



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [News](#) - A desire of St Josemaria

A desire of St Josemaria

2010.2.9

A long-standing desire of St Josemaria effected by Bishop Alvaro del Portillo

The Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome has celebrated its 25th anniversary. For this reason, the academic year 2009-2010 was inaugurated on November 4, 2009 with a solemn commemoration of these twenty-five years in the service of the Church.

A special Mass was celebrated in the basilica of Sant'Apollinare. In his homily, Bishop Javier Echevarria, the current prelate of Opus Dei, invited those present to thank God for all the benefits received. And he added, "Our gratitude also goes to St Josemaria and the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo, who were the instruments used by God to make this dream come true: the University of the Holy Cross, which today we can see with our own eyes."

In the academic ceremony, the Rector of the University touched on the most outstanding events of the previous year and then went on to refer to several new features put in place for the year now starting: the appointment of a Vice-Rector of Communication; the new Institute of Liturgy, set up within the Faculty of Theology; and the institution of an interdisciplinary Center for Priestly Formation, offering ongoing training for priests. After the inaugural lecture, "Twenty-five years in the University: evocative reflections", came a speech by the current prelate, Bishop Javier Echevarria.

Thought up by St Josemaria, effected by Don Alvaro

The speech by the prelate of Opus Dei was entitled "A Roman university thought up by St Josemaria and effected by Don Alvaro del Portillo".

He began by recalling the great love for the Pope that St Josemaria always

cherished in his heart. He referred to the aspiration “Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam – All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!” that St Josemaria often loved to say; and other signs of his filial union with the Pope, the Successor of Peter, such as saying a part of the Rosary every day for the Pope and his intentions, for many years.

“When he was a young priest, he thought about moving to Rome to do a doctorate in Canon Law. Like that he would have been able to fulfill the great desire he felt to see the Pope, pray at the tomb of St Peter, and visit the places linked to the history of the early Christians, whom he venerated so deeply. At the beginning of 1929 he confided this project to a friend, who had been a seminarian with him in Logroño. This friend suggested enrolling in the Angelicum, which had classes in the mornings only; like that, he said, he’d be able to go to other classes in the Palazzo dell’Apollinare, where there was a ‘highly renowned University’ run by secular clergy – what is now the Lateran University.

However, St Josemaria very soon realized that at least for the time being God had other plans. On October 2, 1928, the Lord had shown him His will – the founding of Opus Dei. A second foundational light received on February 14, 1930, made him understand that women were also part of those divine plans. The mission he had received from God required total dedication, without any distractions, and therefore the ecclesiastical doctorate in Rome would have to wait for a more opportune time. St Josemaria could never have imagined that that same Palazzo dell’Apollinare would be the future location of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross.”

First milestones

Bishop Javier then recalled the finding and setting up of Villa Tevere as the central headquarters of Opus Dei, and St Josemaria’s desire that his sons and daughters could spend time in Rome, studying and training to a high level in ecclesiastical subjects and also being “Romanized”.

“At the beginning, the students of the Roman College attended the Pontifical teaching centers in Rome. But even back then, in a hand-written account by St Josemaria about plans for the year 1949-50, we read: ‘Coordinate studies with the Angelicum. Until it is time to organize the big University teaching center in Rome...’”

As other milestones which with time would lead to the creation of that “big

University teaching center in Rome”, Bishop Javier referred to the beginning of the Studium Generale of Navarre, Spain, in 1952, and the establishing of the Faculties of Canon Law in 1962 and Theology in 1969, of the University of Navarre. He also spoke of the CRIS (Centro Romano di Incontri Sacerdotali), a center set up to provide classes for priests, whose activities St Josemaria followed closely. Thanks to these initiatives, when God took him to heaven, there was already in existence a solid academic body of teaching staff, with valuable experience in teaching and research, which in a short space of time would enable the new University to be started in Rome, spurred on by Don Alvaro.

Faith, daring and a firm will to serve the Church

In 1982, recalled Bishop Javier, “Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo told us that the time had come to set up in Rome something similar to the ecclesiastical Faculties of the University of Navarre. He was convinced that the time was right to bring this initiative into being in the Eternal City. And he reminded us explicitly that this had been a long-standing desire of our Founder’s.

At the age of nearly seventy, Don Alvaro prepared to set in motion a major undertaking, which required faith, daring and a firm will to serve the Church and souls. It is undoubtedly true that he had the benefit of the grace of God and the blessing of Pope John Paul II, who followed the project with interest. He also had some well trained teachers available. I have always been edified by the humility of my predecessor, who did not attribute any merit to himself, insisting that everything had been made possible by the prayer and sacrifices offered by St Josemaria for that intention.

Sometimes we tended to think that it was a project for some time in the future. But Don Alvaro did away with everyone’s hesitation when he asked for the necessary documentation to be drawn up as soon as possible. He guided the project with prudence and perseverance. He had an impressive degree of determination and tenacity to reach his goal, in spite of the inevitable difficulties which arose, as might be expected. It was he, for example, who suggested a bold and innovative way of effecting the project: it was not necessary to found a new University, because it would be sufficient to open some Roman sections of the ecclesiastical Faculties of the University of Navarre.

There were many other things that had to be got ready: appointing the teaching staff, finding suitable buildings, raising funds, etc. None of those challenges unsettled him: he used to repeat that when faced with difficulties, we have to

remember that God will send help in the same proportions.”

The Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross

At last “hardly a year after those first steps, in October 1984, the Roman Academic Center of the Holy Cross opened its doors, with two Faculties – Theology and Canon Law – and about forty students. The formal inauguration took place on January 9, 1985. On the suggestion of Cardinal Palazzini, who made it possible, the buildings were ceded by the Foundation of San Girolamo della Carità.

Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo desired the new center to be characterized by total adherence to the Magisterium of the Church, a fruitful dialogue with contemporary culture, and thorough scientific standards in the teaching given to the students, together with the greatest possible spiritual attention. He knew that the bishops trusted us to provide that help to the priests and seminarians from their dioceses, and he always said that we couldn’t let them down. But above all, he stressed the importance of serving the Church by helping to form priests and lay-people who would be able to spread Christ’s Kingdom. As well as setting up agreements with some institutions to house students, Msgr. del Portillo was behind the creation of several residences for priests, with the help of generous donations from many people. On Pope John Paul II’s suggestion, he also created the International Seminary Sedes Sapientiae, for seminarians from all dioceses.

Very soon, the buildings of San Girolamo della Carità became too small. I remember how much effort went into obtaining the use of the Palazzo dell’Apollinare. Msgr. del Portillo did all he could to further the negotiations, and the location has turned out to be eminently appropriate for the service offered to the Church by our University.

I retain a vivid memory of the great mobilization of fund-raising initiatives for such a huge project, with donations from institutions and individuals. The Servant of God Bishop Alvaro del Portillo often underlined that we were doing a lot of good to the people whom we asked for donations, because we were offering them the chance to contribute to a project for the service of the Church and priests. Since many of the students would come from dioceses with limited resources, he also ensured that a grant-awarding fund was set up.”

Atheneum

“On January 9, 1990, the anniversary of St Josemaria’s birth, the Congregation for Catholic Education, seeing the notable development of the Center, decreed its establishment as an Atheneum, with the Faculties of Theology and Philosophy, and shortly afterwards one of Canon Law. At the same time they appointed Msgr. Alvaro del Portillo as Chancellor. On March 23, 1994, St Josemaria’s successor rendered his soul to God in a holy way, on his return from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He thus ended a life dedicated to the service of the Church, Opus Dei, priests, religious, and the whole Christian people. With fidelity to the Will of God and the spirit of the founder of Opus Dei, he had brought into being the long-standing desire of St Josemaria, which has now completed its first twenty-five years of life.”

University of the Holy Cross

“It fell to me to preside joyfully at the creation of the Faculty of Social and Institutional Communication, and the granting of the rank of University by Pope John Paul II, on July 20, 1998. This opened a new stage on which we are still engaged, with a determination to follow faithfully the example of love and service to the Church left us as a precious inheritance by St Josemaria and the Servant of God Alvaro del Portillo.”

At the end of the academic ceremony, Bishop Javier Echevarria presented a silver medal to those who had worked at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross for 25 years – i.e. from its beginnings.

Lasting gratitude was expressed to all the many benefactors who enable this academic center to function with their generosity and self-sacrifice; and especially to those who embarked on the project back in 1984. The 41 students of that first year had grown to 1,471 by the year 2008-2009, of 75 different nationalities. Particular mention was made of those who took part in the University’s first steps and now help it from heaven.

Together with universality, other aspects that were prized first by Don Alvaro and now by Bishop Echevarria, and that have characterized the work of this University from the start, are unity, trust and a spirit of cooperation.

For [more about the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross](#)

Official website: www.pusc.it