



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO BOLOGNA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE
23rd ITALIAN NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS
(SEPTEMBER 27-28, 1997)

***HOMILY - VESPERS SERVICE FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF
BARTHOLOMEW MARY DAL MONTE***

Saturday, 27 September 1997

1. *"Grace to you and peace from God our Father"* (Col:1,2b).

The Apostle's greeting, which we have just heard in the "short reading" from these First Vespers of Sunday, introduces us to a vision of hope: "the hope", says St Paul, "laid up for you in heaven". "Of this", he adds, "you have heard before in the word of the truth, the Gospel which has come to you" (Col 1:5-6).

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the day of beatification for the priest *Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte*. The entire Church and in particular the Christian community of Bologna, whose son he was, rejoice because today his name is solemnly written in the "book of life" (Rv 21:27).

The new blessed spent his short earthly life proclaiming the "words of truth of the Gospel" (Col 1:5). The Lord made use of him and his fidelity to reach many searching people with these integral, living and life-giving words. Thus Jesus' promise, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20), was fulfilled through him personally.

2. Dear people of Bologna, Fr Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte is the most recent jewel which has come to enhance *the sanctoral cycle of your Archdiocese*. It is a book that is already rich in exemplary Gospel witnesses: Apollinaris, Zama, Vitalis, Agricola, Proculus, Felix, Petronius, Lucy

of Settefonti, Guarinus, Dominic, Diana, Cecilia, Amata, Imelda Lambertini, Nicholas Albergati, Catherine de' Vigri, Mark of Bologna, Louis Morbioli, James of Ulm, Arcangelo Canetoli, Helen Duglioli, Clelia Barbieri, Elia Facchini and many others.

In this book of saints and blessed is sketched the *truest identity of Christian Bologna* and of your land, rich in art and culture. A book whose value all should esteem: believers and non-believers alike. A book to love, just as one loves one's most authentic identity.

The face of Bologna is also that of its saints, who drew from the truth and charity of the Gospel inspiration for their words and actions among the men and women of this city, whose original features they fashioned and which can still be seen today.

We give thanks to the Lord this evening in the context of the National Eucharistic Congress because Bologna can present herself for the appointment of the third millennium with her characteristic features: *a human and Christian face*, which enables her to face with serene trust the difficult challenges of our time. She knows she can count on her saints who with the "words of truth" and the exuberance of their charity, all the more effective the more it was hidden, have enabled her to survive the most difficult periods of her history.

3. Precious in God's eyes, *holiness is not useless to the world*. It does not only build up the Body of Christ, but leaves an indelible mark on the succession of events and in the diversified formation of society itself.

Although Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte's earthly activity was marked by a typically intra-ecclesial dedication such as the preaching of missions to the people and the formation of priests, it had a powerful influence *on the civil fabric of the nation*, helping effectively to promote the elements of justice, concord and peace. It is also through the work of *missionaries in their homeland*, like that of the new blessed, that the Italian people were able down the centuries to preserve that heritage of human and Christian values which is its most precious treasure and the most significant contribution it can make to building the new Europe.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, the beatification of Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte is providentially a part of the celebrations of the Eucharistic Congress because it fully emphasizes the connection between a conscious, lived Eucharistic spirituality and the personal and ecclesial commitment to evangelization.

In 18th-century Italy situations of widespread religious ignorance and the phenomena of a worrying dechristianization infecting cities and villages were faced in an amazing way by those holy priests who generously dedicated themselves to popular missions. These also include St Leonard of Port Maurice who was personally acquainted with Fr Bartholomew Mary and encouraged him to undertake this pastoral work.

The fame of Fr Bartholomew's effective missions to the people and of his holiness and generosity spread so rapidly that he was barely able to comply with all the requests. When he died, *at the age of only 52*, he had preached missions to the people and courses of spiritual exercises in more than *60 Italian Dioceses*.

In an age when a long seminary course was not a part of formation for the priesthood, Fr Bartholomew Mary foresaw the need of diocesan priests who, in full communion with their Bishop, would be totally available for preaching. To prepare them properly he established the "Pious Society for the Missions", which became a real source of apostles. He was convinced that it was impossible to be self-taught in the difficult way of holiness. He was therefore concerned to provide adequate formation structures for his co-workers, dedicating interesting spiritual writings to them which were written in his own hand.

5. But from where did Fr Bartholomew Mary draw such dynamism and vigour for this exceptional ministry? Holy Mass, Eucharistic adoration and sacramental confession were at the centre of his life, his missionary activity and his spirituality. We find frequent traces of this Eucharistic piety in his writings, where we see his daily concern to save souls, the priority of his ascetic and pastoral efforts.

His whole life was modeled on Christ's ministry, intransigent in proclaiming the Truth and in censuring sin, but welcoming and merciful to sinners.

He thus became a living icon of the One who is "rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4).

The new blessed also loved the Virgin Mother of God with deep feeling. Born and raised in a city honoured by the special protection of the "Madonna of St Luke", Fr Bartholomew Mary showed her tender devotion. He venerated her and invoked her under the title of "*Mater Misericordiae* — Mother of Mercy". He liked to repeat: "Every thought, every impulse, every word: yes, I did it all for Mary".

6. This evening Bl. Dal Monte shines brightly before us as a witness to Christ who was *particularly sensitive to the demands of the modern age*. He encourages everyone to face the challenges of the new evangelization with zeal and trust. A vast field of missionary work lies before us on the threshold of the third Christian millennium.

May the example of the new blessed sustain and encourage you all, dear brothers and sisters present here, whom I greet with affection. May he be an example to you, venerable Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, Pastor of this diocesan community; may he be an example for you all, dear Brothers in the episcopate and the priesthood who come from the city of Bologna and from all over Italy. May his tireless apostolic zeal be an encouragement and a support for you, men and women religious, consecrated persons called to give a special witness in Christ's Church; may he be for

you, dear young people, the hope of a world renewed by love; for you, dear families, little domestic churches; for you, dear sick people, who are more intensely associated with Christ's sufferings.

The new evangelization is the responsibility of every believer. Be conscious of it, all you who are gathered at this Vespers for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time. God calls us to keep the "word of truth of the Gospel" (Col 1:5). The missionary fervour that consumed the life of Bl. Bartholomew Mary Dal Monte is the model which the Church presents to her children today.

May his intercession, together with that of Mary most holy, especially venerated in the image of the Madonna of St Luke, the "Hodegetria", she who shows the way, help us to imitate him humbly, faithfully and courageously.

The "way" is Jesus. On this path we want to walk without wavering until our definitive meeting with him. Amen!