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Letter of the Holy Father Francis constituting the “Commission of the New Martyrs - Witnesses of the Faith” at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints

In view of the forthcoming Jubilee of 2025, which will see us gathered as “Pilgrims of Hope”, I have established at the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints the “Commission of the New Martyrs - Witnesses of the Faith”, to draw up a Catalogue of all those who have shed their blood to confess Christ and bear witness to His Gospel. Martyrs in the Church are witnesses of the hope that comes from faith in Christ and incites to true charity. Hope keeps alive the deep conviction that good is stronger than evil, because God in Christ conquered sin and death. The Commission will continue the search, already begun on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of 2000, to identify the Witnesses of the Faith in this first quarter of the century and to continue in the future.

Indeed, martyrs have accompanied the life of the Church in every age, and flourish as “ripe and excellent fruits of the Lord's vineyard” even today. As I have said many times, martyrs “are more numerous in our time than in the first centuries”: they are bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, lay people and families, who in the different countries of the world, with the gift of their lives, have offered the supreme proof of charity (cf. *LG* 42). As Saint John Paul II already wrote in his Apostolic Letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*, everything must be done so that the legacy of the cloud of “unknown soldiers ... of God's great cause” (37) is not lost. On 7 May 2000 they were recalled in an ecumenical celebration, which saw gathered at the Colosseum representatives of Churches and ecclesial communities from all over the world, to evoke, together with the Bishop of Rome, the richness of what I later called “ecumenism of the blood”. In the coming Jubilee we will also be united in a similar celebration.

With such an initiative it is not intended to establish new criteria for the canonical ascertainment of martyrdom, but to continue the survey already underway of those who, to this day, continue to be killed simply because they are Christians.

It is therefore a matter of continuing historical research in order to gather the testimonies of life, up to the shedding of blood, of these sisters and brothers of ours, so that their memory can stand as a treasure cherished by the Christian community. The research will concern not only the Catholic Church, but will extend to all

Christian denominations. Even in our times, in which we are witnessing a change of epoch, Christians continue to show, in contexts of great risk, the vitality of Baptism that unites us. A not insignificant number, indeed, are those who, despite being aware of the dangers they face, manifest their faith or participate in the Sunday Eucharist. Others are killed in the effort to assist in charity the lives of the poor, in caring for those rejected by society, in cherishing and promoting the gift of peace and the power of forgiveness. Still others are silent victims, as individuals or in groups, of the upheavals of history. To all of them we owe a great debt and we cannot forget them. The work of the Commission will make it possible to place side by side with the martyrs, officially recognized by the Church, the documented testimonies - and there are many - of these brothers and sisters of ours, within a vast panorama in which the single voice of the *martyria* of Christians resounds.

The Commission now established will be required to avail itself of the active contribution of the particular Churches in their structures, of religious institutes and of all other Christian realities, according to the criteria to be drawn up by the same Commission.

In a world where at times it seems that evil prevails, I am certain that the drafting of this Catalogue, also in the context of the now imminent Jubilee, will help believers to read our times too in the Paschal light, drawing from the treasury of such generous faithfulness to Christ the reasons for life and goodness.

From the Vatican, 3 July 2023

FRANCIS
