



The Holy See

CANONIZATION OF FOUR NEW SAINTS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Fifth Sunday of Easter, 18 May 2003

1. *"He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit"* (Jn 15: 5; cf. *Gospel Acclamation*). The words Jesus addressed to the Apostles at the end of the Last Supper are also a moving invitation to us, his disciples in the third millennium. Only those who are intimately united to him - grafted to him like the branch of the vine - receive the vital nourishment of his grace. Only those who live in communion with God produce abundant fruits of justice and holiness.

Witnesses of this fundamental Gospel truth are the Saints whom I have the joy of canonizing on this Fifth Sunday of Easter. Two of them come from Poland: [Joseph Sebastian Pelczar](#), Bishop of Przemyśl, Founder of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus; [Ursula Ledóchowska](#), virgin, Foundress of the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Agony. The other two Saints are Italian: [Maria De Mattias](#), virgin, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ; [Virginia Centurione Bracelli](#), a lay woman, Foundress of the Sisters of Our Lady of Refuge on Mount Calvary and of the Daughters of Our Lady on Mount Calvary.

2. "Perfection is like that city in the Apocalypse (Apoc 21) with 12 gates that open toward every part of the world, as a sign that the men of every nation, every State and every age may pass through them.... No condition, no age is an obstacle to a perfect life. Indeed, God is not concerned with external things... but the soul... and demands no more than what we are able to give". With these words, our new Saint, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, expressed his faith in the universal call to holiness. He lived out this conviction as priest, teacher and Bishop. He himself strove for holiness and he led others towards it. He was zealous in all things, but in such a way that in his service Christ himself was the Master.

His motto in life was: "All for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus through the immaculate hands of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary". This motto shaped his spiritual life, which consisted in the entrustment of himself, his life and his ministry to Christ through Mary.

His gift to Christ was intended above all as a response to His love, contained and revealed in the sacrament of the Eucharist. He would say: "Every person must be struck with amazement at the thought that the Lord Jesus, destined to go to the Father on a throne of glory, lived on earth with men. It was His love that invented this miracle of miracles, instituting the Most Holy Sacrament". He ceaselessly inspired in himself and in others this wonderment of faith. It was this that led him also to Mary. As an expert theologian, he could not but see in Mary the One who "in the mystery of the Incarnation also anticipated the Eucharistic faith of the Church"; the One who, bearing in her womb the Word who became flesh, was in a certain sense the "tabernacle" - the first "tabernacle" in history (cf. *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, n. 55).

Therefore, he turned to her with filial devotion, the love he had learned in his family, and he encouraged this love in others. He wrote to the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, which he founded: "One of the most ardent desires of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is that his Most Holy Mother be venerated and loved by all: firstly, because the Lord himself has ineffable love for her, and then because he made her the mother of all men, so that with her sweetness she might attract to herself even those who flee the Holy Cross, and bring them to the Divine Heart".

In raising [Joseph Sebastian Pelczar](#) to the glory of the altars, I ask that through his intercession, the splendour of his holiness may be an encouragement for the Sisters Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, for the Church of Przemyśl and for all believers in Poland and throughout the world, to nurture this love for Christ and for his Mother.

3. Throughout her life, St [Ursula Ledóchowska](#) fixed her gaze on the face of Christ, her Bridegroom, with fidelity and with love. In a particular way, she united herself to Christ in agony on the Cross. This union filled her with an extraordinary zeal in the work of proclaiming in words and in deeds the Good News of God's love. She brought it first of all to children and young people, but also to all who were in need: the poor, the abandoned, the lonely. She addressed to all the language of love, borne out by her work. With the message of God's love she crossed Russia, the Scandinavian countries, France and Italy. In her day she was an apostle of the new evangelization, demonstrating a constant timeliness, creativity and the effectiveness of Gospel love by her life and action.

Through love for the Eucharist she also drew the inspiration and strength for the great work of her apostolate. She wrote: "I must love my neighbour as Jesus loved me. Take and eat.... Eat my strength, I am available for you.... Take and eat my abilities, my talents... my heart, so that with his love he may warm and brighten your life.... Take and eat my time, may it be at your disposal.... I

am yours, as Jesus the Host is mine". Do not these words echo the gift with which Christ, in the Upper Room, offered himself to his disciples of all times?

In founding the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Agony, she passed on to it this spirit. "The Most Blessed Sacrament", she wrote, "is the sun of our life, our treasure, our happiness, our all on the earth.... Love Jesus in the tabernacle! Always leave your heart there, even if you are busy at work. It is there that Jesus dwells, whom we must love ardently with all our heart. And if we cannot love him, let us at least seek to love him - to love him more and more".

In the light of this Eucharistic love, St Ursula could glimpse a sign of the times in every circumstance, in order to serve God and her brothers and sisters. She knew that for believers, every event, even the least important, becomes an opportunity to carry out God's plans. What was ordinary, she made extraordinary; what was part of daily life, she transformed so that it became eternal; what was banal, she made holy.

If today St Ursula has become an example of holiness for all believers, it is because her charism can be grasped by those who, in the name of the love of Christ and of the Church, want to witness effectively to the Gospel in today's world. We can all learn from her how to build with Christ an ever more human world - a world in which values such as justice, freedom, solidarity and peace will be more and more fully achieved. From her we can learn how to put into practice every day the "new" commandment of love.

4. *"This is his commandment, that we should believe... and love one another"* (I Jn 3: 23). The Apostle John exhorts us to accept the boundless love of God, who for the salvation of the world gave his Only-begotten Son (cf. Jn 3: 16). Christ expressed this love in a sublime manner when he poured out his Blood as "an infinite price of redemption" for all humanity. *Maria De Mattias* was won over in the depths of her spirit by the mystery of the Cross and founded the Institute of the Sisters Adorers of the Blood of Christ "under the emblem of the Divine Blood". Love for Jesus crucified was expressed in her in passion for souls and in humble devotion to her brothers and sisters, her "beloved neighbour", as she liked to say. "Let us encourage one another", she urged, "to suffer willingly out of love of Jesus who with such great love shed his blood for us. Let us work hard to win souls for heaven".

St Maria De Mattias entrusts this message to her spiritual sons and daughters today, spurring all to follow the Lamb who gave himself in sacrifice for us, even to the point of giving up their life.

5. This same love sustained *Virginia Centurione Bracelli*. In response to the exhortation of the Apostle John, she wanted to love not only "with words", "or with her lips", but "with deeds and in truth" (cf. I Jn 3: 18). Disregarding her noble origins, she devoted herself to assisting the lowliest with extraordinary apostolic zeal. The effectiveness of her apostolate stemmed from her

unconditional adherence to God's will, which was nourished by ceaseless contemplation of, and obedient listening to, the word of the Lord.

In love with Christ and for his sake ready to give herself for her brothers and sisters, St Virginia Centurione Bracelli leaves the Church the witness of a simple and active saint. Her example of courageous fidelity to the Gospel also continues to exert a powerful influence on people in our time. She used to say: when God is one's only goal, "all disagreements are smoothed out, all difficulties overcome" (*Positio*, n. 86).

6. "*Abide in me!*". In the Upper Room, Jesus repeated several times this invitation which St Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, St Ursula Ledóchowska, St Maria De Mattias and St Virginia Centurione Bracelli accepted with total trust and willingness. It is a pressing and loving invitation that is addressed to all believers. "*If you abide in me*", the Lord assures us, "*and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you*" (Jn 15: 7).

May each one of us experience in our own life the efficacy of Jesus' assurance!

May Mary, Queen of the Saints and a model of perfect communion with her divine Son, help us. May she teach us how to continue "to abide" in Jesus, united to him as branches to the vine, and never to cut ourselves off from his love. Indeed, without him we can do nothing, for our life is Christ, alive and present in the Church and in the world. Today and forever. Praised be Jesus Christ!

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