

Devotion to Don Alvaro in a Congo prison

Handing out Don Alvaro's prayer cards in Kinshasa's central prison (D. R. of the Congo).

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I live in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In July 2018 I went to visit my uncle whom I hadn't seen for some time. He was a security guard and lived in the premises he guarded. When I

went to that place, they told me that my uncle had a problem with the law – related to the premises he guarded – and they had taken him to the central prison of the city.

I decided then to go see him there. But it was the very first time that I was going to visit a prison, and I felt quite apprehensive about everything that I had heard about that prison.

I set a day for the visit, which would be on a Sunday after celebrating Holy Mass at my home. I entrusted the fruit of the visit to Blessed Alvaro, thinking of my uncle whom I was going to visit and also so that everything would go very well.

On the day of the visit, I also took a good stack of prayer cards with the prayer to Blessed Alvaro, to distribute them there taking advantage of the occasion. I was dressed in the white cassock, as priests dress here, and in this way

people would not confuse me with a "pastor" of sects of all kinds and who not infrequently dress in "clergyman", i.e. a clerical suit.

Once there, I had to go through four controls inside the prison itself and at each checkpoint they gave me a card of a certain colour that I had to hand back when I returned. Seeing me in a cassock, the officials treated me with great kindness. And I made use of those stops at the checkpoint to distribute Blessed Alvaro's prayer cards that I brought with me.

At the last checkpoint, before giving him the prayer card, I asked the official if he was Catholic. He said No, but he would be very grateful if I gave him a prayer card, because prayer is always useful. There were many people around and they all also wanted to receive a prayer card. First, they received it, and after

looking at both sides, they asked me, and how does this work?

At this last checkpoint is where, in theory, they should tell me the block where the person I was looking for was located. But after going through his records several times, the official could not find the name I gave him. Meanwhile I was praying to Don Alvaro so as not to return home without greeting my uncle.

Then the official told me: I cannot find the name of your uncle in the records, but this doesn't mean he is not here. I am going to entrust two prisoners in charge of order to take you to another official who is further inside the prison.

We found the official in question in a courtyard, sitting under an awning, and when he saw me, he stood up to welcome me with great kindness, saying that he too was a Catholic. He asked me what was it that brought

me to him and said: Don't worry. We'll find him in a couple of minutes; He put my uncle's name and surname on two pieces of paper, gave them to two prisoners with the mission of bringing him the person indicated as soon as possible.

He offered me a chair to have a seat and we started chatting. I told him I was an Opus Dei priest. And he replied: "I know Opus Dei. It was founded by Monsignor Josemaría Escrivá, right? I say this because in the 80s, I used to receive by mail the Newsletter of the founder of Opus Dei, and I used to go to the Mass that was said in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Zaire - that was how the Congo was called before - on 26 June.

And I'm going to tell you one thing: Do you know what stuck with me the most? A few words from Monsignor Escrivá that I read in a newsletter about frequent confession." I was

impressed! I could not imagine finding a person who had love and devotion to our Father in this place.

And while we were talking, the two envoys arrived with my uncle. He was surprised and very happy to see me, as I was to see him. The official gave us permission to go chat in the area of the Catholic chapel that was there and where my uncle used to go to pray.

I am convinced that this meeting was a favour of Blessed Alvaro. And Don Alvaro did even more, since after a few days my uncle left that detention centre, since it became clear that the reason why he had been detained were unfounded.

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