



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Salvador Bernal

Three months after St Josemaria's death on June 26, 1975, Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo – “Don Alvaro” – was elected to succeed him at the head of Opus Dei.

No one was surprised when, on September 15, 1975, Don Alvaro was unanimously elected as the founder's successor. He himself later said to the electors, “You have chosen to place the burden of the Work upon the shoulders of this poor man, and I know why. I well know that I am worth nothing, that I can do nothing, that I am nothing. You did this because you knew that I spent more time than anyone else with our Father, and you wanted continuity. You have not voted for Alvaro del Portillo; you have elected our Father.” Don Alvaro first met St Josemaria in July 1935 and from then on was constantly with him.

That same day, September 15, just before one o'clock in the afternoon, he went down to the crypt of Our Lady of Peace. It was the first visit he made to the tomb of the founder since being elected as his successor. When he entered, all those present stood up as a sign of respect. Don Alvaro gestured towards the tomb and said, “Where there is a skipper, a sailor doesn't give the orders. And the skipper is here.” Then he knelt down, kissed the marble slab and said, “Ask him to be the one to direct the Work, from heaven, and to have his successors be just his instruments and nothing more.”

Bishop Alvaro del Portillo used to quote “with great delight,” as he himself put it, the advice that Pope Paul VI had given him during his first audience after the death of Monsignor Escriva. “He encouraged me,” he would say, “to have always the most absolute fidelity to the founder's spirit. He said to me in a very assured and enthusiastic tone of voice, ‘Always, whenever you have some matter to resolve, put yourself in the presence of God and ask yourself, What would the founder do? And then act accordingly’.”

On March 23, 1994, the day of Don Alvaro's death, Don Javier Echevarria, the present Prelate of Opus Dei, summed up his work as head of Opus Dei in these words: "His period of governing Opus Dei has been a beautiful one. For many reasons, it has been a marvelous adventure. He had to preserve the witness of a saint, and he accepted the challenge (if I may put it this way) by moving ahead with the same gracefulness, rhythm and energy that always characterized our Founder."

Salvador Bernal, *Alvaro del Portillo, Bishop Prelate of Opus Dei*, New South Wales: Little Hills Press / New Jersey: Scepter Publishers, 1999.

For more information about Alvaro del Portillo [click here](#)