



# The Holy See

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## BEATIFICATION OF 5 SERVANTS OF GOD

### *HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 29 April 2001*

1. *"Just as the day was breaking, Jesus stood on the beach"* (Jn 21: 4). At the crack of dawn, the Risen One appeared to the Apostles, who had just returned after a night of unsuccessful fishing on the lake of Tiberias. The Evangelist explains that on that night *"they caught nothing"* (Jn 21: 3) and adds that they had nothing to eat. They obeyed Jesus' invitation: *"Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some"* (Jn 21: 6) without hesitation. Their response was prompt and their reward great, because all night long their net had been empty and now, *"they were not able to haul it in for the great quantity of fish"* (Jn 21: 6).

How can we not see in this episode, which St John mentions in the epilogue of his Gospel, an eloquent sign of what the Lord continues to do in the Church and in the hearts of believers who trust in him without reserve? The five Servants of God whom I have had the joy of raising to the honour of the altars today are special witnesses of the extraordinary gift which the risen Christ lavishes upon every baptized person: the gift of holiness.

Blessed are those who make this mysterious gift fruitful, allowing the Holy Spirit to conform their lives to Christ who died and was raised! Blessed are you who shine today like bright stars in the firmament of the Church: Manuel González García, Bishop, Founder of the Congregation of the *Misioneras Eucarísticas de Nazaret*; Carlos Manuel Cecilio Rodríguez Santiago, layman; Marie Anne Blondin, virgin, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of St Anne; Caterina Volpicelli, virgin, foundress of the Servants of the Sacred Heart; Caterina Cittadini, virgin, foundress of the Ursuline Sisters of Somasca.

Each one of you, in promising yourselves to Christ, made the Gospel the your rule of life. Thus you became his faithful disciples, having drawn that newness of life, inaugurated by the mystery of the

Resurrection, from the inexhaustible spring of his love.

2. *"That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord' "* (Jn 21: 7). In the Gospel we have heard that seeing the miracle worked, a disciple recognizes Jesus. The others will recognize him later. In presenting to us Jesus who "came and took the bread and gave it to them" (Jn 21: 13), the Gospel points out how and when we can meet the risen Christ: in the Eucharist, where Jesus is truly present under the appearances of bread and wine. It would be sad if, after so long, the Saviour's loving presence were still to be unknown by humanity.

This was the great passion of the new blessed, Bl. Manuel González García, Bishop of Malaga and later of Palencia. His experience before a deserted tabernacle in Palomares del Río was to mark his whole life, and from that moment he dedicated himself to spreading devotion to the Eucharist, proclaiming the words he subsequently chose as his epitaph: *"Here is Jesus! He is here! Do not abandon him!"* Bl. Manuel González, founder of the *Misioneras Eucarísticas de Nazaret*, is a model of Eucharistic faith whose example continues to speak to the Church today.

3. *"None of the disciples dared ask him, 'Who are you?'. They knew it was the Lord"* (Jn 21: 12). When the disciples recognize him by the lake of Tiberias, their faith in Christ, risen and present among his disciples, is strengthened. For two millennia the Church has not tired of proclaiming and repeating this fundamental truth of faith.

The experience of the mystery of Easter renews all things, since as we sang in the Easter Proclamation: *"the power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy"*. This spirit animated the whole existence of Carlos Manuel Rodríguez Santiago, the first Puerto Rican to be raised to the glory of the altars. The new blessed, illumined by faith in the Resurrection, shared with everyone the profound meaning of the paschal mystery, repeating frequently: *"We live for this night"*, the Easter Vigil. His fruitful and generous apostolate chiefly consisted in the effort to help the Church in Puerto Rico to attain an awareness of this important event of our salvation.

Carlos Manuel Rodríguez emphasized the universal call to holiness for all Christians and the importance for all the baptized to respond to it in a conscious and responsible way. May his example help the whole Church of Puerto Rico to be faithful, living with great consistency the values and Christian principles received during the evangelization of the island.

4. Marie Anne Blondin, foundress of the Sisters of St Anne, is a model of a life given to love and inspired by Christ's death and resurrection. This young Canadian country woman proposed to her Bishop the foundation of a religious congregation for the education of poor children in rural areas, to overcome illiteracy. With a spirit of abandonment in Providence whose ways she blessed, she would humbly accept the Church's decisions and until her death did menial tasks for her sisters' good. Trials would never lessen her great love for Christ and for the Church, nor her concern to

form true teachers of youth. The model of a humble and hidden life, Marie Anne Blondin drew her inner strength from contemplation of the Cross, showing us that a life of closeness to Christ is the surest way to bear fruit mysteriously and to accomplish the mission willed by God. May her example awaken in the religious of her Institute and in many young women an inclination to serve God and others, particularly youth, to whom it is important to offer the means for an authentic spiritual, moral and intellectual development!

5. "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!*" (Rv 5: 12). These words taken from the Book of Revelation and proclaimed in the Second Reading can also be fittingly applied to the mystical experience of Bl. *Caterina Volpicelli*. Three significant aspects stand out in her life, which was totally consecrated to the heart of the Lamb slain for our salvation: a deep Eucharistic spirituality, an indomitable fidelity to the Church and a surprising apostolic generosity.

The Eucharist, which she adored for long hours and made the centre of her life, to the point of taking a vow as a victim of reparation, was a school of docile and loving obedience to God for her. At the same time it was a source of tender and merciful love for her neighbour; in the poorest and most marginalized she loved her Lord, contemplated at length in the Blessed Sacrament.

She was always able to find in the Eucharist the missionary fervour which impelled her to express her vocation in the Church with docility to her pastors and with prophetic intentions of promoting the laity and new forms of consecrated life. Without determining places for action or founding specific institutions, she wanted, as she herself said, to seek solitude in work and fruitful work in solitude. She was the first "messenger" of the Apostleship of Prayer in Italy, and left as a legacy, especially to the *Ancelle del Sacro Cuore* (Servants of the Sacred Heart), a unique apostolic mission which must continue to be ceaselessly nourished at the source of the Eucharistic mystery.

6. "Lord; you know that I love you" (Jn 21: 15; cf. vv. 16, 17). The threefold declaration of love which Peter makes to the Lord in today's Gospel passage, leads us to think of *Caterina Cittadini*. In her difficult life the new blessed showed indomitable love for the Lord. Her deep capacity for loving, sustained by great emotional balance, is emphasized by all those who had the opportunity to know her. Having been orphaned at a very early age, she made herself a loving mother to orphans. Moreover, she wanted her spiritual daughters, at the school and in their contact with the children, to be "mothers".

Caterina did her utmost to "*be of Christ to bring people to Christ*". For her too, the secret was union with the Eucharist. She recommended her first co-workers to foster an intense spiritual life and an especially vital contact with Jesus in the Eucharist. How very timely is her spiritual legacy for those who are called to be teachers of the faith and want to pass on the values of Christian culture to the new generations in this time of great social changes!

7. *"We are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him"* (Acts 5: 32). Let us joyfully make our own the words taken from the Acts of the Apostles which have rung out during the Mass. Yes, we are witnesses of the miracles that God works in those "who submit to him".

We find the truth of this affirmation in your life, O new blessed, whom we are venerating today and invoke as intercessors. Your heroic fidelity to the Gospel is a proof of the Holy Spirit's fruitful action.

Help us in turn to take the path of holiness, especially when it becomes difficult. Steady us as we keep our gaze fixed on the One who has called us. Let us join our voices to those of the Virgin Mary and all the saints, to sing: *"To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!"* (Rv 5: 13). Amen!