



# The Holy See

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**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI  
TO SUPERIORS, OFFICIALS AND COLLABORATORS  
OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 40th ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE INSTITUTION OF THE DICASTERY**

*Clementine Hall  
Saturday, 19 December 2009*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

I would like to express to you all my joy at meeting you!

I greet with deep cordiality the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops present. I address a special thought to the Prefect of the Dicastery, Archbishop Angelo Amato, and thank him for his kind and affectionate words on behalf of all. Together with him I greet the Secretary of the Congregation, the Undersecretary, the Priests, the Religious, the Historical and Theological Consultors, the Postulators, the Lay Officials and the Medical Experts with their families and all the collaborators.

The special circumstance that sees you gathered round the Successor of Peter is the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the institution of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which has given a more organic and modern form to the action of discernment which the Church, from her origins, has exercised in order to recognize the holiness of so many of her children. The interventions of my Predecessors, especially Sixtus V, Urban VIII and Benedict XIV prepared for the creation of your Dicastery which was set up in 1969 by the Servant of God Paul VI, thanks to whom a collection of experiences, scientific contributions and procedural norms were worked out in an intelligent and balanced synthesis, which resulted in the erection of a new Dicastery.

I am well aware of the activity that this Congregation has developed with competence over the past 40 years at the service of the edification of the People of God, making a significant

contribution to the work of evangelization. Indeed, when the Church venerates a Saint, she proclaims the efficacy of the Gospel and discovers joyfully that Christ's presence in the world, believed in and adored with faith, is capable of transforming the life of human beings and producing fruits of salvation for all humanity. In addition, every beatification and canonization is for Christians a strong encouragement to live the *sequela* of Christ with intensity and enthusiasm, walking towards the fullness of Christian existence and the perfection of charity (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 40). In the light of these fruits it is possible to understand the importance of the role carried out by the Dicastery in accompanying the individual stages of an event of such rare depth and beauty and faithfully documenting the manifestation of that *sensus fidelium* which is an important factor in the recognition of holiness.

The Saints are a sign of that radical newness which the Son of God with his Incarnation, death and Resurrection grafted on to human nature. As outstanding witnesses of faith, they are not representatives of the past but rather constitute the present and future of the Church and of society. They have fully realized that *caritas in veritate* which is the supreme value of Christian life; they are like the facets of a prism which, in various nuances, reflect the one light who is Christ.

The life of these extraordinary figures of believers who belong to all the regions of the earth have two significant constants that I would like to underline.

First of all, their relationship with the Lord, even when it takes traditional paths, is never weary and repetitive but is always expressed in authentic, lively and original ways and flows from an intense and involving dialogue with the Lord, which also enhances and enriches the exterior forms.

In addition, the continuous search for evangelical perfection, the rejection of mediocrity and the aspiration to belong totally to Christ stands out in the lives of these brothers and sisters. "You shall be holy; for I the Lord your God am holy" (Lev 19: 2) is the exhortation quoted in the Book of Leviticus which God addresses to Moses. It makes us realize that holiness means constantly striving for a high standard of Christian living, a demanding achievement, a ceaseless quest for communion with God which makes the committed believer, with the greatest possible generosity, "correspond" to the plan of love that the Father has for him or her and for the whole of humanity.

The main stages in the recognition of holiness by the Church, that is, beatification and canonization, are linked to each other by a bond of great coherence. To them should be added, as an indispensable preparatory phase, the declaration of a Servant of God's heroic virtues or martyrdom, and the ascertainment of some extraordinary gift, the miracle, which the Lord grants through the intercession of his faithful Servant.

What great pedagogical wisdom is manifest in this itinerary! At first, the People of God are invited to look to those brethren who, after a careful preliminary discernment, are held up as models of Christian life; the faithful are then urged to address to them a cult of veneration and invocation

restricted to within the context of local Churches or religious orders; finally, they are called to rejoice with the entire community of believers in the certainty that thanks to the solemn Pontifical proclamation, one of its sons or daughters has attained God's glory, in which he or she shares in Christ's perennial intercessions for the brothers and sisters (cf. Heb 7: 25).

In this journey the Church welcomes with joy and wonder the miracles that God in his infinite kindness freely bestows upon her in order to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel (cf. Mk 16: 20). He likewise welcomes the testimony of martyrs as the clearest and most intense form of configuration to Christ.

This progressive manifestation of the holiness of believers corresponds with the style God has chosen in revealing himself to men and women, and, at the same time, it is part of the process with which the People of God grows in faith and in the knowledge of the Truth.

The gradual approach to the "fullness of light" emerges uniquely in the passage from beatification to canonization. In this process, in fact, events of great religious and cultural vitality take place. Liturgical invocation, popular devotion, the imitation of virtues, historical and theological study and attention to the "signs from on high" are all interwoven and enrich one another. On this occasion, Jesus' promise to his disciples of all times is fulfilled: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (cf. Jn 16: 13). Indeed, the witness of Saints sheds light on ever new aspects of the Gospel and makes them known.

As has been clearly emphasized by the words of the Most Excellent Prefect, a spiritual and pastoral richness becomes visible in the process of the recognition of holiness which involves the whole Christian community. Holiness, namely the transfiguration of people and human realities into an image of the Risen Christ, represents the ultimate goal of the plan of divine salvation, as the Apostle Paul recalls: "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thes 4: 3).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, the Solemnity of Christmas, for which we are preparing, causes to shine out in its full light the dignity of each human being, called to become a son or daughter of God. In the experience of the Saints, this dignity is manifested in the concreteness of historical circumstances, in personal temperaments, in free and responsible choices and in supernatural charisms.

Comforted by such a large number of witnesses, let us too, therefore, hasten our steps toward the Lord who comes, raising the splendid invocation with which the hymn of the *Te Deum* ends: *Aeterna fac sum sanctis tuis in gloria numerari*"; Let them [Thy servants] be numbered with Thy Saints in everlasting glory.

With these wishes I gladly express to each one my fervent good wishes for the approaching Christmas celebrations and impart my Apostolic Blessing to you all with affection.

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