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Letter from the Prelate (June 2014)

The Prelate's June letter focuses on the theological virtue of hope. He invites us to pray with Alvaro del Portillo: "Lord, do not trust in me; but I do trust in you."

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My dear children: may Jesus watch over my daughters and sons for me!

The Solemnity of Pentecost is approaching next Sunday, and right afterwards the return, also joyful, to ordinary time in the Liturgy. The Church invites us to continue our efforts to carry out our ordinary duties: the setting of our struggle for sanctity. Let us take advantage of the impetus we have received during the preceding weeks. The consideration of Christ's triumph over sin and death, his resurrection and glorious ascension, and the sending of the Paraclete, has given us new encouragement to raise our eyes to the true goal of our earthly journey: to Heaven. Following a devotion deeply rooted in the Church, St. Josemaría invited us to prepare for the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, the Sunday following Pentecost, with a *triduum* of adoration and thanksgiving, the "Trisagium Angelicum": *tibi laus, tibi gloria, tibi gratiarum actio in saecula sempiterna, o beata Trinitas!*[1]

Praise to you, glory to you,
thanksgiving to you, forever and
ever, O Most Blessed Trinity!

The eagerness to rejoice fully in God, raising our daily life to the supernatural order, is a mark of souls who take their vocation to holiness seriously. I was a witness to how our beloved Don Alvaro strove to keep closely united to our Lord here below, as a foretaste of the contemplation and eternal love of God in Heaven. Just like St. Josemaría in his final years, he frequently prayed the words from the Psalm: *vultum tuum, Domine, requiram*,^[2] Lord, I will always seek your face. He used these words to keep God present in the midst of his work and daily tasks.

Hope is a powerful help to direct our thoughts to God in all our occupations. Don Alvaro would look at the Tabernacle or the images of

our Lady with great affection and piety. He was deeply grateful for Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, and for our Lady's motherly care. His faith gave him a foretaste of the joy of contemplating and rejoicing with God in Heaven, not as we do here on earth, where we can only contemplate him as in a mirror and through obscure images, but face to face.[3] Therefore, although he suffered a lesion in his vertebrae that at times caused severe pain also in his legs, he never failed to make a slow genuflection when he passed before the Tabernacle. He was convinced that those discomforts, offered to God, were another way of honoring him and hoping in him.

We all realize that, although sincerely trying to follow closely in our Lord's footsteps, we experience our own limitations every day. Our state of health or sickness, the

setbacks of each day, our natural concern (which shouldn't take away our peace) for the people we love, for the needs of the Church and society, are a spur to make acts of hope. St. Josemaría advised us: “renew your decision each morning, with a very determined *Serviam!*, I will serve you, Lord! Renew your resolution not to give in, not to give way to laziness or idleness; to face up to your duties with greater hope and more optimism, convinced that if we are defeated in some small skirmish we can overcome this setback by making a sincere act of love.”[4]

The life of a disciple of Christ is not meant to be a continual negation, nor a repression of the desires for happiness deep in our heart. For as Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “We need the . . . hopes that keep us going day by day.”[5] In that same encyclical, he said that “day by day, man experiences many greater or lesser

hopes, different in kind according to the different periods of his life.”[6] These hopes help us to set goals, to keep advancing on our earthly pilgrimage. Frequently, these human plans can absorb everything and not allow room for other hopes. This happens especially with young people and with those who are just beginning to make their way in their professional activity, who may perhaps be blinded by a deceptive “mirage.” But when these aspirations fail, or aren’t fulfilled as one had hoped, Benedict XVI said, “it becomes clear that they were not, in reality, the whole. It becomes evident that man has need of a hope that goes further. It becomes clear that only something infinite will suffice for him, something that will always be more than he can ever attain . . . This great hope can only be God, who encompasses the whole of reality and who can bestow upon us what we, by ourselves, cannot attain.”[7]

In the months that remain until September 27, the date of Don Alvaro's beatification, I would like to frequently consider my predecessor, so loyal to God, who followed faithfully the example and teachings of St. Josemaría, even in his eagerness to attain the happiness of Heaven. On earth he was a happy and optimistic person, because he loved this supernatural virtue of hope, which he beseeched God for each day. With words that I also often heard from our Founder, Don Alvaro used an aspiration very well suited for fostering that outlook, especially when we sense more vividly our own weakness or personal limitations. He would say: *Lord, do not trust in me; but I do trust in you.* He recommended it also to those listening to him, especially if anyone thought they were unable to correspond to grace, because of the weight of their faults and defects. He encouraged everyone to put their

trust in God, while also making use of the human means available to them.

With the certainty that God is always attentive to our needs, we need to consider the Founder of Opus Dei's energetic words: "We have to get moving, my children, we have to act! With courage, with energy, and with joy in our life, because love casts out fear (see *1 Jn* 4:19), with daring, without timidity . . . You have to flee equally from the attitude of the intrepid person, who sees everything as easy because he thinks he has all the required energy, as from that of the timid and retiring person, who sees insuperable difficulties in everything, because he thinks he doesn't have the strength needed.

"But don't forget that, *if one truly wants*, everything will go ahead. *Deus non denegat gratiam*: God does

not deny his help to the one who does all that he can.”[8]

I recall an incident from the 1960's that shows how Don Alvaro would make use of any small event to strengthen his hope. He had asked our Father to write a few words on a small photograph and, owing to his filial insistence, St. Josemaría wrote the following verse from a Psalm: *homines et iumenta salvabis, Domine.*

[9] “Man and beast of burden thou savest, O Lord.” Perhaps this phrase from Scripture came to mind because he had meditated on it frequently, for he saw himself as a little donkey before God. I don't exclude the possibility that he was thinking of Don Alvaro himself, remembering the affection and strength with which that son of his had helped him bear joyfully the divine burden of Opus Dei. When about to write down the date, Don Alvaro read the words written there

and, playing with his own name, remarked: *esto abre un portillo a la esperanza*. “This provides an opening for hope.” St. Josemaría liked that phrase and quickly and happily added it to the photograph.

In a meditation preached to faithful of Opus Dei, St. Josemaria addressed our Lord with these words: “Jesus, you are my God, my Brother, my Love and my All. How could I fail to trust completely in You? How could my hope not be unbounded? Yes, my sons, we have solid reasons, even material ones, to trust fully in our Father God’s providence. This assurance leads us, once again, to deeply humble ourselves. But our humiliation should be filled with trust and thanksgiving.”[10]

For God has given us many proofs of his predilection, which strengthen our hope. We only need to consider the marvelous sending of his dearly

beloved Son into the world, to save us from sin and make us his children; the constant help of the Holy Spirit, who remains and acts in the Church; the means of sanctification (the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Penance), which he has placed within our reach; the protection of his Mother, who is our Mother; the example of so many people who, by their joyful and self-sacrificing response to our Lord, spur us to look ever more intently to Heaven. As so many Pontiffs and Fathers of the Church assure us, the saints and blessed whom we venerate on the altars encourage us in a special way: an irrefutable proof that truly each and every one of us can also aspire to holiness.

In this month we celebrate the feast of St. Josemaría, who has shown us not only the path to reach Heaven through our ordinary occupations, but also the specific way to follow it.

We have ample experience of the supernatural fruit produced all over the world, on the occasion of the Masses that are celebrated around the 26th of June, with the conversions of so many men and women. Let us prepare to personally receive this shower of grace and to provide help to those who feel the prompting of such a holy priest to transform their life into a path towards God.

At times, some men and women can seem “impermeable” to this invitation. Let us not tire of praying for them, treating them with constant affection. We can apply to ourselves what Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, and which he shows us every day in his way of approaching everyone: “we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink. At times, this becomes a heavy cross, but it was from the

cross, from his pierced side, that our Lord gave himself to us as a source of living water. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope!”[11] We need, then, “to proclaim and bring God’s salvation into our world, which often goes astray and needs to be encouraged, given hope and strengthened on the way. The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven, and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”[12]

Hope led Don Alvaro to refuse to be held back by difficulties. From the moment he joined Opus Dei, in 1935, he carried out a constant and optimistic apostolate, convinced that God would always help him; and he persevered in doing so right to the end of his life. No one who passed by his side, for any reason, left without a prayer from him, some words of interest for their family or work,

some spiritual advice.... He paid no attention to people's social rank; he saw only souls that God had put next to him: the doorman of a building, the warden of a dicastery in the Holy See, the flight attendant on a plane. He did the same with civil or church authorities, who might also have been much older or of some importance in society. He was never held back by false human respect. In those encounters, whether fortuitous or planned, he always acted with the security that God would assist him, since he had seen the example of how St. Josemaría acted.

In 1972, Fr. José Maria Hernandez Garnica, before dying, wrote down a remembrance in which he mentions his amazement at Don Alvaro's "daring" (before receiving priestly ordination) in dealing with cardinals and bishops, with government ministers, with local officials. As some of the biographies of Don

Alvaro mention, Fr. José María once asked him if he didn't feel a little out of place, insecure, in carrying out these tasks. The response, full of faith in God and trust in the example of our Father, was this: "I think of the miraculous catch of fish and of what St. Peter said: *in nomine tuo, laxabo rete*. I think of what the Father said and I know that, in obeying him, I am obeying God." [13]

As the date of his beatification approaches, let us go confidently to Don Alvaro's intercession, asking him to obtain for us from our Lord this optimistic hope in our apostolic work. A good day to do so is the upcoming June 25th, the 70th anniversary of his priestly ordination, which he received in Madrid together with Fr. José María Hernández Garnica and Fr. Joseph Muzquiz, whose causes of beatification are underway.

On the 14th, if God wills, I will finish another year in my life. Pray for me so that I will follow faithfully the example of these holy pastors of Opus Dei, St. Josemaría and Don Alvaro. Continue praying a lot and every day for the Pope and for the fruit of his recent pastoral trip to the Holy Land, so that our Lord will hear his prayers for peace and for the union of all Christians. And keep very much in mind the apostolic expansion of the Work. A few days ago I was in Singapore, Taiwan and Korea, where I encouraged your sisters and brothers in their marvelous task of bringing Christ's doctrine, saturated with the spirit of the Work, to the great Asian continent. All the work they are carrying out invites us to accompany them daily through a deeply lived Communion of the Saints. How many millions of people there are awaiting the announcement of the Gospel!

I won't stop to consider in more detail the anniversary on June 26th, although I think I have an obligation to add: if we want to serve God, let us be closely united to St. Josemaría; let us love him more, and may no day go by, as he wrote in a letter, without telling him “our little worries,” for he is interested in our whole life.

With all my affection, I bless you,

Your Father

+ Javier

Rome, June 1, 2014

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[1] *Triasagium Angelicum*.

[2] *Ps 26[27]:8* (Vulgate).

[3] See *1 Cor 13:12*.

[4] St. Josemaría, *Friends of God*, no. 217.

[5] Benedict XVI, Encyclical *Spe Salvi*, November 30, 2007, no. 31.

[6] *Ibid.*, no. 30.

[7] *Ibid.*, nos. 30 and 31.

[8] St. Josemaría, *Letter of May 6, 1945*, no. 44.

[9] *Ps 35[36]:6*.

[10] St. Josemaría, Notes from a meditation, April 10, 1937, in *Growing on the Inside*, p. 36.

[11] Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhort. *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, no. 86.

[12] *Ibid.*, no. 114.

[13] See Salvador Bernal, *Recuerdo de Alvaro del Portillo*, Rialp, 6th ed., Madrid 1996, p. 79; Hugo de Azevedo,

Missão cumprida, Lisbon, Diel 2008, p 101.

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