# May 12th: Blessed Alvaro del Portillo, bishop

**Gospel text (*Jn* 10:11-16):** Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. A hired man, who is not a shepherd and whose sheep are not his own, sees a wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf catches and scatters them. This is because he works for pay and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”

***“A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep”***

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
*(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)*

Today the Church celebrates the memorial of Blessed Álvaro del Portillo, coinciding with the anniversary of his First Communion. The liturgical date chosen to honor this holy shepherd, May 12, is no coincidence: he lived deeply in love with Jesus in the Eucharist, from childhood through his time as a venerable bishop.

As the "good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep" (Jn 10:11), he once described the Holy Mass in a pastoral letter (1986) with great beauty and realism: "Let us never grow accustomed to celebrating or participating in the Holy Sacrifice! A soul of faith recognizes in the Sacrifice of the altar the most extraordinary wonder taking place in our world." Most importantly, Álvaro never became desensitized to the Mass, neither as a layman, nor as a priest, nor as a bishop.

During a difficult period in his life, while in a military officer training camp, he received permission to attend Mass. To do so, he had to rise much earlier than his peers and walk a long distance to a nearby village church, returning in time. This was in the heart of winter, in unbearable cold. Blessed Álvaro not only persevered, but by the end of the training period, about forty of his fellow soldiers were joining him in that heroic act of piety.

In the same pastoral letter, he continued: "Attending Mass — and for priests, celebrating it — means detaching oneself from the limited bounds of time and place typical of our human condition, and placing ourselves on the summit of Calvary, next to the Cross where Jesus dies for our sins."

The Golgotha!... God granted Blessed Álvaro a special "reward" at the end of his life: in 1994, at the end of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, he had the grace of celebrating Mass in the "Cenacolino" (near the Cenacle

of Jesus), with deep emotion and piety. It was the last act of the pilgrimage. Just hours later, upon returning to Rome, God called him into His presence, full of joy from the experience of those final days. Upon hearing these details, Saint John Paul II exclaimed: “How fortunate!”