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Homily of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Mass for the Beatification of María Carmen Lacaba Andía and 13 companion martyrs

The following is the homily pronounced this morning by the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, His Eminence Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, in the Cathedral of Santa María la Real de la Almudena, Madrid, Spain, during the Mass for the Beatification of María Carmen Lacaba Andía and thirteen companions, professed women religious of the Franciscan Order of the Immaculate Conception, killed in hatred of the faith in 1936 during the civil war in Spain:

Homily of Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu

Dear brothers and sisters,

These words of Saint Paul, proclaimed in the first Letter, can be applied today to the fourteen nuns of the Franciscan Order of the Immaculate Conception (Conceptionists) killed during the religious persecution that sought to eliminate the Church in Spain. They remained strong in the faith: they did not take fright in the face of outrages, anguish and persecutions. They were ready to seal with their life the Truth they professed with their lips, joining to the martyrdom of Jesus their martyrdom of faith, hope and charity.

Blessed María del Carmen (born Isabel Lacaba Andía) and her thirteen companions were nuns belonging to the same monastic family, but from three different monasteries: the Monastery of Madrid, the Monastery of El Pardo, and the Monastery of Escalona. All of them, persevering in their consecration to God, gave their life for faith and as the supreme proof of love. It was indeed aversion to God and to Christian faith that caused their martyrdom. Indeed, they underwent persecution up to death due to their state of religious life and their full adhesion to Christ and to the Church. Their executioners were militants who, led by their hatred of the Catholic Church, were the agents of a general and systematic religious persecution against the people most representative of the Catholic community. The new Blesseds were certainly well aware of the exhortation of the divine Master: *"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness"* (Mt 6: 33). They are an example and stimulus for all, but particularly for the Conceptionist nuns, and also for all those consecrated women who totally dedicate their life to pray and

contemplation. In this valuable prayerful mission, cloistered nuns are called to “*savour and see how good the Lord is*”, to bear witness to all of how enveloping God’s love is.

“*Three times I pleaded with the Lord ... But He said to me: ‘My grace is sufficient for you’*” (2 Cor 12: 8-9). These words of Saint Paul, which we have just listened to, seem to inspire the messages left by these fourteen martyrs. In different times and places, they faced with generosity and courage their offering of sacrifice to the Lord. The spiritual and moral integrity of these women comes to us through direct and indirect testimonies and also through documents. We are deeply struck by the testimonies referring to their martyrdom. In the assault on the monastery of Madrid, the assailants shouted: “*Death to the nuns!*”, and these latter exclaimed “*Long live Christ the King!*”. In the case of the women religious of El Pardo, the executioners, when they discovered that the nuns were among the people who had received them after the attack on the monastery, posed the question: “*Are you nuns?*”, to which the women religious replied, “*Yes, by the grace of God*”; that is, for them it was equivalent to a death sentence that the militias would have carried out without any motivation. For their part, the nuns of Escalona, who left their Community, were expelled from the municipality by the local militias and sent to the Directorate General for Security in Madrid, to force them to abandon their faith and pass to apostasy. To force the youngest nuns to carry out this gesture, the two eldest were separated from the group and taken to a blind alley, where they were tortured and eventually shot.

All the testimonies we have received enable us to affirm that these Conceptionist nuns died because they were disciples of Christ, because they did not want to deny their own faith and break their religious vows. When at the beginning of the war, in the republican zone the Communities transferred to the homes of relatives and friends, they adapted without complaint, giving an example of heroism. They never had attitudes of animosity towards those who were the cause of their sufferings, but they responded with charity. They approached sacrifice, glorifying God and forgiving their executioners, following the example of Christ Who on the cross said, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*” (Lk 23: 34).

The witness of these Blesseds constitutes a living example, close to all. Their heroic death is an eloquent sign of how the vitality of the Church depends not on human projects or calculations, but springs from the total adhesion to Christ and His message of salvation. These nuns of ours were well aware of this; they drew strength not from a mania of personal protagonism, but rather their boundless love for Jesus Christ, even at the cost of their life. Their existence is like a direct message to consecrated persons and to the lay faithful of today. To consecrated persons, the new Blesseds say they remain faithful to their vocation and to their joyful belonging to the Church, serving her through their own Institute, in an intense life of fraternal communion, perseverance and the witness of their own religious identity. To lay faithful, they remind us of the need to listen and to adhere obediently to the Word of God, which we are all called to live and announce by virtue of Baptism.

“*My power is made perfect in weakness*” (2 Cor 12: 9), responded the Lord to the apostle Paul. Today we give thanks for this strength that has also become the strength of martyrs on Spanish soil. The strength of faith, hope and love, which is shown to be stronger than violence. The cruelty of the firing squads and the entire system of organized hatred was defeated. Christ, Who made Himself present alongside the martyrs, came to them with the force of His death and His martyrdom. At the same time, He came to them with the strength of His resurrection. Martyrdom, in fact, is a particular revelation of the Paschal mystery, which continues to work and is offered to men of all times as a promise of new life. Thus wrote the famous Roman writer Tertullian: “*Sanguis martyrum - semen christianorum*”; the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. [2]

We cannot doubt the fruitfulness of this seed, even though there seem to grow, in various forms, the forces that seek to uproot the “*semen christianorum*”, that is, Christian values, from the consciences and the fabric of our societies. Faced with the attitude of closure against those most in need, religious indifference, moral relativism, the arrogance of the strongest towards the weakest, faced with attacks on the unity of the family and the sacredness of human life, we cannot forget the beauty of the Gospel. The word of God always puts down new roots. On these roots, we disciples of the Lord must and can grow! These fourteen new Blesseds, who remained steadfast in their faith even in the moment of supreme oblation, represent an encouragement to continue with joy and hope in bearing witness in every environment to the love and mercy of God, who never abandons us, especially at the moment of failure and defeat.