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Blessed Alvaro del Portillo: a good shepherd

Bishop Elias Ayuban's homily during the Solemn Eucharistic Concelebration held at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel in New Manila, Quezon City on the liturgical feast day of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, 12 May 2025.

05/15/2025

Dear brother priests, fellow
consecrated men and women,

members of the Prelature of Opus Dei, brothers and sisters in Christ,
happy feast day po sa inyong lahat!

Thank you for having me preside over this Eucharistic celebration. Today we gather in joy to honor Blessed Alvaro del Portillio, a faithful servant of God and the closest collaborator of Saint Josemaria Escriva. Allow me to reflect with you on the exemplary life of Blessed Alvaro in light of the gospel of the Good Shepherd. “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” I counted that the phrasal verb “lay down” is mentioned four times in today’s gospel. It is said that when the same word or phrase in the scriptural reading is mentioned time and again, it is the most important one. These two realities – the life of Blessed Alvaro and the promise of Christ – wonderfully illuminate each other.

Like the Good Shepherd, Blessed Alvaro laid down his life, not by shedding his blood, though, but each day in his small acts of love, service, and faithfulness, he did this, even as a layman.

I read the story of the young Alvaro and his fellow students would go to the impoverished neighborhood in Madrid to come to the aid of the poor. *“El que no vive para servir no sirve para vivir.” Sinuman ang hindi nabubuhay para magsilbi ay walang silbi para mabuhay.*

In our elections: *“Ang sinumang hindi tumatakbo sa halalan para magsilbi ay walang silbi para tumakbo.”*

‘Service-oriented’ is now nuanced these days. We become choosy about our service vehicles... priests and politicians alike.

Early on, Blessed Alvaro deeply understood the importance of the

laity's vocation in the Church. His life's work was to help ordinary Christians discover that sanctity is not reserved for the few, but is a call for all – to be lived in daily work, family life, and friendship.

He showed, like the Good Shepherd, that holiness is not about spectacular deeds, but about daily fidelity, quiet perseverance, and joyful trust in God.

Later on, as a priest, Blessed Alvaro never drew attention to himself. Instead, he reflected Christ: available, compassionate, a man who truly “knew his sheep” (Pope Francis would use the phrase: “to have the smell of the sheep”) and called them by name – just as Christ knows and calls each of us. And we are aware that knowledge in a biblical sense is not just in a superficial sense.

His priestly heart did not seek to be placed above others but among them

– to walk with them, to listen, to guide with patience and charity.

He did not seek his own glory; rather, like a good and faithful steward, he pointed always toward Christ. As the first successor of St. Josemaria Escriva at the head of Opus Dei, he worked humbly and tirelessly to spread the call to holiness in ordinary life.

In the letter of the late Pope Francis addressed to Bishop Javier Echevarria on the occasion of the beatification of then Venerable Álvaro del Portillo, he says, and I quote, “He is teaching us that in the simplicity and ordinariness of our daily life, we can find the sure path to holiness!” One of Blessed Alvaro’s most striking traits was his gentleness and loyalty. He was known for his serene spirit, patience in suffering, and fatherly kindness to everyone. In him, many could

recognize the very traits of the Good Shepherd: one who leads not by force but by love; one who builds up rather than tears down. When we do not know how to love, we impose.

Brothers and sisters, we live in a world filled with many false gates, many voices that promise freedom, but lead to emptiness. Blessed Álvaro reminds us that there is only one gate worth entering: the heart of Jesus. If we listen to His voice, if we follow Him even when the way is narrow or difficult, we too will find “life, and life in abundance.” Pope Francis adds: “Blessed Alvaro is encouraging us not to be afraid to go against the current and suffering, announcing the Gospel.”

Inspired by the Good Shepherd and Blessed Alvaro, may we lay down our lives for others through the quiet prophecy of ordinary life, lived with love, humility, and perseverance.

Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, pray for
us!

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