



The Holy See

HOLY MASS AND CANONIZATIONS

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Saint Peter's Square

Seventh Sunday of Easter, 12 May 2013

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On this Seventh Sunday of Easter we gather together in joy to celebrate a feast of holiness. Let us give thanks to God who made his glory, the glory of Love, shine on the Martyrs of Otranto, on Mother Laura Montoya and on Mother María Guadalupe García Zavala. I greet all of you who have come for this celebration — from Italy, Colombia, Mexico and other countries — and I thank you! Let us look at the new saints in the light of the word of God proclaimed. It is a word that has invited us to be faithful to Christ, even to martyrdom; it has reminded us of the urgency and beauty of bringing Christ and his Gospel to everyone; and it has spoken to us of the testimony of charity, without which even martyrdom and the mission lose their Christian savour.

1. When the Acts of the Apostles tell us about the Deacon Stephen, the Proto-Martyr, it is written that he was a man “filled with the Holy Spirit” (6:5; 7:55). What does this mean? It means that he was filled with the Love of God, that his whole self, his life, was inspired by the Spirit of the Risen Christ so that he followed Jesus with total fidelity, to the point of giving up himself.

Today the Church holds up for our veneration an array of martyrs who in 1480 were called to bear the highest witness to the Gospel together. About 800 people, who had survived the siege and invasion of Otranto, were beheaded in the environs of that city. They refused to deny their faith and died professing the Risen Christ. Where did they find the strength to stay faithful? In the faith

itself, which enables us to see beyond the limits of our human sight, beyond the boundaries of earthly life. It grants us to contemplate “the heavens opened”, as St Stephen says, and the living Christ at God’s right hand. Dear friends, let us keep the faith we have received and which is our true treasure, let us renew our faithfulness to the Lord, even in the midst of obstacles and misunderstanding. God will never let us lack strength and calmness. While we venerate the Martyrs of Otranto, let us ask God to sustain all the Christians who still suffer violence today in these very times and in so many parts of the world and to give them the courage to stay faithful and to respond to evil with goodness.

2. We might take the second idea from the words of Jesus which we heard in the Gospel: “I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (Jn 17:20). St Laura Montoya was an instrument of evangelization, first as a teacher and later as a spiritual mother of the indigenous in whom she instilled hope, welcoming them with this love that she had learned from God and bringing them to him with an effective pedagogy that respected their culture and was not in opposition to it. In her work of evangelization Mother Laura truly made herself all things to all people, to borrow St Paul’s words (cf. 1 Cor 9:22). Today too, like a vanguard of the Church, her spiritual daughters live in and take the Gospel to the furthest and most needy places.

This first saint, born in the beautiful country of Colombia, teaches us to be generous to God and not to live our faith in solitude — as if it were possible to live the faith alone! — but to communicate it and to make the joy of the Gospel shine out in our words and in the witness of our life wherever we meet others. Wherever we may happen to be, to radiate this life of the Gospel. She teaches us to see Jesus’ face reflected in others and to get the better of the indifference and individualism that corrode Christian communities and eat away our heart itself. She also teaches us to accept everyone without prejudice, without discrimination and without reticence, but rather with sincere love, giving them the very best of ourselves and, especially, sharing with them our most worthwhile possession; this is not one of our institutions or organizations, no. The most worthwhile thing we possess is Christ and his Gospel.

3. Lastly, a third idea. In today’s Gospel, Jesus prays to the Father with these words: “I made known to them your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (Jn 17:26). The martyr’s fidelity event to the death and the proclamation of the Gospel to all people are rooted, have their roots, in God’s love, which was poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), and in the witness we must bear in our life to this love.

St Guadalupe García Zavala was well aware of this. By renouncing a comfortable life — what great harm an easy life and well-being cause; the adoption of a bourgeois heart paralyzes us — by renouncing an easy life in order to follow Jesus’ call she taught people how to love poverty, how to feel greater love for the poor and for the sick. Mother Lupita would kneel on the hospital floor,

before the sick, before the abandoned, in order to serve them with tenderness and compassion. And this is called “touching the flesh of Christ”. The poor, the abandoned, the sick and the marginalized are the flesh of Christ. And Mother Lupita touched the flesh of Christ and taught us this behaviour: not to feel ashamed, not to fear, not to find “touching Christ’s flesh” repugnant. Mother Lupita had realized what “touching Christ’s flesh” actually means. Today too her spiritual daughters try to mirror God’s love in works of charity, unsparing in sacrifices and facing every obstacle with docility and with apostolic perseverance (*hypomonon?*), bearing it with courage.

This new Mexican saint invites us to love as Jesus loved us. This does not entail withdrawal into ourselves, into our own problems, into our own ideas, into our own interests, into this small world that is so harmful to us; but rather to come out of ourselves and care for those who are in need of attention, understanding and help, to bring them the warm closeness of God’s love through tangible actions of sensitivity, of sincere affection and of love.

Faithfulness to Christ and to his Gospel, in order to proclaim them with our words and our life, witnessing to God’s love with our own love and with our charity to all: these are the luminous examples and teachings that the saints canonized today offer us but they call into question our Christian life: how am I faithful to Christ? Let us take this question with us, to think about it during the day: how am I faithful to Christ? Am I able to “make my faith seen with respect, but also with courage? Am I attentive to others, do I notice who is in need, do I see everyone as brothers and sisters to love? Let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the new saints, to fill our life with the joy of his love. So may it be.