



The Holy See

MASS FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF:
ZEFIRINO AGOSTINI,
ANTÔNIO DE SANT'ANNA GALVÃO,
FAUSTINO MIGUEZ AND THEODORE GUÉRIN

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 25 October 1998

1. *"The lowly will hear me and be glad"* (Ps 33 [34]:3).

With these words today's liturgy invites us to rejoice as we give thanks to the Lord for the gift of these new blessed. The Church's joy is expressed in the song of praise that the assembly lifts to heaven. Yes, let the lowly hear and be glad as they consider what God accomplishes in the lives of his faithful servants. The Church, which is the "People of the lowly", hears and rejoices because in these members, enrolled among the blessed, she sees a reflection of the heavenly Father's merciful love. At this liturgy let us make our own the inspired words of Jesus: "Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the kingdom" (Gospel acclamation).

The "little ones": how different is human logic from the divine! The "little ones", according to the Gospel, are those who know they are God's creatures and shun all presumption: they expect everything from the Lord and so are never disappointed. This is the basic attitude of the believer: faith and humility are inseparable. Proof of this is the witness given by the new blessed: Zefirino Agostini, Antônio de Sant'Anna Galvão, Faustino Míguez and Theodore Guérin. The greater a person's faith, the "littler" he feels, in the image of Jesus Christ, who, "though he was in the form of God, ... emptied himself" (*Phil 2:6-7*) and came among men as their servant.

2. The new blessed are examples for us to imitate and witnesses to follow. Their lives show that *the strength of little ones is prayer*, as this Sunday's word of God emphasizes. The saints and blessed are first of all men and women of prayer: they bless the Lord at all times, his praise is ever in their mouth; they cry out and the Lord hears them, and from all their distress he rescues them, as the responsorial psalm reminds us (cf. *Ps 33 [34]:2, 18*). Their prayer pierces the clouds, is ceaseless and untiring, and never rests until the Most High responds (cf. *Sir 35:16-18*).

The prayerful power of spiritual men and women is always accompanied by a deep sense of their own limitations and unworthiness. It is faith, not presumption, that nurtures the courage and fidelity of Christ's disciples. Like the Apostle Paul, they know that the Lord has reserved a crown of righteousness for those who await his appearing with eager longing (cf. 2 Tm 4:8).

3. *"The Lord stood by me and gave me strength" (2 Tm 4:17).*

These words of the Apostle to Timothy certainly apply to *Fr Zefirino Agostino*, who never lost heart despite countless difficulties. He stands before us today as a humble, steadfast witness to the Gospel in the latter half of the 19th century, a fruitful period for the Church in Verona. His faith was steadfast, his charitable work effective, and ardent was the priestly spirit that distinguished him.

The love of the Lord spurred him in his apostolate to the poor, especially in the Christian education of girls, particularly the most needy. He understood well the important role women play in the rehabilitation of society by teaching the values of freedom, honesty and charity.

He advised the Ursulines, his spiritual daughters: "Poor girls: let them be the favourite object of your care and attention. Awaken their minds, teach their hearts virtue and save their souls from malignant contact with the wicked world" (*Scritti alle Orsoline*, 289). May his example strongly encourage those who honour him today as blessed and invoke him as their protector.

4. *"The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully" (2 Tm 4:17).*

This message of St Paul to Timothy is well reflected in the life of *Friar Antônio de Sant'Anna Galvão*, who fulfilled his religious consecration by dedicating himself with love and devotion to the afflicted, the suffering and the slaves of his era in Brazil.

Let us thank God for the continual blessings granted through the powerful evangelizing influence which the Holy Spirit has exercised in so many souls down to our day through Friar Galvão. His authentically Franciscan faith, evangelically lived and apostolically spent in serving his neighbour, will be an encouragement to imitate this *"man of peace and charity"*. His mission of founding "Recolhimentos" dedicated to Our Lady and to Providence still bears astounding fruit: he was a fervent adorer of the Eucharist, a teacher and defender of Gospel charity, a wise spiritual director for many souls and a defender of the poor. May Mary Immaculate, whose *"son and everlasting slave"* Friar Galvão considered himself, enlighten the hearts of the faithful and awaken in them a hunger for God and a commitment to serving his kingdom through their own witness of authentic Christian life.

5. "He who humbles himself will be exalted" (*Lk 18:14*). These words of Jesus which we have heard in the Gospel are fulfilled as the Piarist priest, *Faustino Míguez*, is raised to the glory of the altars. By renouncing his own ambitions, the new blessed followed Jesus the Teacher and

dedicated his life to teaching children and young people in the style of St Joseph Calasanz. As an educator, his goal was the formation of the whole person. As a priest, he continually sought the holiness of souls. As a scientist, he was able to alleviate sickness by freeing humanity from physical suffering. In school and the street, in the confessional and the laboratory, Fr Faustino Míguez was the very image of Christ, who welcomes, pardons and gives life.

A “man of the people and for the people”, everything and everyone were his concern. Thus, he observed the conditions of ignorance and marginalization in which women lived, whom he regarded as the “soul of the family and the most important part of society”. To guide them from their childhood years on the path of human and Christian advancement, he founded the Calasanctian Institute of the Divine Shepherdess for the education of girls in religion and the arts.

His shining example, an interweaving of prayer, study and apostolate, continues today in the witness of his daughters and of the many teachers who courageously and joyfully work to imprint the image of Jesus on the minds and hearts of young people.

6. “The Lord stood by me and gave me strength to proclaim the word fully” (2 Tm 4:17). In these words to Timothy, St Paul looks back across the years of his apostolic ministry and affirms his hope in the Lord in the face of adversity.

The words of the Apostle were engraved on *Mother Theodore Guérin*’s heart when she left her native France in 1840 with her five companions to face the uncertainties and dangers of the frontier territory of Indiana. Her life and work were always guided by the sure hand of Providence, in which she had complete confidence. She understood that she must spend herself in God’s service, seeking always his will. Despite initial difficulties and misunderstandings, and subsequent crosses and afflictions, she felt deeply that God had blessed her Congregation of the Sisters of Providence, giving it growth and forging a union of hearts among its members. In the congregation’s schools and orphanages, Mother Theodore’s witness led many young boys and girls to know the loving care of God in their lives.

Today she continues to teach Christians to abandon themselves to the providence of our heavenly Father and to be totally committed to doing what pleases him. The life of Bl. Theodore Guérin is a testimony that everything is possible with God and for God. May her spiritual daughters and all who have experienced her charism live the same spirit today.

7. Dear brothers and sisters who have come from various parts of the world for this festive celebration, I warmly greet you and thank you for your presence!

May the witness offered by the new blessed encourage us to advance generously on the way of the Gospel. By looking at those who found favour with God because of their humble submission to his will, may our spirit feel moved to follow the Gospel with patient and constant generosity.

“He whose service is pleasing to the Lord will be accepted, and his prayer will reach to the heavens” (*Sir* 35:16). Here is the great lesson which our brothers and sister offer us: to honour, love and serve God with our whole life, always knowing that “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted” (*Lk* 18:14).

May God generously open the treasures of his mercy to all: he who “hears the cry of the oppressed” (*Sir* 35:13); who “is close to the broken-hearted” (*Ps* 33 [34]:19); who rescues the poor “from all their distress” (*Ps* 33 [34]:18); who gives satisfaction to the just and affirms the right (cf. *Sir* 35:18).

May the Virgin Mary, Queen of All Saints, obtain the gift of humility and fidelity for us and for every believer, so that our prayer may always be genuine and pleasing to the Lord.

Amen.

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