



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PILGRIMS GATHERED IN ROME
FOR THE CANONIZATION OF THREE NEW SAINTS**

Monday, 19 April 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I am pleased to welcome again all of you who came for the canonization of Marcellin Champagnat, Giovanni Calabria and Agostina Livia Pietrantoni. Today's meeting offers us the happy occasion to extend yesterday's celebration in the atmosphere of Easter joy which marks this liturgical season.

We give thanks to the Father in heaven, the origin and source of all holiness, for giving these beloved children to the Church and to the world. God has accomplished great things in them, fashioning in them the wonderful image of his Only-begotten Son by the gentle strength of the Holy Spirit. As we see the Year 2000 emerging on the horizon, how can we not think of the multitude of blessed and saints whom divine grace has brought forth and made fruitful in these two millennia? In the lives of the saints the kingdom of heaven is already made present and active in this world.

2. Dear pilgrims who have come to celebrate the canonization of Marcellin Champagnat, I am pleased to welcome you. Your presence shows your attention to this saint's ever timely charism, which has attracted so many vocations. I greet Bishop Pierre Joatton of Saint- Étienne and the civil authorities from the department of the Loire, where St Marcellin lived. In a special way I greet the Marist Brothers, the institute he founded, as well as the members of the other institutes of the Marist family. Dear young people who have come particularly from Spain, Mexico and France to express your devotion to the spirit of the education given by Fr Champagnat, I encourage you to remain faithful to the path to God that he taught you.

I also greet the teachers who share in the mission of the Marist Brothers and have come to express their admiration for Marcellin Champagnat, apostle of youth, and their desire to continue the same educational service, with respect for the

young and their development. Lastly, I greet the members of the Marist lay branches, who wish to live according to St Marcellin's spirit in all their commitments. Following Mary's example, may you all follow Christ and be concerned to make him known!

We can give thanks for the numerous disciples of Fr Champagnat who faithfully fulfilled their mission even to the witness of martyrdom. We especially remember the 11 brothers, witnesses of truth and charity, who died tragically over the past five years in Algeria, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Hidden witnesses of hope, they join the very long martyrology of Marist Brothers, which began at the outset of their foundation with Bro. Jacinto. We also recall St Peter Chanel, a Marist Father and Oceania's first martyr.

I cordially grant my Apostolic Blessing to all the faithful here and to all the Marist Brothers of the world, to those who work with them in the educational field and to all the young people who benefit from their apostolate.

3. In the year in which the Church, on her way to the Great Jubilee, fixes her gaze on the infinite tenderness of God the Father, we see in St Giovanni Calabria, a priest of Verona and founder of the Poor Servants and Poor Sister Servants of Divine Providence, a wonderful reflection of the divine fatherhood. From the very start he thought of the mission entrusted to him by the Lord in this way: he felt called to "show the world that divine Providence exists, that God is not a stranger but a Father who thinks of us, provided that we think of him and do our part, which is to seek first God's holy kingdom and his righteousness" (*Letter to his religious, III, 19 March 1933*). The heart of all his intense apostolic and charitable activity was the discovery, through the Gospel, of the love of the heavenly Father and of Christ for man.

Gospel love was the virtue which most characterized his life. A Jewish woman doctor, whom he hid among his Sisters to save her from the Nazi-Fascists, testified that every moment of his life seemed to personify the Apostle Paul's hymn to love. I firmly hope that his spiritual sons and daughters, whom I warmly greet here, will continue and extend that irrepressible love which overflowed from the heart of this holy priest, won by Christ and his Gospel.

4. Today the Church rejoices with the entire religious family of the Sisters of Charity of St Joan Antida Thouret for the gift of St Agostina Livia Pietrantoni. A few days after the celebration marking the second centenary of the institute's foundation, let us praise the Lord for the wonders he worked in the life of this faithful disciple of St Joan Antida. At the same time, we would also like to thank him for the abundant good fruits produced during these two centuries of the congregation's life through the humble and generous work of so many Sisters of Charity.

Growing up in a family accustomed to hard work and deeply rooted in the faith, the new saint embraced the Vincentian ideal of charity, humility and simplicity expressed in respect for others, in warmth and in the sense of duty "done well". During her years of service to the tuberculosis

patients in Santo Spirito Hospital, Sr Agostina met people who were suffering and begged that their physical and spiritual integrity be recognized. In an age marked by the winds of secularization, Agostina Livia Pietrantonio witnessed to spiritual values. She said of her sick, who were incurable at the time and often irritable and difficult to deal with: "In them I serve Jesus Christ ... I feel inflamed with love for them all, ready to make any sacrifice, even to shed my blood for love". The supreme sacrifice of blood would be the final seal of her life, wholly spent in undivided love for God and her brothers and sisters.

May her example inflame the sisters of St Antida's congregation and spur them to bear ardent witness to that love which sums up the divine law and is the bond of all perfection (cf. Col 3:14).

5. Dear brothers and sisters, let us look to these new saints and learn from them the secret of holiness. Let us reflect on their charisms, assimilate the spirit they have bequeathed to us and imitate their example. Then the peace of Christ will reign in our hearts! May the Mother of the Redeemer, the Queen of All Saints, obtain this for each of us.

With these sentiments, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you and to your loved ones.