



The Holy See

BEATIFICATION OF EIGHT SPANISH MARTYRS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Third Sunday of Lent, 7 March 1999

1. *"Whoever drinks of this water that I shall give him will never thirst" (Jn 4:14).*

Today, on the Third Sunday of Lent, Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well is an extraordinary catechesis on faith. To catechumens preparing to receive Baptism and to all believers on their way to Easter, today the Gospel shows us the "living water" of the Holy Spirit, who regenerates man from within, causing him to be reborn to new life "from on high".

Human life is an "exodus" from slavery to the promised land, from death to life. In this journey we sometimes experience the aridity and fatigue of life: poverty, loneliness, the loss of meaning and hope, to the point that we can even wonder, as the Jews did on their journey: "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex 17:7).

That Samaritan woman, so tried by life, must have frequently thought: "Where is the Lord?". Until one day she meets a man who reveals the whole truth to her, a man and even more a Samaritan, in other words, doubly despised. In a simple conversation he offers her the gift of God: the Holy Spirit, a spring of living water welling up to eternal life. He reveals himself to her as the awaited Messiah and tells her of the Father who wants to be worshiped in spirit and truth.

2. The saints are "true worshipers of the Father": men and women who, like the Samaritan woman, have met Christ and through him discovered the meaning of life. They have experienced firsthand what the Apostle Paul says in the second reading: "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

The grace of Baptism also came to fruition in the new blessed. They drank from the fountain of Christ's love to the point that they were deeply transformed and in turn became overflowing

springs to quench the thirst of the many brothers and sisters they met on life's path.

3. "Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God ... and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rom 5:1-2). Today, in beatifying the martyrs of Motril, the Church puts these words of St Paul on her lips. In fact, Vicente Soler, his six Augustinian Recollect companions and the diocesan priest, Manuel Martín, obtained access to "the glory of the sons of God" by the heroic witness of their faith. They did not die for an ideology but freely gave their lives for the One who had first died for them. They offered Christ the gift they had received from him.

By faith these simple men of peace, who had nothing to do with the political debate, worked for years in mission territories, suffered a multitude of hardships in the Philippines, soaked the fields of Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela with their sweat, and started social and educational programmes in Motril and other parts of Spain. When the supreme moment of martyrdom came, by faith they could face death serenely, comforting the other condemned men and forgiving their executioners. "How can this be?", we ask ourselves, and St Augustine answers: "Because he who reigns in heaven governs the mind and tongue of his martyrs, and through them he has triumphed on earth" (*Sermon 329, 1-2*).

Blessed are you, martyrs of Christ! May everyone rejoice over the honour paid to these witnesses of the faith. God helped them in their tribulations and gave them the crown of victory. May they help those who are working today for reconciliation and peace in Spain and in the world!

4. The people who camped in the desert were thirsty, as we are reminded by the first reading from the Book of Exodus (cf. 17:3). The sight of people spiritually thirsting was also before the eyes of Nicolas Barré, of the Order of Minims. His ministry brought him constantly into contact with people who, living in the desert of religious ignorance, were in danger of quenching their thirst at the polluted spring of certain contemporary ideas. That is why he felt it his duty to become a spiritual director and teacher for those he met in his pastoral work. To broaden his range of action, he founded a new religious family, the *Sisters of the Child Jesus*, whose duty was to evangelize and educate abandoned youth, to show them God's love, to communicate the fullness of divine life to them and to contribute to their growth as persons.

The new blessed never ceased to root his mission in contemplation of the mystery of the Incarnation, for God quenches the thirst of those who live in intimacy with him. He showed that an action performed for God can only unite a person with God and that sanctification also comes through the apostolate. Nicolas Barré invites everyone to trust in the Holy Spirit, who guides his people on the way of abandonment to God, in selflessness, humility and perseverance even in the harshest trials. Such an attitude leads to the joy of steadily experiencing the powerful action of the living God.

5. Lastly, if we turn our gaze to Bl. Anna Schäffer, we can see her life as a living commentary on

what St Paul wrote to the Romans: "Hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

The more her life's journey became a journey of suffering the more clearly she recognized that illness and frailty can be the lines on which God writes his Gospel. She called her sickroom a "workshop of suffering", to resemble the Cross of Christ ever more closely. She spoke of three keys to heaven: "The largest, which is made of crude iron and heavier than all the others, is my suffering. The second is the needle, and the third the pen. I want to work hard with all these keys every day, so that I can unlock the door of heaven".

Precisely in the most intense pain Anna Schäffer realized that every Christian is responsible for his neighbour's salvation. For this purpose she used the pen. Her sickbed was the cradle of an extensive letter-writing apostolate. She used what was left of her strength to do embroidery work and in this way give joy to others. In her letters and in her handiwork her favourite motif was the heart of Jesus as the symbol of God's love. She did not depict the flames of Jesus' heart as tongues of fire, but as ears of wheat. The reference to the Eucharist, which Anna Schäffer received from her parish priest every day, is unmistakable. The heart of Jesus, as she portrayed it, will thus be the symbol of this new blessed.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, let us thank God for the gift of these new blessed! Despite the trials of life, they did not harden their hearts, but listened to the voice of the Lord, and the Holy Spirit filled them with the love of God. Thus they could experience that "hope does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5). They were like trees planted by streams of water, which yielded abundant fruit in due season (cf. Ps 1:3).

For this reason, the whole Church today marvels at their witness and acclaims: Lord, you are truly the Saviour of the world; you are the rock from which flows living water for humanity's thirst!

Lord, give us this water always, so that we may know the Father and adore him in Spirit and Truth. Amen!

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