

Homily by His Excellency the Most Reverend Monsignor Andrés Carrascosa
Apostolic Nuncio in Portugal
for the Dedication of the Eucharistic Shrine
Balasar, Sunday 11 October 2026

Your Excellency and dear brother bishop, Monsignor José, I thank you once again publicly for inviting the Representative of the Holy Father to be present at the Dedication of this Eucharistic Shrine, which houses the relics of Blessed Alexandrina of Balasar, and at the Dedication of the Altar.

Your Excellencies and dear brother bishops, who have come to accompany the Archdiocese of Braga at this very important moment; dear brothers in the priesthood, the diaconate and consecrated life; distinguished authorities, I am pleased to see you alongside your people; dear brothers and sisters, all of you, in the Lord:

I am very happy to be here in Balasar today and to share this celebration with you. The Pope is the Successor of Peter, and the mission Jesus entrusted to him is to strengthen his brothers in the faith. On behalf of Pope Leo XIV, I would like this celebration to be an opportunity to strengthen you in the faith as well.

The celebration of the Dedication of a church and an altar is rich in symbolism. Allow me to explain briefly what these symbols mean.

We began without switching on the lights, without covering the altar or kissing it, as we normally do, and by sprinkling the congregation with holy water. At times, we risk treating holy water almost as though it were a lucky charm. Holy water reminds us of our Baptism.

We were baptised when we were still children, and our parents and godparents professed the faith on our behalf. But as we grow up, each of us must personally make that faith our own. The water of Baptism also reminds us that we do not belong to ourselves: through Baptism, we belong to Jesus Christ, who has made us children of God.

How often we go through life as though we were orphans! And there is no worse orphan than someone who has a father and does not know it. We have a God who is our Father and loves us infinitely. Holy water reminds me of this: I am a child, not an orphan.

Holy water is neither a fetish nor a guarantee that «everything will go well for me». It should spur us to live out our Baptism, to live as children of God. This is the greatest treasure we Christians possess.

You will now witness an unusual ceremony: the altar will be anointed with Holy Chrism. At the Chrism Mass on Maundy Thursday, the Bishop consecrates the Holy Chrism, which is used in Baptism, Confirmation, the Ordination of priests and bishops, and the Dedication of churches.

«Chrism» and «Christ» have the same root: chrism means anointing; Christ is the Anointed One. We too were anointed with Holy Chrism at Baptism and Confirmation; we were consecrated and belong to Christ.

Holy Chrism will now be used to dedicate this altar, because the altar is a symbol of Jesus Christ. That is why, at the beginning and end of every Mass, the priest kisses the altar.

But speaking of Chrism should lead us back to our Baptism. You and I have been anointed like Christ; we are called to live like Christ. A Christian must ask: «Lord, what do you want me to do?» Or, in every situation: «What would Christ do if he were in my place?» At home, at work, with our neighbours, in the face of difficulties: how would Christ behave if he were in my place? This is what Holy Chrism reminds us of.

Then incense will be placed on the altar and burned. Incense reminds us of the words of the Psalm: «Let my prayer rise before you, Lord, like incense». May our lives be lived in relationship with God, as a sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to him.

The Christian is called to be the *bonus odor Christi*, the sweet fragrance of Christ. May those who come near us find this «sweet fragrance»; may everyone who crosses our path encounter Jesus Christ in some way, because we live as his good disciples.

Words matter less and less. People are tired of words and are looking for people whose lives bear witness. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, St Paul VI reminded us that the world listens more readily to witnesses than to teachers. We too, who have the responsibility of teaching, must ensure that our lives bear witness. Life comes first, then words. Without witness, words lose their power. Our lives must be the sweet fragrance of Christ.

And so we come to the final symbol: light. The church's lights will be switched on. This brings us back to the Lord's words: «You are the light of the world». The same Jesus who says, «I am the light of the world; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness», entrusts us with the mission of being the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

At times, even in the Church, we want to take centre stage. But Our Lord did not call us to dazzle; he called us to shed light. A single light in the darkness can show us the way. We remember the Easter Vigil: the church is dark; the Paschal Candle enters, and little by little its light reaches the whole congregation. This is what it means to shed light: to be a point of reference.

In a society that is often disoriented, we Christians have a responsibility to be points of reference. This is our mission.

These four symbols – water, Chrism, incense and light – thus lead us to a deeper understanding of our Christian life.

We are dedicating a church and an altar. This reminds us that all of us who are baptised are living stones with which the new temple is built: the Body of Christ. Jesus said: «Destroy this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days», because the true temple is his Body, and we are members of that Body. That is why we too are temples of the Holy Spirit.

If we were truly aware that we are temples of the Holy Spirit, we would live differently. Each of us has been made a member of the Body of Christ. Why, then, do we dedicate this physical temple? So that it may welcome the spiritual Body of Christ, which we all form.

And if we are living stones, each of us has our own mission. No one should live in a Christian community without taking on some responsibility. Some take part in a prayer group, others in a movement, a pastoral activity, the choir or another form of service. There are thousands of possibilities. Each of us has received a gift from God: put it at the service of others. Be a living stone that helps build the Body of Christ.

We are dedicating this Eucharistic Shrine, which has been built in remembrance of Blessed Alexandrina of Balasar. For all of us, she is a shining example of how to live out the consecration of Baptism, belong to Christ and entrust ourselves completely to our heavenly Father. Her life was the «sweet fragrance of Christ» to those who knew her, and it continues to be so today. She was also a light that shone in the darkness of the world.

What message does Alexandrina, more through her life than through her words, leave for each of us today, Christians of the 21st century?

She was a laywoman, part of a family in this small Portuguese village. Her holiness matured in the ordinary – and later extraordinarily painful – circumstances of her life. She teaches us that holiness is not reserved for those who accomplish great deeds. It can mature in a home, in a family, in illness, at work and in the apparent insignificance of everyday life.

On Holy Saturday in 1918, when she was 14, Alexandrina was at home with her sister and another young woman when three men forced their way in. To escape their assault, she threw herself out of a window and, little by little, became permanently confined to bed for about thirty years. She asked Our Lady to heal her, dreaming of becoming a missionary, but came to understand that God was entrusting her with another kind of mission. She moved from resignation to complete acceptance of God's will.

She did not seek suffering for its own sake. The Christian faith does not necessarily remove frailty, illness or irreversible situations, but it can give them a new meaning. Alexandrina

teaches us to move from asking, «Why is this happening to me?» to asking something else: «How can I love in the situation I find myself in?»

Her spirituality was deeply Eucharistic. She understood that Jesus was in the Tabernacle and that she was confined to bed; so they could keep each other company. From this arose her spiritual way of visiting the Tabernacles of the world and remaining inwardly close to Jesus in the Eucharist.

The room of a paralysed woman thus became a place of mission. Unable to travel the world physically, she travelled it through prayer. What a powerful message for a culture dominated by efficiency, productivity and visibility! Alexandrina reminds us that a life apparently «useless» in the eyes of the world can be extraordinarily fruitful.

She drew her strength from the Eucharist, which was her only nourishment for the final thirteen years of her life. Christ in the Eucharist became the centre of her existence. The Eucharist was not simply one devotion among others: it was presence, nourishment, companionship and a way of becoming like Christ.

Let us ask ourselves: «Is Christ, present in the Eucharist, at the centre of my Christian life?»

St John Paul II summed up Alexandrina's spirituality in three words: «suffer, love, make reparation». She had mystical experiences connected with Christ's Passion. But the decisive word is «love». Reparation also means responding to evil with good, to selfishness with self-giving, to indifference with love and to violence with reconciliation.

Suffering is not good in itself; it is love that can transform what we suffer. Christian hope does not mean the absence of suffering, but the certainty that suffering does not have the final word.

Alexandrina did not shut herself away in her suffering. She cared about the poor, the spiritual life of her parish and those who came to visit her.

She prayed for sinners and cared about people's conversion and sanctification. In 1944 she became a Salesian Cooperator, offering her prayer and suffering in particular for young people and the Salesian mission.

The more physically limited she became, the more her heart embraced the whole world. In this world that seeks efficiency, Alexandrina teaches us that an elderly or sick person, or someone unable to leave home, can remain a full participant in the mission of the Church.

Her spirituality was also deeply Marian. On the day of her beatification, St John Paul II returned to this devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, expressing the hope that it would be a gateway to hope for humanity in our time. In Alexandrina, however, Mary never takes the place of Christ: she leads her to give herself even more radically to him and to the salvation of her brothers and sisters.

One of her greatest concerns was the conversion of sinners. She even wanted an appeal to sinners to convert to be placed on her tomb. For her, it was worth offering her life for the salvation of others. Christians receive the Gospel so that others, too, may discover God's love.

Ask yourself: how much do I truly care about the spiritual lives of others?

Those who visited Alexandrina met a smiling woman, able to convey peace despite her profound inner and physical suffering. It is striking to see how intense suffering and an extraordinary capacity for welcoming others coexisted in her.

Dear brothers and sisters, Alexandrina's life makes several practical appeals to us:

May the Eucharist be at the centre of our Christian life, as it is in this Shrine, where Jesus in the Eucharist is at the centre.

May we accept our frailty without regarding our lives as useless.

May we transform suffering into love, without seeking suffering or considering it good in itself.

May we know how to offer our lives for others, moving beyond an excessively individualistic spirituality and rediscovering intercessory prayer and our responsibility for the salvation of our brothers and sisters.

May we live our devotion to Our Lady as a way that leads to Christ, always trusting in the possibility of conversion and in God's mercy.

May we be missionaries, united with Christ, even when it seems that we can do nothing.

All this will help us to live in hope, because the final word on Christian existence belongs neither to pain nor to death, but to the Resurrection.

During the beatification, St John Paul II said that Alexandrina's secret lay not first and foremost in the extraordinary mystical phenomena, but in love. He concluded: «Love for Christ is the secret of holiness!» This is true for us too: love for Christ is the secret of holiness.

May this Eucharistic Shrine of Balasar be a sacred space offering pilgrims silence and contemplation amid the clamour of the world. May it awaken in many a longing for God and help them encounter Christ by listening to the Word, for which Our Lady is a model, and through the celebration of the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation, the path of conversion, and the Eucharist, in which we receive Christ himself.

Amen.

Monsignor Andrés Carrascosa
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