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"What happens to my freedom if I surrender it to God and, for his sake, to others?"

Homily of Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz at the Mass celebrated for the liturgical feast of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, in Rome.

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Homily for the liturgical feast of Blessed Alvaro

12 May 2018

(First reading: *Ezekiel* 34:11-16; *Psalms* 22;
Gospel: *John* 10:11-16)

This is the faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his household (cf. *Luke* 12:42). These words from the entrance hymn begin this celebration with an expression of joy and reverence.

Indeed, Blessed Alvaro was a faithful servant who gave his life to be a support and then successor of Saint Josemaria at the head of Opus Dei. He was a loyal son of the Church. As Pope Francis wrote on the occasion of his beatification: “Especially outstanding was his love for the Church, the Spouse of Christ, whom he served with a heart devoid of worldly self-interest, far from discord, welcoming towards everyone and always seeking in others what was positive, what united, what was constructive. He

never spoke a word of complaint or criticism, even at especially difficult times, but instead, as he had learned from Saint Josemaría, he always responded with prayer, forgiveness, understanding and sincere charity.”[1]. We can ask ourselves now: is this the attitude that I usually have in my daily life, when faced with difficulties or problems?

A faithful and prudent man: that's what Blessed Alvaro was. And that is why I now turn to his intercession, so that our Lord will make us all faithful and prudent. Let us ask for the virtue of prudence so that we can always be faithful to the Gospel, amid the changing circumstances of every time and place. We need *fidelity* not to follow an idea but to follow a Person: Jesus Christ, our Lord, who always gives a new horizon to the life of each one of us.

Today's liturgy of the Word presents us with the figure of the Good Shepherd. In the first reading, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel: "As a shepherd examines his flock while he himself is among his scattered sheep, so will I examine my sheep. I will deliver them from every place where they were scattered on the day of dark clouds" (*Ez* 34,12). Then, in Saint John's Gospel, the figure of the shepherd becomes more evident: "I am the good shepherd ... and I will lay down my life for the sheep" (*Jn* 10:14-15).

It is He, Jesus, who truly gives his life for his flock, who goes after the lost sheep and brings it to still waters, as we prayed in the responsorial psalm (cf. *Ps* 22). Loving those entrusted to his care, as Christ loves them, is one of the essential traits of a good shepherd. This is how Blessed Alvaro lived his whole life: with a welcoming and understanding

outlook, full of peace. For “a person who is very immersed in God is able to be very close to other people. The first condition for announcing Christ to them is to love them, because Christ loves them before we do. We have to leave behind our selfish concerns and love of comfort, and go out to meet our brothers and sisters.”[2].

We can ask ourselves: why should we leave behind our selfishness and comfort? Doesn't this clash with what many today consider happiness to be? What happens to my freedom if I surrender it to God and, for his sake, to others? We could even think about it in terms of utility, something very characteristic of our modern society: what do I gain if I decide to forget about myself, in order to give myself to others? These questions speak to us about a fundamental issue: it is only by welcoming the gift of God that one finds true happiness.

Happiness is expressed in joy. And Christian joy, as Saint Josemaria said, has its "roots in the shape of a Cross"[3]; it is joy "in the Lord" (cf. *Phil* 4:4) that Jesus has won for us on the Cross. This joy is capable not only of lasting forever but also of increasing, amid difficulties and sufferings, with the strength of faith, hope and love. This is what we have witnessed in the life of Blessed Alvaro, good shepherd of his daughters and sons.

During this month of May, we turn to Holy Mary, *Virgo fidelis*, *Virgo prudentissima*, so that she might help us grow in the *prudent faithfulness* of *knowing how* and *wanting* to give our lives for others joyfully, day after day.

Amen.

[1] Francis, Letter to the Prelate of Opus Dei, for the Beatification of Alvaro del Portillo, 26 June 2014.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 43.

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