

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
TO THE SPANISH PILGRIMS
WHO HAD COME FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF 233 MARTYRS**

Monday, 12 March 2001

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to have this meeting with you, dear Spanish pilgrims, accompanied by a large group of Bishops, priests and civil authorities from your towns and regions, who have taken part in the solemn beatification of 233 men and women, martyrs of the religious persecution which afflicted the Church in your homeland from 1936 to 1939. Yesterday's beatification was the first to take place in the new century and the new millennium, and it is significant that those beatified were martyrs. We have, in fact, come to the end of a century that was full of sufferings in which many Christians "*risked their lives for the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ*" (Acts 15: 26).

I affectionately greet Cardinals Antonio María Rouco, Archbishop of Madrid and President of the Spanish Episcopal Conference, and Ricardo María Carles, Archbishop of Barcelona, as well as Archbishop Agustín García-Gasco of Valencia, the Archdiocese from which most of the new blessed come, Bishop Francisco Ciuraneta of Lleida and the other Archbishops and Bishops present. I would also like to welcome the autonomous, provincial and local authorities, representing the people who now count the new blessed among their famous children. These new martyrs have sown their message throughout Spain. Indeed, if we note their origins, they come from 37 Dioceses and represent 13 autonomous communities, but their witness embraces the entire Spanish territory. This is why the whole Church in Spain rejoiced in their recognition yesterday.

2. Many of you are descendants, relatives or neighbours of the new blessed. I know that the widow of one, an active member of Catholic Action, is present here, as well as many of the martyrs' brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren. Some of you are brothers and sisters in religion to the religious who have been raised to the glory of the altars. Others are neighbours from their birthplaces, from where they exercised their ministry, from where they were martyred or are buried. I imagine the excitement you feel at this moment, which you have been looking forward to for so many years. Without doubt, their example has encouraged you in your life of faith, for you have cherished their memory and also, in some cases, kept personal mementos.

Yesterday's beatification was the largest of my Pontificate. Indeed, 233 martyrs were raised to the altar. Such a noteworthy number, however, does not make us forget their individual features. They each have a personal history, a name and surname of their own, circumstances which make each one a model of life that becomes even more eloquent with their death freely accepted as the supreme proof of fidelity to Christ and his Church.

These martyrs, whom we speak of today with gratitude and veneration, are like a great picture of the Gospel of the Beatitudes, a beautiful fan displaying the variety of the one, universal Christian vocation to holiness (cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, chap. V). In proclaiming the holiness of this large group of martyrs yesterday, the Church glorifies God.

Holiness is not a privilege reserved for the few. The ways of holiness are many and are followed through the small, concrete events of daily life by performing an act of love in every situation. This is what the newly beatified martyrs did. Here lies the secret of Christianity lived to the full. This is a

truly vital Christianity which all Christians are called to live, whatever their class or state. We are all called to holiness. What God wants of us, in short, is to be holy (1 Thes 4: 3). Dear brothers and sisters from Spain, I believe I should once again propose with conviction "*this 'high standard' of ordinary Christian living*" to you too, as I did to all the faithful in my recent Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte* (n. 31). May your personal path and that of your families and parish communities be one of holiness, especially today!

3. Thus we meet priests, young or old, who carried out the most varied ministries: parish priests, curates, canons, professors, religious who come from the vast fields of charitable work in teaching, care of the elderly or the sick; men and women, single or married, parents of families, workers in various sectors. Christ himself is the origin of their martyrdom and holiness. Their common denominator is the radical option for Christ above all things, even their very lives. They could well say with St Paul: "*For me to live is Christ and to die is gain*" (Phil 1: 21). By their lives and especially by their deaths, they teach us that we should prefer nothing to God's love for us, which he shows to us in Jesus Christ.

In them, as in all martyrs, the Church has always found a seed of life, so that we can say that the early communities were forged by the blood of martyrs. However, martyrdom is a reality that belongs not only to the past but also to the present. I therefore wrote in my recent Apostolic Letter: "*Will this not also be the case of the century and millennium now beginning?*" (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, n. 41).

Indeed, it is a noted fact that martyrs have returned in our time. Furthermore, although it is certain that times have changed, it is also certain that every day offers the possibility of continuing to suffer for love of Christ. The horizon that lies before us is thus broad and exciting. It is up to Christians, always and everywhere, to be ready to spread the light of life that is Christ, even to the point of bloodshed (cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, n. 14). We must be willing to follow in the martyrs' footsteps and, like them, to live holiness to the full with him, for him and in him.

The legacy of these courageous witnesses of faith, "archives of truth written in letters of blood" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2474), has left us an inheritance that speaks louder than that of shameful indifference. It is a voice that urgently calls for our presence in public life. A living but peaceful presence which will lead us, through the incomparable transparency of the Gospel, to present its ever timely radicalness to the men and women of our time.

It is a legacy, moreover, whose language is one of witness. May this patrimony continue to yield abundant fruits through your lives and your commitment, and manifest the extraordinary presence of the Mystery of God which, working always and everywhere, calls us to reconciliation and new life in Christ!

4. Dear brothers and sisters: their witness cannot and must not be forgotten. They show the vitality of your local Churches. May their example make everyone a living and credible witness of the Good News for the new times! May imitating them lead to abundant fruits of love and hope in contemporary society. This is my hope. Foster the culture of life. Do so in word, but also by concrete acts. Prayer for the radical, sincere conversion of everyone to the law of love and a specific, generous commitment to it form the basis of social harmony among men and women, families and peoples. Return to your towns and communities ready to work as apostles in the Church and for the Church. Make the Beatitudes a reality in the places you come from. Imbue everyday realities with the one programme of the Gospel, which is the programme of love. Bring Christ into your lives, your communities, your towns and your history. Be always and everywhere

living and credible witnesses of love, unity and peace. In this task, may my prayer, my affection and my blessing, which I cordially impart to you, go with you always.