tiny fish

A joke is said that the fish celebrated when they heard our Lord telling Simon Peter and his brother Andrew that ...
“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

08/20/2014

For as far as the fish were concerned, the long awaited freedom was gained that moment and henceforth, the fishing nets were to be re-directed to different species, called man.

When I heard the news about the beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, it occurred to me that the Church and in particular the apostles, have truly lived to the calling made by Jesus of being “fishers of men.”

It was one Saturday afternoon 1989, when I saw people trickle to the then Kenyatta International Conference Centre (KICC), Nairobi. And as it is common with many Kenyans, I just followed the crowd to witness the unfolding. As I entered the hall, I was given the ear phone (the first time ever to use such a gadget). Minutes after some preliminary instructions on the usage of ear phones plus a few other details, I heard Kenyan folk songs and dances from a distance, and within a short while, the beaming face of a bishop accompanied with some religious men entered the hall in Rhythm with the songs. From the introduction, I learnt that the bishop was the prelate

of Opus Dei, Don Alvaro Del Portillo – who was on a pastoral visit to Kenya.

The bishop appreciated both the rich culture and beautiful physical features of Kenya. He singled out Mount Kenya and explained that one has to practice on daily basis in order to climb up to the apex of this great mountain. Similarly, in order to reach to the apex of our spiritual life, we need to continually practice daily, weekly, monthly and yearly, he said.

In essence, Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo emphasized the need to combine the natural religious sense of Kenyans with Christ's word. There was applause in the hall and the message penetrated both my mind and heart. Henceforth, I started pondering what Opus Dei was all about, particularly this daily practice in order to reach the apex of human life – being in the presence of God forever. As far as I am concerned, I followed the crowd

to KICC to witness the unfolding and came out with the 'seed' from Alvaro himself planted in my heart forever and ever.

The crowd that thronged KICC that Saturday afternoon 1989 could be compared to the fish in one of the Kenyan lakes. By then I was in my teen years and therefore a 'tiny fish' (omena). The servant of God Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo was truly doing his apostolic work of being a fishers of men.

However, at that hour his fishing net gathered both the "big fish" and the tiny fish which is still struggling to practice daily as per bishop's instructions at KICC.

I am very grateful to God that the fisherman who fished the tiny fish is to be beatified and therefore reach the apex of human life which he preached while on Kenyan soil.

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tiny-fish/](https://opusdei.org/en-ke/article/the-fisherman-and-the-tiny-fish/) (03/24/2026)