

## 6. THE FOUNDER OF OPUS DEI AND HIS SUCCESSORS AS 'FATHER'

Already in Apostolic times, St Paul had called Timothy *my true child in the faith* (Tim 1:2), and wrote that Timothy accompanied him *as a son with a father* (Phil 2:22). How then are we to understand those words *Call no man your father on earth* (Mt 23:9) that Jesus uttered some years earlier?

We recall another of our Lord's statements: *No one is good but God alone* (Lk 18:19). Only God is good by essence; only He is Goodness. At the same time his Love leads him to share his goodness with creatures, so that all things are good (cf. Gen 1:31). In an analogous way, our Lord said that *you have one Father, who is in heaven* (Mt 23:9). Only God has paternity in a full and perfect sense. But he has also wanted some of his children to participate in the divine fatherhood, in various degrees and meanings. St Paul calls Abraham *the father of many nations* (Rom 4:17; cf. Gen 17:5), because we come from his faith which is the model of Christian faith.<sup>1</sup> The Catholic Church mentions him as "our father" in the Roman Canon.<sup>2</sup> It is in this sense that the founder of Opus Dei and his successors are called "father", just as bishops and priests are also called fathers in the Lord.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Only God is Father: some men participate in this fatherhood

"This fatherhood is present in the Only Begotten Son made man, through the unity of the divine Persons in their relative distinction: Jesus said to him, *He who has seen me has seen the Father* (Jn 14:9). But God has also wanted to reflect his fatherhood in his children, in various ways (cf. Eph 3:14-15). There is a natural human generation with its corresponding fatherhood, and there is a supernatural generation which gives rise to a spiritual paternity (cf. Jn 1:13). It is from this that the Apostles felt themselves to be the repositories, when the Lord sent them out, as he had been sent by the Father (cf. Jn 20:21) to communicate the supernatural life, teaching the Gospel and baptizing (cf. Mt 28:19). How deeply must St Paul have felt this fatherhood when he wrote: *For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (1 Cor 4:15). *My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!* (Gal 4:19)."<sup>4</sup>

"After the Apostles, in the Church this supernatural paternity corresponds to the Bishops, and principally to her head, Peter's successor, the Universal Pastor. He is called 'Holy Father', being the first repository of a holy, supernatural and true fatherhood. And he is the common Father to all, according to the teaching of the First Vatican Council: 'the Roman Pontiff is the successor of Blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles, and is the true Vicar of Christ, and the Head of the whole

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 144. What God promised Abraham is fulfilled in us when we believe in Jesus Christ, who died and rose for all men (cf. Rom 4:23-25).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Roman Missal*, Eucharistic Prayer I or *Roman Canon*

<sup>3</sup> On the bishop as father, cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Christus Dominus*, 16. Cf. CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory *Apostolorum succesores*, 22 February 2004, 76. ST JOHN PAUL II deals with this topic in "The fatherhood of a bishop" chap. 4 in his book, *¡Rise! ¡Let us go on our way!*, where he speaks of St Joseph's example.

<sup>4</sup> ERNST BURKHART, JAVIER LÓPEZ, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, Vol. 2, "El sentido de la filiación divina. Fundamento de la vida cristiana", pp. 136-137. We recall that apostolic celibacy is united to a fruitful spiritual paternity, which can have thousands of spiritual children.

Church, and Father and Teacher of all Christians.<sup>5</sup> On occasions St Josemaría referred to him as the common Father<sup>6</sup> of Christians.<sup>7</sup>

In his Apostolic Exhortation on the Bishop as servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the hope of the world, St John Paul II wrote: “The tradition which sees the Bishop as an image of God the Father is quite ancient. As St Ignatius of Antioch wrote, the Father is like an invisible Bishop, the Bishop of all. Every Bishop, therefore, stands in the place of the Father of Jesus Christ in such a way that, precisely because of this representation, he is to be revered by all.<sup>8</sup> Consonant with this symbolism, the Bishop's chair, which especially in the tradition of the Eastern Churches evokes God's paternal authority, can only be occupied by the Bishop. This same symbolism is the source of every Bishop's duty to lead the holy people of God as a devoted father and to guide them – together with his priests, his co-workers in the episcopal ministry, and with his deacons – in the way of salvation.<sup>9</sup> Conversely, as an ancient text exhorts, the faithful are to love their Bishops who are, after God, their fathers and mothers.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, in accordance with a custom widespread in certain cultures, one kisses the Bishop's hand as one would kiss the hand of the loving Father, the giver of life.”<sup>11</sup>

“There is a spiritual paternity proper, not only to that of the Pope and the bishops,<sup>12</sup> but to other pastors of the Church, and to every Christian. Through the exercise of the common priesthood, it can be said that he engenders Christ in others when he co-operates with the Holy Spirit in the transmission of supernatural life.<sup>13</sup> It is within this general spiritual-theological framework that one can sketch the fatherhood of St Josemaría, whose legacy is a spirit left to those who are incorporated in Opus Dei, following the beautiful dynamic of life in the Church. As successor of St Josemaría, the Prelate of Opus Dei is the common father who reflects the paternity of God. Love for the Work is part of love for the Church, mother of Christians, who prolongs the presence of Christ in the world until the final Coming. And this love includes a true affection for the figures of the founder of Opus Dei and his successors: each one, while he is Prelate of Opus Dei, is Father, whoever he might be. Thus, following the first successor of St Josemaría – Blessed Alvaro del Portillo – the Father of this small family within the Church<sup>14</sup> was Bishop Javier Echevarría (who was named by St John Paul II in 1994, the year in which Blessed Alvaro died.<sup>15</sup> He, in turn, was succeeded by Monsignor Fernando Ocáriz, who was appointed by Pope Francis on 23 January 2017.

## 2. A deep and filial devotion to St Josemaría

St Paul spoke of *our Father Abraham* (Rom 4:12) and of *those who share the faith of Abraham* (Rom 4:16; cf. Jas 2:21), knowing that it is only of God that one can properly say that: *remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ* (1 Thess 1:2). St Josemaría, with his Mass, his prayer, his penances and his

<sup>5</sup> FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor aeternus*: DS 3059. The text quotes the Council of Florence: DS 1307.

<sup>6</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching*, 21 November 1958 (AGP, P01 II-1988, p. 44); 30 November 1964 (AGP, P02 XII-1964, p. 33).

<sup>7</sup> ERNST BURKHART, JAVIER LÓPEZ, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, Vol. 2, “*El sentido de la filiación divina. Fundamento de la vida cristiana*”, pp. 136-237.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *To the Magnesians*, 6:1: PG 5:764; *To the Trallians*, 3:1: PG 5:780; *To the Smyrnaeans*, 8:1: PG 5:852.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. ROMAN PONTIFICAL, *Episcopal Ordination: Examination*.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Didascalia Apostolorum*, II, 33, 1: ed. F.X. Funk, I, 115.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. ST JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores gregis*, 16 October 2003, 7.

<sup>12</sup> As the SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, has stated, sacred ministers receive a “paternity in Christ” (Decree *Prebyterorum Ordinis*, 16), as pastors of the Church; so too the Bishop as father, cf. ST JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores gregis*, 16 October 2003, 7, 10, 33, 37, 42, etc.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. ERNST BURKHART, JAVIER LÓPEZ, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, Vol. 2, “*El sentido de la filiación divina. Fundamento de la vida cristiana*”, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> On the Church as family, cf. ST JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63.

<sup>15</sup> BISHOP JAVIER ECHEVARRÍA RODRÍGUEZ, Bishop, Prelate of Opus Dei (1994-2016†), was ordained bishop by ST JOHN PAUL II in 1994, cf. for example, the corresponding entry in *Diccionario de San Josemaría*, pp. 351-353, written by Salvador Bernal.

example, has contributed to God's grace making the universal call to holiness take root and grow in the souls of many, with *faith working through love* (Gal 5:6). "That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority... Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life."<sup>16</sup> With true humility, St Josemaría was able to state: *There are very few things in which I can offer myself as an example. Nevertheless, in the midst of all my personal shortcomings, I think I can put myself forward as an example of a man who loves. Your worries, your sorrows, the things that keep you awake at night, are for me a continuous call. I would like, with this heart of mine which is both that of a father and of a mother, to carry the whole weight on my shoulders.*<sup>17</sup> He was a person who knew how to love, and easily returned those feelings.

In a natural way this spontaneous affection towards the Father contributed to the joy of knowing themselves to be members of a family where love, both supernatural and human, was shown in affection. And after 1975 he enabled his successors also to participate in this. After his death, he began to be referred to as "*our Father*", so as not to be confused in conversations with his successors who would also be called "*the Father*". This way of designating founders, for example, is usual in the Church.

As a sign of gratitude and a need for the soul, it is normal for the faithful of Opus Dei to turn to the intercession of St Josemaría before God. "By reason of the fact that those in heaven are more closely united with Christ, they establish the whole Church more firmly in holiness,... they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, showing forth the merits which they won on earth through the one Mediator between God and man,... Thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is greatly strengthened."<sup>18</sup> The Communion of Saints is thus reinforced: "Nor is it by the title of example only that we cherish the memory of those in heaven, but still more in order that the union of the whole Church may be strengthened in the Spirit by the practice of fraternal charity. For just as Christian communion among wayfarers brings us closer to Christ, so our companionship with the saints joins us to Christ, from Whom as from its Fountain and Head issues every grace and the very life of the people of God."<sup>19</sup> In practice we know this, as in a Preface of the Mass we say: *eórum coronádo mérita tua dona coronás*:<sup>20</sup> "in crowning their merits you crown your own gifts".

### 3. *The Father in Opus Dei*

As a good shepherd in Christ,<sup>21</sup> the Father embodies within the Work the loving fatherhood of God. In this particular Communion of Saints which is practised, fatherhood and filiation are two sides of the same coin: a union with God, which in its turn, unites the faithful among themselves.<sup>22</sup>

In the Prelature of Opus Dei, the Father is the principle and visible foundation of unity, just as bishops are for the People of God whom they govern.<sup>23</sup> He is "before the faithful, teacher, sanctifier and shepherd, charged with acting in the name and in the person of Christ".<sup>24</sup> St Augustine did not hesitate calling this mission a service, a duty of love: "*amoris officium*".<sup>25</sup> Indeed, no one can consider himself a pastor worthy of this name if charity does not make him one with Christ.<sup>26</sup>

No one is a father without a child. This is why St Jerome states that to name a father is always to name a child, to refer to a child: *Omnis enim pater filii nomen est.*<sup>27</sup> As sons and daughters, the

<sup>16</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from a get-together*, 6 October 1968 (AGP, P01 VI-1969, p. 13).

<sup>18</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 50.

<sup>20</sup> *Roman Missal*, Preface I *De sanctis*.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Jn 10:11.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. ST JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores gregis*, 16 October 2003, 10.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. ST AUGUSTINE, *In Ioannis Evangelium tractatus*, 123, 5. (CCL 36, 678-680)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. ST THOMAS AQUINAS, *In Ioann. Ev.*, X, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. ST JEROME, *In Evangelium Matthaei commentarium*, IV, 24, 36.

faithful of Opus Dei are part of his own being and of his mission as head of this body which is the Work. St Thomas of Aquinas, when considering fatherly love, says that fathers see part of themselves in their children: *ut aliquid sui existentes*.<sup>28</sup> And so, the Father feels the calling to live out this fatherhood which St Josemaría had *taken on with the full consciousness of being on the earth only for this purpose*.<sup>29</sup> The founder of Opus Dei interiorized it; he understood it as a demanding invitation for his own sanctity. In 1933, when he was seeking permission of his confessor for an increase in his penances, he exhorted him with these words: *You must realise God is asking this of me and, furthermore, I need to be a saint, a father, a teacher and a guide of saints*.<sup>30</sup> He did not hesitate in writing to his sons: *I keep you constantly in mind*.<sup>31</sup> As if echoing these words of the founder, the second successor of St Josemaría often opened wide his soul with the same sentiments: *I need you*, he said on several occasions.

### ***The Father makes manifest God's endearment***

There is currently no shortage of literature on what it means to be a good father: to carry the weight of a family, to educate in freedom and to make the children grow. Something similar can be said of the Father's mission: to guide his flock with firm hand and deep understanding, and also correcting when this is necessary for the food of souls (cf. Acts 12:7-11).

At the same time, the Father enjoys sharing with his children the enjoyable moments of his life, as for example in a get-together, where with the same naturalness the marvels of God in the apostolate are related, as some amusing incidents which helps one not to take oneself too seriously. At these times he feels the duty to embody this "fatherly tenderness" which proper Francis so often emphasizes when he speaks about God.<sup>32</sup>

The call to Opus Dei, like every vocation received from God, is like a precious pearl (cf. Mt 13:46). The pearl is born from a grain of sand and when it has grown reflects light and colour. Like a diamond too, which comes from coal, the littleness of man when united to the gift of God, makes one feel loved and understood. Meditating on the Christian spirit, of the spirit of the Gospel just as it was received and transmitted by St Josemaría, makes the heart burn like those of the disciples of Emmaus, so that life is filled with a sense of mission. To be united to the Father helps the faithful of Opus Dei to be more united to the Pope and the whole Church. The Father constantly reminds them of the Magisterium of the Successors of Peter, and invites them to widen their gaze, not to fail in serving the universal Church.

### ***Mature sons and daughters***

Virtues are perfected with the passage of time and under the impulse of grace, through repeated exercise of virtuous acts. At the same time, it is good not to delay until an undefined later date the maturity of a Christian dedication and to aspire to reach the 'age of majority' quickly. In this sense, Opus Dei is for "adults", neither better nor worse than others, who learn to behave as children before God.<sup>33</sup> Maturity is forged with successes and failures embraced and put in their proper place; it is not principally a matter of age, but of a real dedication, of a struggle to be saints: *super senes intellexi, quia mandata tua servavi* (Ps 119 [118]:100): *I understand more than the aged, for I keep thy precepts*. These words also apply to those who seek to live their dedication with deep humility. This is how the founder understood Peter's vocation: after the miraculous catch of fish, he exclaimed: *Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (Lk 5:8). And St Josemaría commented:

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ST THOMAS AQUINAS, *S. Th.*, II-II, q. 26, a. 9, co.

<sup>29</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 6 May 1945*, 23 quoted in ERNST BURKHART, JAVIER LÓPEZ, *Vida cotidiana y santidad en la enseñanza de san Josemaría*, Vol. 2, "El sentido de la filiación divina. Fundamento de la vida cristiana", p. 138.

<sup>30</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Intimate Notes*, 1725, quoted in ANDRÉS VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. I, Scepter, New York.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 9 January 1938*, quoted in ANDRÉS VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. II, Scepter, New York

<sup>32</sup> Cf. FRANCIS, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 24 November 2013, 4.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 14 February 1974*, 4 (AGP, A.3, 95-2-4).

*That choice, the root of the call, should be the basis of your humility.*<sup>34</sup> We find this conviction in the heart of Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, who could be *saxum*, true rock for St Josemaría, because his faithfulness was based on humility. This is how this exemplary son replied to a letter he had received from the founder: “I hope, despite everything, you can have confidence in this man who, rather than being rock, is mud without any consistency. But how good the Lord is!”<sup>35</sup>

*I go to Him sobbing with contrition; begging Him for mercy: miserere mei, Deus secundum magnam misericordiam tuam (Ps 51 [50]:2),*<sup>36</sup> St Josemaría confided, quoting the *Miserere* Psalm. In the life of the Father, the humility of one who turns to God so as to be strength for others is made specific, among other ways, in the recital of this Psalm, where the Lord says: *You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart (Ps 51 [50]:6):* in the depths of one’s being, in the deepest intimacy of the heart, God helps the Father. At the same time, the Father counts a lot on the prayer of the members of Opus Dei. And he needs their understanding and affection of children. This is shown in one way in the letters that they write to him. *I keep you constantly in mind... Don’t let me down, be faithful!*<sup>37</sup> From Burgos St Josemaría wrote to his sons, inviting them to pray for the Father in the *Preces Operis Dei*, resorting to divine mercy: *Misericordia Domini ab æterno et usque in æternum super eum: custodit enim Dominus omnes diligentes se, God’s mercy be upon him always: for the Lord watches over those who love him.*<sup>38</sup> This prayer is accompanied by a small daily mortification for the Father.

The spirit of filiation is the foundation of unity and fraternal charity, in the Work as it is in the Church. The best gift that can be given to parents is the respect, the affection and the gratitude of their sons and daughters, together with good mutual understanding. *We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another (Rom 12:5).* The Apostle exhorts the Romans to *love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour (Rom 12:10).* Bishop Javier Echevarría, while he was Prelate, constantly invited the faithful of Opus Dei, just as St John had done with the early Christians: *Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 Jn 4:11).*

### **Family Letters**

Fatherhood and filiation are shown, in particular, in the exchange of letters. The gift of paternity led St Josemaría to write to his spiritual sons and daughters frequently. Blessed Alvaro del Portillo recalls: “He dedicated a considerable amount of time to writing letters to us, in the spare moments of the morning or in the first couple of hours in the afternoon.”<sup>39</sup> The Father follows this tradition, with letters to individuals and also pastoral letters which help the members of Opus Dei respond to their calling to holiness and apostolate, to live the liturgical year and feasts which are to be celebrated, in an intense way.

The custom of writing letters to the Father arose spontaneously from the beginnings of Opus Dei.<sup>40</sup> Blessed Alvaro del Portillo relates, as he sets down in writing, his forty years of living with St Josemaría: “Working constantly at his side, I had the privilege of getting to

<sup>34</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Christ is Passing By*, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *Letter to St Josemaría*, 13 August 1939, quoted in Javier Medina Bayo, *Álvaro del Portillo*, Rialp, Madrid 2012, p. 169.

<sup>36</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 X-1971, p. 12).

<sup>37</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 9 January 1938*, quoted in ANDRÉS VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. II, Scepter, New York.

<sup>38</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Letter 9 January 1938*, quoted in ANDRÉS VÁZQUEZ DE PRADA, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. II, Scepter, New York. Cf. Ps 103[102] (quoted in *Roman Missal*, Votive Mass *de Dei Misericordia*, Antiphon *ad communionem* 17) and Ps 145[144]:20.

<sup>39</sup> BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *40 Years with a Saint*, by Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter, New York 2016, ch. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *Get-together*, 2 September 1985 (AGP, B.1.4).

read with him lots of letters in which people who narrated their sufferings and entrusted them to his prayer; I am a witness of how he took to heart all these problems, and the intensity with which he recommended them to the Lord, almost as though he felt it his duty to wrest these graces out of God's hands. I recall in a particular way the impression made on me in those frequent instances when, after reading a letter, he would become recollected for a few moments, and then make a gesture of complete tranquillity, which seemed to denote his certainty that the matter had already been resolved."<sup>41</sup> That is why he was able to say: "I am sure that the Father didn't read a single letter without praying for the person who wrote it, and for the problem which was explained in it."<sup>42</sup> These letters to the Father relate the events of daily life, as children do with their parents, spontaneously, naturally and correctly, without solemn sounding phrases.

*If only you knew with what eagerness I await their arrival! I read all of them with the same love, all of them help me to do my prayer. I should like to answer every one of them, but I cannot; it is not possible, there is no time....*<sup>43</sup> On one occasion St Josemaría confessed that he had remained awake until two in the morning, reading these personal letters. He then described the joy he felt *on reading, a letter from a university professor and then one from a labourer, with large rounded letters and twisted lines.*<sup>44</sup> *I love this custom,* he added. *When instead of seven pounds of mail there are seven hundred, we will see what can be done, but you can be sure that your letters will always be read with the love and interest of a Father.*<sup>45</sup>

These letters to the Prelate are written with affection, and with affection they are read. These texts nourish his prayer of petition, and also his acts of thanksgiving. *The custom of writing letters to the Father is a holy custom, which helps me to be very much aware of all my children's needs – and to present them to the Lord. I thank you sincerely for these letters which always get to me.*<sup>46</sup>

It is natural to write to the Father on the occasion of feasts and important anniversaries of the Church or the Work; or, on the occasion of the death of a father or mother, or a family concern, a significant step in one's studies, and important profession success, or after a long journey to another country for professional reasons, or having passed through Rome. It is also usual, that when the Father goes out of Rome, he immediately writes to his Roman daughters and sons to express his closeness to them, his fatherly affection and his prayer.

Each one can sustain the Work, with their lines, when expressing these desires of dedication. It also leaves an appreciative witness to the history of the marvels of God, which are kept carefully.

### ***With the optimism of the children of God***

Writing to the Father strengthens desires of docility to the Holy Spirit, of service to the Church and society, of demonstrating the beauty of the universal call to holiness and evangelization, particularly through work and ordinary life, and it helps develop filial union. They are family letters which speak about work and study, daily interests, about apostolate and of the vocational purpose which leads to that attraction which the testimony of Christian charity provides, as does the beauty of the spirit of sanctification in the middle of the world; one also understands that when one relates difficulties about health, family or professional setbacks, financial problems, worries about social instability in one's country, this is done with the spirit of optimism of children of God. The one regret of the Father, as happened with St Josemaría and Blessed Alvaro, is that he isn't able to reply

<sup>41</sup> BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *40 Years with a Saint*, by Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter, New York 2016, ch. 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 V-1954, p. 5).

<sup>44</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 V-1954, p. 5).

<sup>45</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 V-1954, p. 5).

<sup>46</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 I-1963, p. 49).

to each one. *It pains me*, St Josemaría said, *not to be able to reply personally to all who write to me. May my children recognise the material impossibility of replying, on the one hand; and, on the other, when I read their letters, I always pray for them.*<sup>47</sup> It is enough for us to know that these letters are a joy for the Father, and also an occasion for people to be more present in his prayers, for he loves everyone with *the affection of Christ Jesus* (cf. Phil 1:8).<sup>48</sup>

Blessed Alvaro described the normal daily schedule of the founder of Opus Dei: “Then came the time for the mail. The Father liked to open all the envelopes personally, though he would afterwards hand them over to me – and in the last years, to Fr Javier as well – so that we could help him with reading the contents. He separated business letters (those addressed to the General Council) from personal letters. If we could see that there was something confidential in a letter, we handed it back to him immediately, without reading it.”<sup>49</sup> For many years St Josemaría read all the letters from his daughters and sons. As these increased, and in spite of his wanting to continue like that, it became impossible to do so. So that no one who wrote to him would be ignored, he decided that some priests would help him read those letters, while he continued to spend a part of the day reading letters. He placed everything that was written to him on the paten during the Sacrifice of the Altar, in a special way, beside the eucharistic bread which would become the Body of our Lord and the wine his Blood.<sup>50</sup>

### ***I will give you pastors to the measure of my heart***

The Prelate of Opus Dei counts on the prayer and mortification which the faithful offer for his person and intentions. He counts on them to fulfil his mission as Pastor, which is none other than to unite them more to Christ and to the multitude of souls who benefit from the warmth of the Work. *I will give you shepherds after my own heart*, Jeremiah had prophesied: *Dabo vobis pastores iuxta cor meum* (Jer 3:15). God announced these good shepherds in the context of the Alliance, which found its ultimate and definitive development in the Alliance of the Blood of Christ. United to the Mass of the Prelate, deeply immersed in the Heart of Mary, the faithful form *one heart and soul* (Acts 4:32) to serve the Church, with a charity which is open to the whole world, with a love which urges one to go out and beyond, about which Pope Francis speaks so much.

On one occasion, a young Italian member of Opus Dei, asked Blessed Alvaro: “What does it mean for the Father and for ourselves, that we are all clustered together around his heart?” The then Prelate replied: “For me, it is a constant call to the obligation I have to become a saint, to help you to become saints. In my littleness, I have to try to live Jesus’ words: *pro eis sanctifico meipsum* [I sanctify myself for them]. And I give myself for you, for your personal holiness. And the affection I have for you should also get you to move. Love is repaid with love!, my children. You cannot respond to the affection of the Father nailing thorns in my heart, but behaving in the best way you can. Struggle to be faithful, first for the love of God and, then, out of a little bit of love for the Father.”<sup>51</sup>

G. Derville  
November 2016  
(updated in February 2017)

<sup>47</sup> ST JOSEMARÍA, *Notes from his preaching* (AGP, P01 I-1963, p. 49).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. STATUTA, 132, §3.

<sup>49</sup> BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *40 Years with a Saint*, by Cesare Cavalleri, Scepter, New York 2016, ch. 3.

<sup>50</sup> The letters which the Father cannot read, are seen by those who have received this task directly from him; usually the Central Spiritual Director and that of the respective circumscription, and other priests, who do so with affection, respect, exquisite refinement and absolute discretion, and they inform the Father.

<sup>51</sup> BLESSED ALVARO DEL PORTILLO, *Get-together* (AGP, P01 III-1989, pp. 319-320). Cf. Jn 17:19.

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