



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CONCELEBRATION
FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FOUR NEW SAINTS

RAFAEL GUÍZAR VALENCIA (1878 – 1938)

FILIPPO SMALDONE (1848 – 1923)

ROSA VENERINI (1656 – 1728)

THÉODORE GUÉRIN (1798 – 1856)

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

St Peter's Square

Sunday, 15 October 2006

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Four new Saints are proposed today for the veneration of the universal Church: *Rafael Guízar y Valencia*, *Filippo Smaldone*, *Rose Venerini* and *Théodore Guérin*. Their names will be remembered for ever.

In contrast to this immediately comes the thought of the "rich young man" of whom the Gospel, just proclaimed, speaks. This youth has remained anonymous; if he had responded positively to the invitation of Jesus, he would have become his disciple and probably the Evangelist would have recorded his name.

From this fact one can immediately glimpse the theme of this Sunday's Liturgy of the Word: if man puts his trust in the riches of this world, he will not reach the full sense of life and of true joy. If instead, trusting the Word of God, he renounces himself and his goods for the Kingdom of Heaven, apparently losing much, he in reality gains all.

The Saint is exactly that man, that woman, who, responding with joy and generosity to Christ's

call, leaves everything to follow him. Like Peter and the other Apostles, as St Teresa of Jesus today reminds us as well as countless other friends of God, the new Saints have also run this demanding yet fulfilling Gospel itinerary and have already received "a hundred fold" in this life, together with trials and persecutions, and then eternal life.

Jesus, therefore, can truly guarantee a happy existence and eternal life, but by a route different from what the rich young man imagines: that is, not through a good work, a legal tribute, but rather in the choice of the Kingdom of God as the "precious pearl" for which it is worth selling all that one possesses (cf. Mt 13: 45-46).

The rich youth is not able to take this step. Notwithstanding that he has been the object of the loving gaze of Jesus (cf. Mk 10: 21), his heart is not able to detach itself from the many goods that he possessed.

Thus comes the teaching for the disciples: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God!" (Mk 10: 23).

Earthly riches occupy and preoccupy the mind and the heart. Jesus does not say they are bad, but that they distance one from God if they are not, so to speak, "invested" for the Kingdom of Heaven, spent, that is, to come to the help of those who are poor.

Understanding this is the fruit of that wisdom of which the First Reading speaks. As we were told, she is more precious than silver or gold, and more beautiful, healthy and full of light, "because her radiance never ceases" (Wis 7: 10).

Obviously, this wisdom cannot be reduced merely to an intellectual dimension. It is much more; it is "the Wisdom of the heart", as it is called in Psalm 89. It is a gift from on high (cf. Jas 3: 17), from God, and is obtained by prayer (cf. Wis 7: 7).

In fact, it has not remained distant from man; it has come close to his heart (cf. Dt 30: 14), taking form in the law of the First Covenant between God and Israel through Moses.

The Wisdom of God is contained in the Decalogue. This is why Jesus affirms in the Gospel that to "enter into life" it is necessary to observe the commandments (cf. Mk 10: 19). It is necessary, but not sufficient!

In fact, as St Paul says, salvation does not come from the law, but from Grace. And St John recalls that the law was given by Moses, while Grace and Truth come by means of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 1: 17).

To reach salvation one must therefore be open in faith to the grace of Christ, who, however, when

addressed, places a demanding condition: "Come, follow me" (Mk 10: 21).

The Saints have had the humility and the courage to respond "yes", and they have renounced all to be his friends.

The four new Saints who we particularly venerate today have done likewise. In them we find the experience of Peter actualized: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you" (Mk 10: 28). Their only treasure is in heaven: it is God.

The Gospel that we have heard helps us to understand the figure of St *Rafael Guízar y Valencia*, Bishop of Vera Cruz in the beloved Mexican Nation, as an example of one who has left all to "follow Jesus".

This Saint was faithful to the divine Word, "living and active", that penetrates the depth of the spirit (cf. Heb 4: 12). Imitating the poor Christ, he renounced his goods and never accepted the gifts of the powerful, or rather, he gave them back immediately. This is why he received "a hundred fold" and could thus help the poor, even amid endless "persecutions" (cf. Mk 10: 30).

His charity, lived to a heroic degree, earned him the name, "Bishop of the poor". In his priestly and later episcopal ministry, he was an untiring preacher of popular missions, the most appropriate way at the time to evangelize people, using his own "Catechism of Christian Doctrine".

Since the formation of priests was one of his priorities, he reopened the seminary, which he considered "the apple of his eye", and therefore he would often say: "A Bishop can do without the mitre, the crosier and even without the cathedral, but he cannot do without the seminary, since the future of his Diocese depends on it".

With this profound sense of priestly paternity he faced new persecutions and exiles, but he always guaranteed the formation of the students.

The example of St Rafael Guízar y Valencia is a call to his brother Bishops and priests to consider as fundamental in pastoral programmes, beyond the spirit of poverty and evangelization, the promotion of priestly and religious vocations, and their formation according to the heart of Jesus!

St *Filippo Smaldone*, son of South Italy, knew how to instil in his life the higher virtues characteristic of his land.

A priest with a great heart nourished continuously on prayer and Eucharistic adoration, he was above all a witness and servant of charity, which he manifested in an eminent way through service to the poor, in particular to deaf-mutes, to whom he dedicated himself entirely.

The work that he began developed thanks to the Congregation of the Salesian Sisters of the Sacred Hearts founded by him and which spread to various parts of Italy and the world.

St Filippo Smaldone saw the image of God reflected in deaf-mutes, and he used to repeat that, just as we prostrate before the Blessed Sacrament, so we should kneel before a deaf-mute.

From his example we welcome the invitation to consider the ever indivisible love for the Eucharist and love for one's neighbour. But the true capacity to love the brethren can come only from meeting with the Lord in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

St *Rose Venerini* is another example of a faithful disciple of Christ, ready to give up all in order to do the will of God. She loved to say: "I find myself so bound to the divine will that neither death nor life is important: I want to live as he wishes and I want to serve him as he likes, and nothing more" (*Biografia Andreucci*, p. 515).

From here, from this surrender to God, sprang the long-admired work that she courageously developed in favour of the spiritual elevation and authentic emancipation of the young women of her time.

St Rose did not content herself with providing the girls an adequate education, but she was concerned with assuring their complete formation, with sound references to the Church's doctrinal teaching.

Her own apostolic style continues to characterize the life of the Congregation of the Religious Teachers Venerini which she founded. And how timely and important for today's society is this service, which puts them in the field of education and especially of the formation of women.

"Go, sell everything you own, and give the money to the poor... then come, follow me". These words have inspired countless Christians throughout the history of the Church to follow Christ in a life of radical poverty, trusting in Divine Providence.

Among these generous disciples of Christ was a young Frenchwoman, who responded unreservedly to the call of the divine Teacher. Mother *Théodore Guérin* entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Providence in 1823, and she devoted herself to the work of teaching in schools. Then, in 1839, she was asked by her Superiors to travel to the United States to become the head of a new community in Indiana.

After their long journey over land and sea, the group of six Sisters arrived at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods. There they found a simple log-cabin chapel in the heart of the forest. They knelt down before the Blessed Sacrament and gave thanks, asking God's guidance upon the new foundation.

With great trust in Divine Providence, Mother Théodore overcame many challenges and persevered in the work that the Lord had called her to do. By the time of her death in 1856, the Sisters were running schools and orphanages throughout the State of Indiana.

In her own words, "How much good has been accomplished by the Sisters of Saint Mary-of-the-Woods! How much more good they will be able to do if they remain faithful to their holy vocation!".

Mother Théodore Guérin is a beautiful spiritual figure and a model of the Christian life. She was always open for the missions the Church entrusted to her, and she found the strength and the boldness to put them [the missions] into practice in the Eucharist, in prayer and in an infinite trust in Divine Providence. Her inner strength moved her to address particular attention to the poor, and above all to children.

Dear brothers and sisters, we give thanks to the Lord for the gift of holiness that today shines forth in the Church with singular beauty.

Jesus also invites us, like these Saints, to follow him in order to have an inheritance in eternal life. May their exemplary witness illuminate and encourage especially young people, so that they may allow themselves to be won over by Christ, by his glance full of love.

May Mary, Queen of the Saints, raise up among the Christian people, men and women like *St Rafael Guízar y Valencia*, *St Filippo Smaldone*, *St Rose Venerini* and *St Théodore Guérin*, ready to abandon all for the Kingdom of God; disposed to make their own the logic of gift and service, the only one that saves the world. Amen.

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