



The Holy See

BEATIFICATION OF 11 SPANISH WOMEN RELIGIOUS AND A LEBANESE MARONITE MONK

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 10 May 1998

1. *"I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rv 21:1-2).*

The splendid vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, which today's Liturgy of the Word presents to us again, closes the Book of Revelation and the whole series of sacred books which comprise the Bible. With this magnificent description of the City of God, the author of Revelation indicates the definitive defeat of evil and the achievement of perfect communion between God and men. From the beginning, the history of salvation aims at this goal.

Before the community of believers, who are also called to proclaim the Gospel and to witness to their own faith in Christ amid various trials, the supreme goal shines forth: the heavenly Jerusalem! We are all advancing towards that goal, where the saints and martyrs have preceded us down the centuries. On our earthly pilgrimage, these brethren of ours, who have passed victoriously through "great tribulations", serve as an example, incentive and encouragement to us. The Church which "continues her pilgrimage amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God" (St Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, 51:2), knows she is sustained and encouraged by the example and communion of the heavenly Church.

2. In the glorious array of saints and blessed who enjoy the vision of God, we contemplate in a particular way our illustrious sisters and brother in the faith whom today I have the joy of raising to the honours of the altar. They are: Rita Dolores Pujalte Sánchez and Francisca of the Sacred Heart of Jesus Aldea Araujo; María Gabriela Hinojosa and her six companions; María Sagrario of St Aloysius Gonzaga Elvira Moragas Cantarero; Nimatullah Al-Hardini Youssef Kassab; and María Maravillas de Jesús Pidal y Chico de Guzmán.

With very different experiences and in quite different contexts, they heroically lived an extraordinary, complete fidelity to Christ and the same ardent love of neighbour.

3. In beatifying Fr Nimatullah Kassab Al-Hardini, a Lebanese Maronite monk, I would first like to give thanks for my journey to the land of the cedars exactly one year ago. Today there is a new celebration for Lebanese all over the world, for one of their brothers is held up to them as a model of holiness. Throughout his monastic life, the new blessed willingly incarnated the words of Christ's disciples which we have heard in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God".

This same reading also shows us the different aspects of mission: prayer, fasting and the preaching of the Gospel. Through his rigorous asceticism, his long periods of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, his concern for theological research and his merciful attention to his brothers, Bl. Al-Hardini is a model of Christian and monastic life for the Maronite community and for all Christ's followers in our time. As I recalled in my Post-Synodal Exhortation, *A Hope for Lebanon*, citing St Basil: "It is a moral life and an ascetical life in conformity with the commitment made which lead to reconciliation between people" (n. 53).

From now on the new blessed is a sign of hope for all Lebanese, especially families and youth people. As a man of prayer, he calls his brothers and sisters to trust in God and to commit all their efforts to following Christ, in order to build a better future. May Lebanon continue to be a land of witnesses and saints, and a land of ever greater peace and brotherhood!

4. In the Gospel proclaimed during this celebration we heard: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you*" (Jn 13:34). *Mother Rita Dolores Pujalte and Mother Francisca Aldea* who today are raised to the glory of the altars, faithfully followed Jesus, loving to the end, as he did, and suffering death for the faith in July 1936.

They belonged to the community of St Susanna's College in Madrid, of the *Sisters of Charity of the Sacred Heart*, who decided to stay at their post despite the religious persecution which was unleashed in that time, so as not to abandon the orphans in their care. This heroic act of love and selfless devotion for their brethren cost Mother Rita and Mother Francisca their life: although they were old and ailing, they were captured and shot to death.

The supreme commandment of the Lord had taken deep root in them during the years of their religious consecration, which they lived in fidelity to the congregation's charism. Growing in a love for the needy which is not frightened by danger nor, when necessary, shrinks from bloodshed, they achieved martyrdom. Their example is a call to all Christians to love as Christ loves, even amid the greatest difficulties.

5. "*By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*". How well these words of today's Gospel can be applied to Sr Gabriela Hinojosa and her six companions, Visitandine martyrs in Madrid, also in 1936! Obedience and community life are basic elements of consecrated life. This is how they understood it, so out of obedience they remained in Madrid despite the persecution, in order to follow, although from a distance, the monastery's fate.

Thus, sustained by silence, prayer and sacrifice, they continued to prepare for the holocaust, giving themselves generously to God. In honouring them as martyrs for Christ, they enlighten us by their example, intercede for us and await us in glory. May their life and death serve as an example to the Visitation nuns, whose monasteries are found throughout the world, and draw to them many vocations who will follow the sweet and gentle spirit of St Francis de Sales and St Jane Frances de Chantal.

6. The Book of Revelation has shown us a vision of Jerusalem “*prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*” (21:2). Although these words refer to the Church, we can also apply them to the two Discalced Carmelites who are proclaimed blessed at this celebration, having reached the same ideal by different paths: *Mother Sagrario of St Aloysius Gonzaga and Mother Maravillas de Jesús*. Adorned with Christian virtues, their human qualities and their commitment to the Lord in the Teresian Carmel, today they both stand before the eyes of the Christian people as brides of Christ.

Mother María Sagrario, a pharmacist in her youth and a Christian example for those who practise that noble profession, gave up everything to live for God alone in Christ Jesus (cf. *Rom 6:11*) in the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of St Anne and St Joseph in Madrid. There her commitment to the Lord matured, and she learned from him to serve and to sacrifice herself for her brothers and sisters. This how in the turbulent events of July 1936 she found the strength not to betray priests and friends of the community, facing death with integrity for her state as a Carmelite and to save others.

7. *Mother Maravillas de Jesús*, also a Discalced Carmelite, is another shining example of holiness whom the Church, in proclaiming her blessed, holds up today for the veneration of the faithful. This distinguished religious from Madrid sought God throughout her life and consecrated herself entirely to him in the quiet life of Carmel. She founded a monastery in Cerro de los Ángeles, the geographical centre of Spain, next to the Sacred Heart Monument to which the nation had been consecrated. Forced by the Civil War to leave her convent, she devoted all her energies to ensuring that the order would survive, which led her to make many foundations where she wanted the spirit of penance, sacrifice and recollection, characteristic of the Teresian reform, to prevail.

A well-known person in her time, she was able to make the most of this fact to attract many souls to God. She used all the help she received to aid monasteries, priests, seminaries and religious works in need. For this reason many had reason to be grateful to her. She was prioress for almost all her religious life, acting as a true Mother to her sisters. She lived with heroic faith, formed in response to an austere vocation, by putting God at the centre of her life. After suffering many trials, she died repeating: “What happiness to die a Carmelite!”. Her life and death are an eloquent message of hope for the world, so much in need of values and, at times, so tempted by hedonism, the easy life and living without God.

8. “*All your works shall give thanks to you, O Lord, and all your saints shall bless you!*” (*Ps 145*)

[144]:10) Together with Mary, Queen of Saints, and with the whole Church, we give thanks to God for the great things he has accomplished in these sisters and brother of ours, who shine forth as beacons of hope for everyone. They are a powerful reminder to all humanity of the perennial values of the spirit, on the threshold of the third Christian millennium.

In making the words of the liturgy our own, we praise the Lord for the precious gift of these blessed, who enhance the face of the Church with renewed splendour. "Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous deeds" (entrance antiphon). Yes, we sing to God who has revealed his salvation to all peoples. And each of us responds in his heart: "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations" (cf. Responsorial Psalm).

Amen!

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