

Sept 15: Anniversary of the Election of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

“Those of us who knew him will always remember the serenity, the peace, the trusting abandonment in God's hands that he managed to convey... precisely as a result of knowing, and feeling, himself to be a son of God.”

09/10/2007

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo was elected as the first successor of St Josemaria on 15th September 1975. When Pope John Paul II established the Work as a personal Prelature on 28th November 1982, he appointed him Prelate of Opus Dei and ordained him bishop on 6th January 1991.

The way Bishop Alvaro del Portillo governed Opus Dei was characterized by faithfulness to the founder and his message. He was tireless in his pastoral work of extending the apostolates of the Prelature in the service of the Church. He was called to the Lord early in the morning of 23rd March 1994, the morning after he returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.*Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo.*

In the following, we offer an except of a homily given by Opus Dei's Prelate, Bishop Echeverria, when he

celebrated Mass in Saint Eugene's Basilica in Rome this year, to mark the death anniversary of the Servant of God, Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo.

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Dear brothers and sisters, I would like to begin by suggesting that we thank God wholeheartedly, because throughout the world many thousands of people are gathering today to thank Heaven for don Álvaro del Portillo, our most beloved Bishop, Prelate of Opus Dei, and for the apostolic effectiveness of his life. There still resound in our ears Jesus' words: At that time Jesus declared, I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will (*Mt 11, 25-26*).

Among the truths revealed by Christ, the truth about our divine filiation

fills our hearts with joy every time we pause to meditate on it. In fact, in the Baptismal font, Our Lord Jesus Christ has made us true children of God by the grace of the Holy Spirit. From that moment, made partakers of the divine nature, we have begun to belong to God's family.

St. Paul's words to the Romans have reminded us of this truth: For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption, through which we cry, «Abba, Father!» (*Rom 8, 14-15*).

To be a child of God in Christ is the distinctive mark of the Christian, the essential condition of being a follower of Christ. As you well know, St. Josemaría received from God a most lively awareness of his divine filiation, not only to live it personally but also to teach it to others. This

truth was always in his preaching: «All men and women — he wrote — are children of God. But a child can look upon his father in many ways. We must try to be children who realize that the Lord, by loving us as his children, has taken us into his house, in the middle of the world, to be members of his family, so that what is his is ours, and what is ours is his, and to develop that familiarity and confidence which prompts us to ask him, like children, for the moon!» (St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, n. 64.)

By his Death and Resurrection the Lord has won for us the adoptive divine filiation: an immense dignity that the human mind could never have imagined. The Fathers of the Church, when presenting this truth, never fail to express their wonder. «What is more wonderful —St. Peter Chrysologus, for instance, asked himself— that God give Himself to

the Earth or that He give us Heaven? That He unite Himself to our humanity or that He introduce us into the community of his divinity? That He assume death or that He call us out of death? That he be born as a slave or that He engender us as His children? That He adopt our poverty or that He make us His heirs, co-heirs of His only Son? Yes, what causes us to wonder most is to see the Earth converted into Heaven, man transformed by the divinity, the servant with a right to his Lord's inheritance.» (St. Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 67*)

Faith in our divine filiation in Christ should provoke, every time we stop to consider it, great amazement and intense joy in each one of us. We should never get used to this reality! This is how Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo lived, especially from the beginning of his vocation to Opus Dei, when he learned and then experienced fully

the practical consequences of the truth of our divine filiation. Our most beloved don Álvaro assimilated perfectly the teachings of St. Josemaría; he made them flesh of his flesh and life of his life. Those of us who knew him will always remember the serenity, the peace, the trusting abandonment in God's hands that he managed to convey — at times just with a glance or by his mere presence — precisely as a result of knowing, and feeling, himself to be a son a God. This trait, so distinctive in his life, is an example for us to follow.

From Heaven he invites us to recall our divine filiation at all times, and especially when the circumstances of our life may try to push us into the dark pit of sadness or discouragement. Let us listen to some of his words from a pastoral letter. «The knowledge that we are beloved children of God will move us in a

powerful way. In fact, frequent meditation on this truth brings with it very precise consequences for the interior life, for our work and for the apostolic effort; in sum, for all our behavior. Propelled by filial piety, faith becomes unshakable, hope secure, charity ardent. No difficulty, from within or without, can take away our optimism, even when externally we find everything arduous. And as an inseparable token of this most precious gift, the *gaudium cum pace*, the joy and peace so characteristic of God's children, enters our soul so that we may sow it abundantly all around us.» (Msgr. Álvaro del Portillo, *Pastoral Letter*, May 1, 1988)

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