



The Holy See

BEATIFICATION OF THREE SERVANTS OF GOD:

VINCENT EUGENE BOSSILKOV
BRIGIDA OF JESUS MORELLO
MARÍA OF MT CARMEL SALLÉS Y BARANGUERAS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 15 March 1998

1. *"God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here am I"" (Ex 3:4).*

In the first reading we heard the account of Moses' vocation. God reveals his own name to Moses: *"I am who I am"* (Ex 3:14), so that he would tell it to the people of Israel. This is how a special relationship of trust and familiarity is established between God and his messenger. He is invested with authority as mediator between the people and their Lord. Because of this responsibility, he will become God's instrument for Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Through his work, Yahweh himself will lead the people for 40 years through the desert to the promised land and make the great Covenant of Sinai with them.

The history of Moses' vocation clearly shows how the call to communion with God, and therefore to holiness, is the necessary premise for every particular mission for the sake of the community and in service to one's brothers and sisters.

The divine initiative, which calls a person to holiness and entrusts him with a special mission in service to his neighbour, shines brightly in the spiritual experience of the three new Servants of God whom I have had the joy today of raising to the glory of the altars: Vincent Eugene Bossilkov, Brigida of Jesus Morello, religious and foundress of the Ursuline Sisters of Mary Immaculate, and María of Mt Carmel Sallés y Barangueras, virgin and foundress of the Missionary Teaching Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.

2. *"They drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (1 Cor*

10:4). The martyr Bishop, Vincent Eugene Bossilkov, drank from the supernatural Rock which is Christ. Faithfully following the charism of St Paul of the Cross, founder of his congregation, he intensively cultivated the spirituality of the Passion. He also dedicated himself without reserve to the pastoral service of the Christian community entrusted to his care and faced the supreme trial of martyrdom without hesitation.

Bishop Bossilkov thus became the Church's radiant glory in his country. A fearless witness to the Cross of Christ, he is one of the many victims sacrificed by atheistic communism in Bulgaria and elsewhere, in its plan to destroy the

Church. In those times of harsh persecution, many looked to him and drew from his example of courage the strength to remain faithful to the Gospel to the very end. I am pleased, on this festive day for the Bulgarian nation, to honour those who, like Bishop Bossilkov, paid with their lives for adhering without reserve to the faith they received in Baptism.

Bishop Bossilkov was able wonderfully to combine an intense spiritual life and constant attention to the needs of his brethren with his mission as priest and Bishop. Today he is presented to us as an eminent figure of the Catholic Church in Bulgaria, not only because of his extensive learning, but for his constant ecumenical concern and his heroic fidelity to the See of Peter.

When the communist regime's hostility to the Church became more determined and threatening, Bl. Bossilkov chose to stay by his people, although he knew that this meant risking his life. He was not afraid to face the storm of persecution. When he sensed the moment of supreme trial, he wrote to the Superior of his religious Province: "I have the courage to live; I hope I will also have it to suffer the worst and to stay faithful to Christ, to the Pope and to the Church!" (Letter XIV).

And so this Bishop and martyr, who throughout his life strove to be a faithful image of the Good Shepherd, became one in an altogether special way at the moment of death when he united his blood with that of the Lamb sacrificed for the world's salvation. What a shining example for us all, called to bear faithful witness to Christ and his Gospel! What a great encouragement for those who today are still suffering injustice and oppression because of their faith! May the example of this martyr, whom we contemplate today in the glory of the blessed, instil faith and zeal in all Christians, especially those of the beloved Bulgarian nation which from now on can invoke him as its heavenly protector.

3. "*The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love*". These words, which today's liturgy presents in the responsorial psalm, sustained and guided the heroic fidelity to the Gospel of Bl. Brigida of Jesus Morello, religious and foundress of the Ursuline Sisters of Mary Immaculate. The events of her varied life - first as a young woman gifted with human and spiritual virtues, then as a wise and faithful wife, a Christian widow and, lastly, as a consecrated person and a guide for her sisters - reflect with exceptional clarity the new blessed's trusting

abandonment to the mercy of God who "is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love".

At a similar school, Bl. Brigida of Jesus learned the basic lesson of love that is spent in daily dedication to the service of one's neighbour. At a time when the ideals of femininity were given scant consideration, Bl. Morello quietly brought to light woman's value in the family and in society. In love with God, she was thus ready to open her heart and her arms to brothers and sisters in need. Enriched with mystical gifts but at the same time tried by long and severe suffering, she never ceased to be an authentic teacher of the spiritual life and a significant example of a wonderful blend of consecrated life and social and educational activity.

A constant invitation to trust in God shines through her writings. She loved to repeat: "Trust, trust, great heart! God is our Father and will never abandon us!".

Is this not a remarkably contemporary message that the new Blessed offers us? Our sister in the faith, today raised to the honours of the altar, forcefully reminds us that loving God is the secret of all true and effective social involvement for the good of our brothers and sisters.

4. The first reading from the Book of Exodus presents Moses' calling and mission according to a typical pattern of vocational accounts in the Bible: the divine call, the objections of the chosen and the sign of protection and satisfaction on God's part. These elements are also found in the life of Carmen Sallés y Barangueras, foundress of the Missionary Teaching Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. From her youth, the new blessed focused all her efforts on discerning God's will for her. Various experiences of religious life led her to discover that her mission in the Church was to sow goodness in children and young people, to protect them from the evils that threaten them and to provide women with learning and professional training that would enable them to take a worthy place in society.

Dedicated in this way to women's education, she overcame many difficulties, seeing herself as a "useless instrument in the hands of Mary Immaculate"; she took on daring projects which were the fruit of prayer and the advice of welltrained persons, repeating with firm confidence: "Onwards, ever onwards. God will provide".

A valiant woman, Mother Carmen based her life and work on a Christocentric and Marian spirituality nourished by solid and sensible piety. Her Conceptionist charism, a sign of the Lord's love for his people, lives on today in the witness of her daughters who, as missionaries in schools and colleges, enthusiastically evangelize through their teaching.

5. "*Repent, says the Lord, the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Gospel acclamation; cf. Mt 4:17). The Gospel passage for today, the Third Sunday of Lent, highlights the basic theme of this *important season* of the liturgical year: the invitation to repent and to perform worthy acts of penance.

The three new blessed who are presented today for our veneration were able to accept this demanding invitation. It was not an easy path for them. Indeed, they had to face trials and opposition; but they always did so with a heart ready to do God's will to the end. They combated evil by doing good. Thus, by word and example they became credible witnesses for their contemporaries. With their help, many others have accepted Christ and his Gospel of salvation.

In our time, as we now rapidly approach the third millennium, may the lives of our illustrious brothers and sisters spur us to follow the Lord faithfully on the difficult but shining path of fidelity to Christ.

Amen.

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