



# The Holy See

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## **ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER TO THE PILGRIMS FOR THE RECENT CANONIZATIONS**

*Monday, 22 November 1999*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,*

*Dear Religious,*

*Brothers and Sisters,*

1. Today we meet again to renew our hymn of praise and thanksgiving to God the day after yesterday's solemn liturgy in the Vatican Basilica during which I had the joy of canonizing 12 new saints, steadfast witnesses to Christ, the King of the Universe. At the same time, let us reflect once again on their shining example of unconditional love for God and of generous devotion to the spiritual and material good of their brethren.

2. With great affection I greet the Spanish-speaking pilgrims who have come to Rome. On this occasion I extend a special greeting to the Brothers of the Christian Schools, accompanied by their students and alumni, the Passionist Fathers, as well as the members of the great Hospitaller family. These saints, beloved sons of the Church and faithful witnesses to the risen Lord, offer us the testimony of their rich spirituality, forged in daily faithfulness and unconditional self-giving to their vocation of service to neighbour.

3. The martyred Brothers of the Christian Schools canonized yesterday, followers of the charism of St John Baptist de La Salle, were totally dedicated to the complete education of children and young people. They belong to a long series of Christian educators who devoted their lives and energies to teaching in Catholic schools, committed to this indispensable service that the Church offers society. In our day the latter is sometimes individualistic and is tempted to secularism. The Holy Martyrs of Turón, who came from various places in Spain and one from Argentina, are an eloquent proof that fidelity to Christ is worth more than one's life.

May their example, together with that of Fr Inocencio de la Inmaculada, spur young people to embrace the lifestyle which

the Gospel offers us, living it with courage and enthusiasm. May the educational work of these holy martyrs also be a model for Christian teachers on the threshold of the new millennium now close at hand.

With regard to the formation of the younger generation, I would like to recall the fundamental duty of parents, who have the primary responsibility for their children's education, which implies that they be given absolute freedom in choosing schools for their children. The public authorities, for their part, should ensure that families are given the necessary conditions, on the basis of respect for pluralism and religious freedom, so that in all schools, whether public or private, an education in conformity with their own moral and religious principles is imparted to their children. And this is even more necessary in a country like Spain, where most parents desire a religious education for their children.

4. St Benedict Menni, an illustrious member of the Hospitaller Order of St John of God and founder of the Hospitaller Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, lived his vocation as an apostle in the field of health care, sparing neither effort nor suffering, with a boldness and unlimited devotion in the care of the sick, especially children and the mentally ill.

The work carried out by his brothers in religion and the sisters of the institute he founded is most timely in today's world, where all too often the weak and suffering are marginalized. May the great Hospitaller family, faithful to the charism of the new saint, imitate the great love he had for the most disadvantaged, by devoting their whole lives to their service.

St Benedict Menni discovered his vocation precisely when he had almost ended his volunteer service in Milan. Many of you pilgrims who have come for his canonization are volunteer workers in various hospital centres and in other social assistance centres. This service enriches your life and increases your capacity for self-giving and solidarity towards your neighbour, especially the suffering. I encourage you to continue this work, inspired by the example of Fr Menni, by imitating and following him on the path of mercy he took.

5. I address you, dear religious of the Order of Friars Minor, and everyone who, with you, is rejoicing over the canonization of St Thomas of Cori. "I have come here to become holy": with these words the new saint presented himself at the hermitage of Bellegra, where for many years he continuously followed this demanding form of Gospel life.

He fully understood that every true reform begins with oneself, and, for this reason his humble person ranks among the great reformers of the Order of Friars Minor.

The intensity of his intimate relationship with God, especially from his deep devotion to the Eucharist, bore fruit in his pastoral work, which was so effective that he earned the title "apostle of the Subiaco region". A true son of the *Poverello* of Assisi, what was said of St Francis can also be said of him, namely, that he "was not so much a man who prayed as one who himself became a living prayer" (Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, 95: *Fonti Francescane*, 682).

6. Dear brothers and sisters, together with the whole Church, let us praise the Lord for the great works he has accomplished through these new saints.

In returning to your homes and your daily tasks, take with you the happy memory of this pilgrimage to Rome, and continue courageously in your commitment to bearing Christian witness, in order to prepare yourselves to live with

intensity and fervour the Holy Year now close at hand.

With these hopes, I entrust you all to the heavenly protection of Our Lady and the new saints, and I cordially bless you, your families and your communities.

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