



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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Rome, March 17, 2008

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*Bishop Javier Echevarría*

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Dear brothers and sisters.

Today we offer this Eucharistic Sacrifice for the soul of the Servant of God Mons. Álvaro del Portillo, Prelate of Opus Dei, on the fourteenth anniversary of his *dies natalis*. We do so with six days of anticipation because the 23 of March coincides this year with Easter Sunday. The fact that we are already in the midst of Holy Week should help us to prepare ourselves even better for the Triduum of our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection.

The readings for the Monday of Holy Week offer us a point of departure for considering certain aspects of the life of my most beloved predecessor, which can help us to improve our own Christian life. God speaks to us through the Prophet Isaiah: **I have put my spirit upon him, he affirms; and continues he will not cry out nor shout (...) a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench. He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not fail nor be discouraged until he has established justice on the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law** (First reading: Is 42, 1-4).

This prophecy refers directly to Jesus of Nazareth, the Savior promised to the people of Israel for all humanity. But beyond its literal sense, which is always fundamental, the Word of God presents other spiritual meanings.

In this Mass in suffrage for my beloved predecessor, the words of Isaiah seem to me especially applicable to the figure of Don Álvaro. Following the example of our Lord, as so many people can attest, he stood out for his meekness of heart and his kindness towards everyone; for his fortitude in carrying out the task our Lord entrusted to him, without ever feeling overwhelmed by the difficulties. These

aspects of his character are very well reflected in his untiring work to fulfill the task that Saint Josemaría had commended to him: to continue taking the necessary steps so that the Holy See would confer to Opus Dei the juridical configuration most fitting to its nature; that is, its transformation into a personal prelature, which the founder of the Work had already prepared before he was called to Heaven.

We remember this now in a special way. On March 19 we will celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of the Papal Bull *Ut Sit*, for the transformation of Opus Dei into a personal prelature. The proclamation, which took place right here, in the Basilica of Saint Eugene, was given by the Nuncio of the Holy Father in Italy. With that solemn act, the long juridical *iter* of Opus Dei was brought to a close, which Saint Josemaría and his first successor sought with untiring eagerness and supernatural outlook.

I invite all of you to give thanks to the Most Holy Trinity, who desired Opus Dei to be born in the Church and from the Church, and who established that it should receive, at the opportune moment, a full and adequate juridical configuration.

What lessons can we draw from this for our personal life? With daily urgency, let us have greater confidence in God who desires to make use of us in order to extend the Kingdom of God on earth. With the grace of God we can, despite our limitations, which are undeniable, achieve a greater love for Christ and help many others to come to know and love Him.

The words which we have just heard in the first reading are directed to all Christians: **I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice, I have grasped you by the hand, I have formed you and set you (...) to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon, those that live in darkness** (First reading: Is 42, 6-7). We, as disciples of Jesus Christ, are given the task of making the Good News resound in the hearts and in the behavior of many people, just as the Apostles did. In the words of Saint Josemaría I wish to tell you, as I tell myself: “You have but little love if you are not zealous for the salvation of all souls. You have but poor love if you are not eager to inspire other apostles with your madness” (Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, n. 796).

Let us ask ourselves: Am I aware that our Lord's invitation to apostolate is directed personally to me, and do I meditate upon this fact frequently? How do I try to put it into practice? With whom from among those closest to me — friends, relatives, colleagues at work or school — could I speak about God, without concern for human respect, in order to bring them closer to Jesus? Perhaps during these days

of Easter we can invite some of them to make a good confession, to attend with greater regularity the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, to begin or intensify their prayer life, to take part in a spiritual retreat or other activities of formation. Remember the advice of our Father: “Among those around you — apostolic soul — you are the stone fallen into the lake. With your word and your example you produce a first circle... and it another... and another, and another... Wider each time.

Now do you understand the greatness of your mission?” (Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, n. 831)

I would like to speak now especially to the young people who have gathered here in Rome during Holy Week in great number for the annual meeting of UNIV. Certainly, what I will say to them applies to everyone, but I am now thinking more specifically about them.

Your time here in Rome, in addition to getting to know the Eternal City — so full of Christian history —, should help you above all to discover once again — and perhaps this time with greater depth — the greatness of God's love. Meditate upon the steps taken by Jesus during his Passion and Death, following Him closely along the Way of the Cross; try to respond with your head and with your heart; let yourselves be attracted by Him.

In the Gospel of today's Mass, Saint John describes to us a truly moving scene: the anointing of the Master in Bethany. The Evangelist recounts: **They gave a dinner for him there, and Martha served, while Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with Him** (Gospel: Jn 12, 2). We have seen already in other moments how this family in Bethany had opened up their home to our Lord. On this occasion, Mary performs a service that will always be upheld in the Church as a symbol of the complete dedication our Lord expects from Christians. Mary of Bethany, without concern for human respect, **taking a pound of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard, anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment** (Gospel: Jn 12, 3).

What does Mary's gesture say to us? Some, like Judas Iscariot, criticize this woman's daring action because their heart is devoid of love. What this gesture tells us, however, is that we should not be afraid of giving everything to God when He asks for it, knowing that He has first given up His life for us. Respond to Him with a firm «yes,» tell Him that you are willing to follow Him for the rest of your life. This is nothing more than corresponding to His love, a love so great that He not only died and rose for us, but He even wanted, for our sake, to remain with us in the Holy Eucharist.

I am sure that His divine call will resound in the depths of many hearts in these days. Do not be afraid to say yes to Him! Our Lord never asks of us more than we can give.

Along these lines, I would like to share with you some words of the Holy Father Benedict XVI. A few months ago in a gathering with young people, the Pope said: «God also seeks young people today. He seeks young people with great hearts who can make room for him in their lives to be protagonists of the New Covenant. To accept a proposal as fascinating as the one Jesus offers us, to make the covenant with him, it is necessary to be youthful within, to be capable of letting oneself be called into question by his newness, to set out with him on new roads.

«Jesus has a fondness for young people, as the conversation with the rich young man clearly shows (cf. Mt 19: 16-22; Mk 10: 17-22); he respects their freedom but never tires of proposing loftier goals for life to them: the newness of the Gospel and the beauty of holy behavior» Benedict XVI, [Homily to Young People in Loreto](#), 2 September 2007.

Yes. Our Lord awaits the response of each one of us. He wishes us to love Him with more intensity, with a love which manifests itself in sacrifice. He wants from us a renewed decision to be very close to Him, an active desire to be an instrument to bring Him to many others. “Each one of you — Saint Josemaría writes — must try to be an apostle of apostles” (Saint Josemaría, *The Way*, n. 920).

Let us entrust these reflections to the intercession of Don Álvaro, who was always so generous in his effort to bring many souls to God. And let us ask Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of the Apostles, to help us so that we may bring Holy Week to a close renewed by the grace of God and filled with apostolic desires. Amen.