



The Holy See

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II

CANONIZATION OF 27 NEW SAINTS

Sunday, 21 May 2000

1. *"Let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth"* (1 Jn 3:18). This exhortation taken from the Apostle John in the second reading of this Mass invites us to imitate Christ and to live in close union with him. Jesus himself also told us this in the Gospel just proclaimed: *"As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me"* (Jn 15:4).

Through profound union with Christ, begun in Baptism and nourished by prayer, the sacraments and the practice of the Gospel virtues, men and women of all times, as children of the Church, have reached the goal of holiness. They are saints because they put God at the centre of their lives and made seeking and extending his kingdom the purpose of their existence; saints because their deeds continue to speak of their total love for the Lord and for their brethren by bearing abundant fruits, thanks to their living faith in Jesus Christ and their commitment to loving as he loved us, including their enemies.

2. During the Jubilee pilgrimage of Mexicans, the Church rejoices in canonizing these children of Mexico: Cristóbal Magallanes and his 24 companion martyrs, priests and laymen; José María de Yermo y Parres, priest and founder of the Religious Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and María de Jesús Sacramentado Venegas, foundress of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

You Mexican pilgrims have come in great numbers, accompanied by a large group of Bishops, to take part in this solemn celebration honouring the memory of these illustrious children of the Church and of your homeland. I greet you all affectionately. The Church in Mexico rejoices at relying on these intercessors in heaven, models of supreme charity who followed in the footsteps

of Jesus Christ. They all dedicated their lives to God and their brethren through martyrdom or by generously serving the needy. The firmness of their faith and hope sustained them in the various trials they had to endure. They are a precious legacy, a fruit of the faith rooted in the lands of Mexico, a faith which, at the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity, must be preserved and revitalized so that you may continue to be faithful to Christ and to his Church as you were in the past. Mexico ever faithful!

3. In the first reading we heard how Paul moved about Jerusalem, "*preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him*" (Acts 9: 28-29). Paul's mission prepares for the growth of the Church, which will take the Gospel message everywhere. And in this expansion, persecution and violence against those who preached the Good News were not lacking. But despite human adversities, the Church relies on the promise of divine help. This is why we heard that "*the Church ... had peace and was built up; and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it was multiplied*" (Acts 9: 31).

We can well apply this passage from the Acts of the Apostles to the situation which Cristóbal Magallanes and his 24 companion martyrs had to endure in the first 30 years of the 20th century.

Most of them belonged to the secular clergy and three were laymen seriously committed to helping priests. They did not stop courageously exercising their ministry when religious persecution intensified in the beloved land of Mexico, unleashing hatred of the Catholic religion. They all freely and calmly accepted martyrdom as a witness to their faith, explicitly forgiving their persecutors. Faithful to God and to the Catholic faith so deeply rooted in the ecclesial communities which they served by also promoting their material well-being, today they are an example to the whole Church and to Mexican society in particular.

After the harsh trials that the Church endured in Mexico during those turbulent years, today Mexican Christians, encouraged by the witness of these witnesses to the faith, can live in peace and harmony, contributing the wealth of Gospel values to society. The Church grows and advances, since she is the crucible in which many priestly and religious vocations are born, where families are formed according to God's plan, and where young people, a substantial part of the Mexican population, can grow up with the hope of a better future. May the shining example of Cristóbal Magallanes and his companion martyrs help you to make a renewed commitment of fidelity to God, which can continue to transform Mexican society so that justice, fraternity and harmony will prevail among all.

4. "*This is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us*" (1 Jn 3:23). The command *par excellence* that Jesus gave to his disciples is to love one another fraternally as he has loved us (cf. Jn 15:12). In the second reading we heard, the command has a twofold aspect: to believe in the person of Jesus

Christ, the Son of God, confessing him at every moment, and to love one another because Christ himself has commanded us to do so. This command is so fundamental to the lives of believers that it becomes the prerequisite for the divine indwelling. Faith, hope and love lead to the existential acceptance of God as the sure path to holiness.

It could be said that this was the path taken by José María de Yermo y Parres, who lived his priestly commitment to Christ by following him with all his might, distinguishing himself at the same time by an essentially prayerful and contemplative attitude. In the Heart of Christ he found guidance for his spirituality and, in reflecting on his infinite love for men, he desired to imitate him by making charity the rule of his life.

The new saint founded the Religious Servants of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Poor, a name which combines the two great loves that express the new saint's spirit and charism in the Church.

Dear daughters of St José María de Yermo y Parres, generously live your founder's rich heritage, beginning with fraternal communion in community and extending it in merciful love to your brothers and sisters with humility, simplicity, effectiveness and, above all, perfect union with God.

5. *"Abide in me, and I in you.... He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn 15: 4, 5). In the Gospel we have just heard, Jesus urged us to abide in him in order to unite all men and women with him. This invitation requires us to fulfil our baptismal commitment by living in his love, drawing inspiration from his Word, being nourished by the Eucharist, receiving his forgiveness and, when necessary, carrying the cross with him. Separation from God is the greatest tragedy a person can experience. The sap that flows to the branch makes it grow; the grace that comes to us through Christ makes us grow to adulthood so that we can bear fruits of eternal life.

St María de Jesús Sacramentado Venegas, the first Mexican woman to be canonized, knew how to remain united to Christ during her long earthly life and thus she bore abundant fruits of eternal life. Her spirituality was marked by an exceptional Eucharistic piety, since it is clear that an excellent way to union with the Lord is to seek him, to adore him, to love him in the most holy mystery of his real presence in the Sacrament of the Altar.

She wanted to continue his work by founding the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who today in the Church follow her charism of charity to the poor and the sick. Indeed, the love of God is universal; it is meant for all human beings and for this reason the new saint understood that it was her duty to spread it, generously caring for everyone until the end of her days, even when her physical energy was declining and the heavy trials that she had to endure throughout her life had sapped her strength. Very faithful in her observance of the Constitutions, respectful to Bishops and priests, attentive to seminarians, St María de Jesús Sacramentado is an eloquent example of total

dedication to the service of God and to suffering humanity.

6. This solemn celebration reminds us that faith involves a deep relationship with the Lord. The new saints teach us that the true followers and disciples of Jesus are those who do God's will and are united with him through faith and grace.

Listening to God's word, living one's life in harmony with it and giving priority to Christ configure a human being's life to him. "*Abide in me and I in you*" continues to be Jesus' invitation and must constantly echo in each of us and in our surroundings. St Paul, in accepting this call, could exclaim: "*It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*" (*Gal 2:20*). May the Word of God proclaimed in this liturgy make our lives authentic by remaining existentially one with the Lord, loving not only in word, but in deed and in truth (cf. *1 Jn 3:18*). Thus our life will truly be "through Christ, with him and in him".

We are celebrating the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. One of its aims is to "inspire in all the faithful *a true longing for holiness*" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 42). May the example of these new saints, a gift of the Church in Mexico to the universal Church, spur all the faithful, using all the means within their reach and especially with the help of God's grace, to seek holiness with courage and determination.

May Our Lady of Guadalupe, to whom the martyrs prayed at the supreme moment of their sacrifice and to whom St José María de Yermo and St María de Jesús Sacramentado Venegas professed such tender devotion, accompany with her motherly protection the good intentions of all who honour the new saints today, and help those who follow their example. May she also guide and protect the Church so that, through her evangelizing activity and the Christian witness of all her children, she may light humanity's path in the third Christian millennium. Amen.

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