



SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE **BOLLETTINO**

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHL
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 241114d

Thursday 14.11.2024

Audience with participants in the Conference promoted by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints “There is no greater love. Martyrdom and the offering of life”

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the participants in the Conference promoted by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, on the theme: *There is no greater love. Martyrdom and the offering of life*, taking place at the *Augustinianum* Patristic Institute from 11 to 14 November 2024.

The following is the address delivered by the Pope to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

I greet Cardinal Semeraro with the other Superiors of the Dicastery, the officials, the consultors, the postulators, and all of you who have taken part in the Conference on the theme of *martyrdom and the offering of life*. It had as its guiding Word that of Jesus in the Gospel of John: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (*Jn* 15:13). And to beatify a martyr, miracles are not required. Martyrdom is enough; we thus save a little time, and paper, and money [*Laughter*]. And this giving of life for one’s friends is a Word that always instils comfort and hope. Indeed, on the evening of the Last Supper, the Lord speaks of the gift of self that would be consummated on the cross. Only love can make sense of the cross: a love so great that it has taken on all sin and forgives it, enters into our suffering and gives us the strength to bear it, enters even into death to overcome it and save us. In the Cross of Christ there is all of God’s love, there is his immense mercy.

To be a saint does not only require human effort or personal commitment to sacrifice and renunciation. First of all, we must allow ourselves to be transformed by the power of God’s love, which is greater than us and makes us capable of loving even beyond what we thought we were capable of. It is not by chance that Vatican II, with regard to the universal vocation to holiness, speaks of the “fullness of Christian life” and the “perfection of charity”, capable of promoting “a much more human manner of living ... in this earthly society” (Dogmatic

Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, 40). This perspective also enlightens your work for the causes of saints, a precious service it offers the Church, so that the sign of lived holiness, always relevant, may never be lacking.

During the Conference you reflected on two forms of canonized holiness: that of *martyrdom* and that of the *offering of life*. Since antiquity, believers in Jesus have held in great esteem those who had paid in person, with their own lives, their love of Christ and the Church. They made their tombs places of worship and prayer. They joined together, on the day of their birth to heaven, to consolidate the bonds of a fraternity that in the Risen Christ transcends the limits of death, however cruel and painful.

In the martyr we find the features of the perfect disciple, who imitated Christ in renouncing himself and taking on his own cross, and, transformed by his charity, showed to all the salvific power of his Cross. I am reminded of the martyrdom of those good Orthodox Libyans: they died saying “Jesus”. “But father, they were orthodox!”. They were Christians. They are martyrs, and the Church venerates them as her own martyrs. On this we must... With martyrdom there is equality. The same happens in Uganda, with the Anglican martyrs. They are martyrs! And the Church takes them all as martyrs.

In the context of the causes of saints, the Church's common feeling has defined *three fundamental elements* of martyrdom, which always remain valid. The martyr is a Christian who - firstly - in order not to deny his faith, consciously suffers a violent and premature death. Even an unbaptized Christian, who is Christian at heart, confesses Jesus Christ with the Baptism of blood. Secondly, the killing is perpetrated by a persecutor, moved by hatred against the faith or another virtue connected to it; and thirdly, the victim assumes an unexpected attitude of charity, patience, meekness, in imitation of the crucified Jesus. What differs, in the various ages, is not the concept of martyrdom, but the concrete ways in which, in a specific historic context, it occurs.

Even today, in many parts of the world, there are many martyrs who give their life for Christ. In many cases Christianity is persecuted because, driven by faith in God, he defends justice, truth, peace, the dignity of the person. This implies, for those who study the various martyrdom events, that - as Venerable Pius XII taught, “sometimes moral certainty results only from a quantity of clues and proofs which, taken individually, are not worth founding a true certainty” – that harmony of knowledge – “and only when taken together do they leave no reasonable doubt in the mind of a man of sound judgement” (*Address to the Roman Rota*, 1 October 1942).

In the *Bull of Indiction of the next Jubilee* I defined that of the martyrs as the most convincing testimony of hope. This is why, within the *Dicastery for the Causes of Saints*, I wanted to set up the *Commission for the New Martyrs - Witnesses of the Faith*, which, distinct from the treatment of the causes of martyrdom, would gather the memory of those who, even within the other Christian denominations, were able to give up their lives in order not to betray the Lord. And there are many, many of other denominations, who are martyrs.

The experience then of the Causes of Saints and the continuous confrontation with the concrete experience of believers led me, on 11 July 2017, to sign the *Motu Proprio* “*Maiorem hac dilectionem*”, with which I intended to express the common sense of the faithful People of God regarding the witness of holiness of those who, inspired by Christ's charity, voluntarily offered their lives, accepting a certain and imminent death. Since it was a question of defining a new path for the causes of beatification and canonization, I established that there must be a connection between the offering of life and premature death, that the Servant of God had exercised the Christian virtues at least to an ordinary degree, and that, especially after his death, he was surrounded by the fame of holiness and its signs.

What distinguishes the offer of life, in which the figure of the persecutor is missing, is the existence of an external, objectively assessable condition in which the disciple of Christ freely placed himself and which leads to death. Even in the extraordinary witness of this type of holiness, the beauty of the Christian life, which is able to make itself a gift without measure, like Jesus on the cross, shines forth.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you, I encourage you to carry out your work for the causes of saints with passion, and with generosity. I entrust you to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and all the witnesses of Christ, whose names are in the book of life. I bless you from my heart, and please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.