



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FIVE NEW SAINTS ZYGMUNT SZCZĘSNY FELIŃSKI (1822 – 1895)

FRANCISCO COLL Y GUITART (1812 – 1875)

JOZEF DAMIAAN DE VEUSTER (1840 – 1889)

RAFAEL ARNÁIZ BARÓN (1911 – 1938)

MARIE DE LA CROIX (JEANNE) JUGAN (1792 – 1879) **HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI**

Vatican Basilica

Sunday, 11 October 2009

Images of the celebrations

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?". The brief conversation we heard in the Gospel passage, between a man identified elsewhere as the rich young man and Jesus, begins with this question (cf. Mk 10: 17-30). We do not have many details about this anonymous figure; yet from a few characteristics we succeed in perceiving his sincere desire to attain eternal life by leading an honest and virtuous earthly existence. In fact he knows the commandments and has observed them faithfully from his youth. Yet, all this which is of course important is not enough. Jesus says he lacks one thing, but it is something essential. Then, seeing him well disposed, the divine Teacher looks at him lovingly and suggests to him a leap in quality; he calls the young man to heroism in holiness, he asks him to abandon everything to follow him: "go, sell what you have, and give to the poor... and come, follow me" (v. 21).

"Come, follow me". This is the Christian vocation which is born from the Lord's proposal of love and can only be fulfilled in our loving response. Jesus invites his disciples to give their lives completely, without calculation or personal interest, with unreserved trust in God. Saints accept this demanding invitation and set out with humble docility in the following of the Crucified and Risen Christ. Their perfection, in the logic of faith sometimes humanly incomprehensible consists in no longer putting themselves at the centre but in choosing to go against the tide, living in line

with the Gospel. This is what the five Saints did who are held up today with great joy for the veneration of the universal Church: *Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński, Francisco Coll y Guitart, Jozef Damien de Veuster, Rafael Arnáiz Barón and Mary of the Cross (Jeanne Jugan)*. In them we contemplate the Apostle Peter's words fulfilled: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you" (v. 28), and Jesus' comforting reassurance: "there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the Gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time... with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (vv. 29-30).

Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński, Archbishop of Warsaw, the Founder of the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary, was a great witness of faith and pastoral charity in very troubled times for the nation and for the Church in Poland. He zealously concerned himself with the spiritual development of the faithful, he helped the poor and orphans. At the Ecclesiastical Academy in St Petersburg he saw to the sound formation of priests and as Archbishop of Warsaw he instilled in everyone the desire for inner renewal. Before the January 1863 Uprising against Russian annexation he put the people on guard against useless bloodshed. However, when the rebellion broke out and there were repressions he courageously defended the oppressed. On the Tsar of Russia's orders he spent 20 years in exile at Jaroslaw on the Volga, without ever being able to return to his diocese. In every situation he retained his steadfast trust in Divine Providence and prayed: "O God, protect us not from the tribulations and worries of this world... only multiply love in our hearts and obtain that in deepest humility we may keep our infinite trust in your help and your mercy". Today his gift of himself to God and to humankind, full of trust and love, becomes a luminous example for the whole Church.

St Paul reminds us in the Second Reading that "the word of God is living and active" (Heb 4: 12). In it the Father who is in Heaven speaks lovingly to his children in all the epochs (cf. *Dei Verbum*, n. 21), making them know his infinite love and, in this way, encouraging them, consoling them and offering them his plan of salvation for humanity and for every person. Aware of this, *St Francisco Coll* dedicated himself eagerly to disseminating it, thus faithfully fulfilling his vocation in the Order of Preachers, in which he had made his profession. His passion was for preaching, mainly as an itinerant preacher, following the form of the "popular missions". Thus he aimed to proclaim and to revive the word of God in the villages and towns of Catalonia, thereby guiding people to profound encounter with God. This encounter leads to conversion of heart, to receiving divine grace joyfully and to keeping up a constant conversation with Our Lord through prayer. For this reason his evangelizing activity included great dedication to the sacrament of Reconciliation, a special emphasis on the Eucharist and constant insistence on prayer. Francisco Coll moved the hearts of others because he conveyed to them what he himself lived passionately within, what set his own heart on fire: love for Christ and surrender to him. To ensure that the seed of the word of God fell on good ground, Francisco founded the Congregation of the Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata to give an integral education to children and young women so that they might continue to discover the unfathomable treasure that is Christ, the faithful friend who never abandons us and never wearies of being beside us, enlivening our hope with his word of life.

Jozef De Veuster received the name of Damien in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. When he was 23 years old, in 1863, he left Flanders, the land of his birth, to proclaim the Gospel on the other side of the world in the Hawaiian Islands. His missionary activity, which gave him such joy, reached its peak in charity. Not without fear and repugnance, he chose to go to the Island of Molokai to serve the lepers who lived there, abandoned by all. Thus he was exposed to the disease from which they suffered. He felt at home with them. The servant of the Word consequently became a suffering servant, a leper with the lepers, for the last four years of his life. In order to follow Christ, Fr Damien not only left his homeland but also risked his health: therefore as the word of Jesus proclaimed to us in today's Gospel says he received eternal life (cf. Mk 10: 30). On this 20th anniversary of the Canonization of another Belgian Saint, Bro. Mutien-Marie, the Church in Belgium has once again come together to give thanks to God for the recognition of one of its sons as an authentic servant of God. Let us remember before this noble figure that it is charity which makes unity, brings it forth and makes it desirable. Following in St Paul's footsteps, St Damien prompts us to choose the good warfare (cf. 1 Tim 1: 18), not the kind that brings division but the kind that gathers people together. He invites us to open our eyes to the forms of leprosy that disfigure the humanity of our brethren and still today call for the charity of our presence as servants, beyond that of our generosity.

Turning to today's Gospel, the figure of the young man who tells Jesus of his desire to be something more than one who fulfils to the letter the duties imposed by the law contrasts with Bro. Rafael, canonized today, who died at age 26 as an oblate at the Trappist Monastery of San Isidro de Dueñas. Bro. Rafael also came from a rich family and, as he himself said, was of a "somewhat dreamy disposition", but his dreams did not vanish before the attraction of material goods and the other aims that the worldly life sometimes proposes with great insistence. He said "yes" to the call to follow Jesus, instantly and with determination, without limits or conditions. So it was that he set out on a journey which, from the moment when he realized at the Monastery that "he did not know how to pray", brought him in just a few years to the peak of spiritual life, which he recounts in a very frank and natural style in many of his letters. Bro. Rafael, who is also near to us, continues with his example and his actions to offer us an attractive path, especially for young people who are not content with little but aspire to the full truth, the ineffable happiness which is attained through God's love. "A life of love.... This is the only reason for living", the new Saint said. And he insisted: "All things come from God's love". May the Lord listen kindly to one of the last prayers of St Rafael Arnáiz, when he offered God his whole life, imploring him: "Take me to yourself and give yourself to the world". May he give himself to revive the inner life of today's Christians. May he give himself so that his Brother Trappists and monastic centres continue to be beacons that reveal the intimate yearning for God which he himself instilled in every human heart.

By her admirable work at the service of the most deprived elderly, St Mary of the Cross is also like a beacon to guide our societies which must always rediscover the place and the unique contribution of this period of life. Born in 1792 at Cancale in Brittany, Jeanne Jugan was concerned with the dignity of her brothers and sisters in humanity whom age had made more

vulnerable, recognizing in them the Person of Christ himself. "Look upon the poor with compassion", she would say, "and Jesus will look kindly upon you on your last day". Jeanne Jugan focused upon the elderly a compassionate gaze drawn from her profound communion with God in her joyful, disinterested service, which she carried out with gentleness and humility of heart, desiring herself to be poor among the poor. Jeanne lived the mystery of love, peacefully accepting obscurity and self-emptying until her death. Her charism is ever timely while so many elderly people are suffering from numerous forms of poverty and solitude and are sometimes also abandoned by their families. In the Beatitudes Jeanne Jugan found the source of the spirit of hospitality and fraternal love, founded on unlimited trust in Providence, which illuminated her whole life. This evangelical dynamism is continued today across the world in the Congregation of Little Sisters of the Poor, which she founded and which testifies, after her example, to the mercy of God and the compassionate love of the Heart of Jesus for the lowliest. May St Jeanne Jugan be for elderly people a living source of hope and for those who generously commit themselves to serving them, a powerful incentive to pursue and develop her work!

Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank the Lord for the gift of holiness which shines out in the Church today with unique beauty. While I greet with affection each one of you Cardinals, Bishops, civil and military authorities, priests, men and women religious and members of the lay faithful of various nationalities who are taking part in this solemn Eucharistic celebration I would like to address to all the invitation to let yourselves be attracted by the luminous examples of these Saints, to let yourselves be guided by their teaching so that our entire life may become a song of praise to God's love. May their heavenly intercession obtain for us this grace and, especially, the motherly protection of Mary, Queen and Mother of humanity. Amen.

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