



# Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

[Home](#) - [Documentation](#) - [Accounts](#) - Takes affectionate care of your tabernacles!

## Takes affectionate care of your tabernacles!

*Bishop Alvaro del Portillo*

The loving care which Saint Josemaria took of the liturgy and everything connected with worship is expressed in n. 527 of *The Way*: “That woman in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, who anoints the Master’s head with precious ointment, reminds us of our duty to be generous in the worship of God. All beauty, richness and majesty seem little to me. And against those who attack the richness of sacred vessels, of vestments and altars, stands the praise given by Jesus: *opus enim bonum operata est in me* – she has acted well towards me.” The following is an extract from the recollections of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, published in the book *Immersed in God*, ed. Cesare Cavalleri (Scepter/Sinag-Tala, 1996).

I remember one time – this was in 1959 or 1960 – the Father was in London, and he watched on television some kind of royal ceremony. Immediately afterwards he observed, as he had done on other occasions, that ceremonies even of this type require very careful preparation, and that when it is the Lord our God who is to be given homage, we must prepare this act of worship with a love and fervor much greater than that shown to the Queen of England by her master of ceremonies.

His spirit of detachment and poverty in no way inhibited his love of beauty and artistic taste in liturgy, in divine worship. This was just one more tangible proof of his faith in, and generosity towards, the Lord.

He wanted objects for liturgical use to be of the highest possible quality; he taught that in this area, poverty should be sought in terms of quantity but not quality. For Opus Dei centers he laid down this norm: that liturgical objects ought to be beautiful and tasteful, but no more in number than is strictly necessary. (...)

Often he was not able to offer to the Lord everything that he would have liked to. I remember that in 1935 he was unhappy about not being able to put a nicer tabernacle in the chapel of the Ferraz Street residence; the one we had was a very poor one, lent to him by Mother Muratori. It also saddened him to have to give solemn Benediction with a monstrance of little value, one made of iron – only

the lunette which held the consecrated host was of silver. Since that time I heard him say that he wanted to use only precious objects for the worship of our Lord, even if he had to go hungry to do it.

Again and again, and particularly in the last years of his life, I heard him say this: "People today are so stingy toward our Lord; and I just don't understand it. Even if there were a man alive who would give to the woman of his dreams a piece of iron or concrete as a present, not even then would I give to my Lord a bit of iron or concrete, but always the very best that I could."

Throughout his life he sought to give to the service of the Lord the very best that he had. I know that shortly after 1928 he wanted to commission the making of a chalice that would have a precious stone encased in its base in such a way that nobody could admire it. It was to be a hidden sacrifice, something for our Lord's eyes only. Many years later, after he had moved to Rome, he was finally able to realize this desire of his, when a lady gave him a very large emerald.

He made sure that once a week, the consecrated hosts reserved in the tabernacle were replaced with fresh ones, and he established this as a norm for all centers of the Work, urging those responsible to anticipate any problems in carrying this out. In 1940 or 1941 he was able to see realized his long-standing desire to have the hosts made in our houses. He even longed for the days, farther into the future, when his own sons and daughters would be in a position to cultivate the grain and the vines necessary for making the Eucharistic species. On January 15, 1965, he explained once again this old plan of his: "It is a way of caressing God, born again in our hands, by preparing the species by means of which he descends to us." I heard him speak of this again on March 28, 1975, just a few months before he died, to a group of his daughters.

When he was the only priest of Opus Dei, he personally did the cleaning of the inside of the tabernacles in our centers. He used to do this every two weeks, making use of his trips from Madrid. As he was doing the cleaning, he would talk continually to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, telling him that everything being done was meant as an act of love. He used to exhort us to 'take exquisite, affectionate care of your tabernacles.' When he stopped doing this personally, he instructed his priest sons to fulfill this duty with the greatest care, and, while doing so, to make spiritual communions and recite many aspirations.

From the beginning he laid it down that the amices, purificators and finger-towels were to be washed and ironed after every time they were used: this is a norm that has always been lived in our centers, as a sign of love of God and of respect for

the Holy Sacrifice. A cardinal who visited our teaching hospital at the University of Navarre (an institution founded and run by members of Opus Dei) later told me what had really impressed him. While making his tour of the various departments, he happened to see in one room a pile of white cloths, very carefully stacked in baskets, and he asked what they were. The answer was that they were the sacred linens which had been used that morning, and that they were about to be washed and ironed for the next day's Masses.

His love for the Eucharist was apparent in so many particulars, even in the way he would go about setting the flowers beside the tabernacle. He told us: "When you place a flower near the tabernacle, give it a kiss and say to the Lord that you would like that kiss to be consumed along with the flower, to be used up just like the candle of the sanctuary lamp gets used up, as it shows people, with its flame, that God is here."