



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

ANGELUS

Castel Gandolfo

Sunday, 29 August 2004

1. Today, 29 August, Christian tradition commemorates the *martyrdom of St John the Baptist*; the Messiah himself says in praise of him: "none born of woman is greater" (cf. Lk 7: 28). He gave to God the supreme witness of his blood, sacrificing his life for truth and justice; indeed, his head was cut off at the orders of Herod, whom he had dared to tell that it was not lawful to take his brother's wife (cf. Mc 6: 17-29).

2. In the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, recalling the sacrifice of John the Baptist (cf. n. 91), I observed that martyrdom is "*an outstanding sign of the holiness of the Church*" (n. 93). Indeed, it "represents the high point of the witness to moral truth" (*ibid.*).

Although relatively few are called to make this supreme sacrifice, it is nonetheless "a consistent witness which all Christians must daily be ready to make, even at the cost of suffering and grave sacrifice" (*ibid.*). At times, a truly heroic effort is also needed in daily life, in order not to give in to the difficulties that are an incentive to compromise and to live the Gospel "*sine glossa*".

3. The heroic example of John the Baptist reminds us of the *martyrs for the faith* who down the centuries followed courageously in his footsteps. I recall in particular the multitude of Christians in the last century who were also victims of religious hatred in various European nations. Today too, in some parts of the world, believers are still subjected to harsh trials for adhering to Christ and his Church.

May these brothers and sisters of ours feel the full solidarity of the entire Ecclesial Community! Let us entrust them to the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Martyrs, whom we call on together at this

moment.

After leading the prayer of the Angelus, the Holy Father said the following:

I cordially greet the French-speaking pilgrims. May the Word of the Lord guide you every day, so that you will always be humble and attentive to others!

I warmly welcome the English-speaking visitors present at this Angelus. May Almighty God bless you and your families with joy and peace!

A cordial welcome to the German-speaking pilgrims and visitors. Bear witness to Christian hope for everyone!

I greet with affection the Spanish-speaking pilgrims. May the Lord grant you an abundance of graces and blessings in order to carry out his will every day of your life!

I greet the Dominican Sisters of the Congregation of the Guardian Angels, and I wish them ever greater fidelity to their religious charism.

I greet with affection the Italian pilgrims here: in particular, the men and women missionaries who are taking part in the formation course organized by the Pontifical Salesian University, the superiors and seminarians of the Pontifical North American College and the group of Legionaries of Christ. I then greet the faithful from Angarano in Bassano del Grappa, from San Giorgio delle Pertiche, the group "*Friends of Fraterna Domus*" from Rome and from various provinces in the Venice region, as well as those taking part in the "Bicycle for Peace" demonstration, who come from Castegnato.

I send a special greeting to the Archbishop of Genoa, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, and to the faithful gathered round him at the Shrine of Our Lady della Guardia, whose image my venerable Predecessor Benedict XV placed in the Vatican Gardens. May the Most Holy Virgin obtain peace for all humanity!

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