



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE PILGRIMS WHO CAME TO ROME FOR THE BEATIFICATION CEREMONIES

Monday, 6 March 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. It is a joy for me to greet you this morning, the day after the solemn beatification of a large group of witnesses to the faith. You come from different countries, especially from Brazil, Belarus, the Philippines, Thailand and Việt Nam. My most cordial greetings to you all.

The new blessed - priests, sisters and lay people - are all martyrs. I would like to stress the special eloquence of this fact: the first beatification of the Holy Year 2000 is characterized by martyrdom, that is, the total gift of self to Christ and the Gospel. These martyrs made their lives a generous response to God's gift and are eloquent models of Christian witness for us all.

2. I most cordially greet Cardinal Paul Joseph Pham Đình Tung, Archbishop of Hà Nội, the Vietnamese Bishops and pilgrims and their friends who have come for the beatification of Andrew of Phú Yên. Fr Alexander de Rhodes discerned great intelligence and an intense spiritual life in this young boy. In order to help the priests to proclaim the Gospel, he first welcomed him among his closest co-workers and later as a member of the *Maison Dieu* association of catechists. From that moment, won over by Christ, Andrew publicly dedicated his life to the service of the Church, generously agreeing to share in the sacrifice of the crucified Lord to the end, assured of following him in his resurrection.

After 350 years Vietnamese Catholics have not forgotten this Gospel witness, their country's protomartyr. They have found in him a model of calm faith and generous love for Christ and his Church. Today may they continue to find in his example the strength to remain faithful to their Christian vocation, in loyalty to the Church and to their country! May Bl. Andrew, whose ardent zeal enabled the Gospel to be proclaimed, implanted and spread, give all catechists the courage to be true witnesses to the faith by a life spent entirely for Christ and for their brothers and sisters!

3. I extend warm greetings to Cardinal Michael Michai Kitbunchu and the Bishops from Thailand, as well as to the priests, religious and faithful who have come to Rome for the beatification of Fr Nicolas Bunkerd Kitbamrung. The Church in Thailand rejoices that one of her sons has been raised to the altars. Bl. Nicolas was completely dedicated to his priestly ministry, which he showed in his love of others, his commitment to teaching the faith, and his courageous witness in times of trial. I pray that through the intercession of Fr Nicolas the Catholic community in your country will always be blessed with priests imbued with that same spirit.

I cordially welcome Cardinal Ricardo Vidal and the Bishops from the Philippines, as well as the many pilgrims who are accompanying you. For a long time the people of the Philippines, especially those of his native Visayas region, have been looking forward to the beatification of Pedro Calungsod. At a young age, Bl. Pedro heard the call of Christ and never wavered in his desire to do God's will, even at the cost of his life. Let us pray that many young people will follow Bl. Pedro's example and give themselves to the Lord in the many forms of lay apostolate or in the priesthood and religious life.

Upon you and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of the risen Saviour!

4. With great satisfaction I now greet Cardinal Eugênio de Araújo Sales and the many Bishops here, together with the Brazilian pilgrims who have come to Rome to take part in the solemn beatification of the martyrs of Natal: the Jesuit André de Soveral, the diocesan priest Ambrósio Francisco Ferro and their communities of 28 lay people who, at the beginning of Brazil's history, gave their lives out of fidelity to their faith.

These martyrs, who were beatified yesterday, came from the communities of Cunhaú and Uruaçu in Rio Grande do Norte. It was there that the seed of martyrdom began to grow and to become a great harvest of ripe fruit through the lengthy work of evangelization and sanctification by the Church in Brazil over the past five centuries of its history. Their blood poured out on the soil of their homeland made it fertile for the birth of new Christians. They are the first fruits of missionary work and are called Brazil's Protomartyrs of the Gospel in those regions, which have been given the name "Land of the Holy Cross".

Let us pray to God that the example of fidelity of these first Christians, especially of those families of martyrs - many of whom had tender-age children - and of the numerous unknown people, will spur us to renew our commitment to a courageous and fruitful evangelization at all levels of society, and that Our Lady of the Apparition, the Mother of God and our Mother, will walk at our side along all of life's paths.

5. I cordially greet the pilgrims from Poland and Belarus.

I extend a particular greeting to the Sisters of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Nazareth,

who have come here to thank God for the gift of the beatification of their 11 sisters, the martyrs of Nowogródek.

In commemorating these heroic Nazareth Sisters, Jesus' words come to mind: "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (cf. *Jn* 15: 13). They perfectly confirmed the truth of these words by their lives filled with devotion and by their death. Before the war and during the occupation, they zealously served the inhabitants of Nowogródek, participating actively in pastoral care and education and engaging in various works of charity. Their love for those among whom they fulfilled their mission took on special significance during the horror of the Nazi invasion.

Together and unanimously they offered their lives to God, asking in exchange that the lives of the mothers and fathers of families and that of the local pastor be spared. The Lord graciously accepted their sacrifice and, we believe, abundantly rewarded them in his glory.

Today, together with the entire Congregation of Nazareth Sisters, let us praise God for this grace, through which the religious charism and human zeal were able to yield such marvellous fruits of martyrdom. May the blood of these blessed sisters be the seed of new religious vocations and a support for many on the ways of holiness.

May the new blessed, Maria Stella Mardosewicz and her 10 sisters, intercede with God for all the people of Belarus, whom I cordially greet.

From my heart I bless all the pilgrims here. Praised be Jesus Christ!

6. Dear brothers and sisters, let us give thanks to God for the gift of these shining witnesses to the Gospel! Let us praise him with our lives and try, with his grace, to follow the example of these martyrs.

May the Virgin Mary, Queen of Saints and Help of Christians, help us. In returning to your countries and to your homes, take with you the memory of these solemn celebrations which enabled you to experience the joy of belonging to the one holy Church, and bring to your loved ones the Pope's blessing, which he gives you affectionately.

© Copyright 2000 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana