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**BEATIFICATION
OF THE MARTYRS OF THE
CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS**

1934 - 1937

The martyrs who were beatified yesterday by His Holiness, John-Paul II, are a source of joy for the Catholic Church. They are heroic witnesses to the Christian faith. They witnessed to their faith in and their love for Jesus Christ with their own lives. It is the Holy Spirit who awakened in them faith, hope and love, and it is the same Spirit who sustained them in fidelity and perseverance to the very last moment of their painful passion. Because of this they have become for us an honour, and for the Church an outstanding example. They are now, for us all, powerful intercessors in heaven where they enjoy the reward of their dedication to the cause of the Gospel.

We thank God today for this new gift which He has given to his Church by the glorification of nine martyrs. We share in the joy of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, of the Passionist Fathers and of the Sisters of the Society of Saint Teresa who see their martyrologies enriched by these new martyrs. We, bishops and priests who are concelebrating, together with all of you who are participating in this Eucharist, are happy to represent the various dioceses and regions where the newly beatified were born and where they died: Barcelona, Buenos Aires (Argentina), Burgos, Cantabria, Guadalajara, Lugo (Mondoñedo), Seo de Urgell (Lérida), Tarragona, and the Asturias. To me, as archbishop of Oviedo belongs the honour of presiding at this celebration and of representing the Asturian diocese where the martyrs of Turon shed their blood for Christ.

Brothers Cirilo-Beltran (Burgos, 46 years), Marciano-Jose (Guadalajara, 324 years), Victoriano-Pio (Burgos, 29 years), Julian-Alfredo (Leon, 31 years), Benjamin-Julian (Burgos, 26 years), Augusto-Andres (Santander, 24 years), Benito de Jesus (Buenos Aires,

Argentina, 24 years), Aniceto-Adolfo (Santander, 22 years) formed the Community of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in the mining valley of Turon near Mieres. Arrested with them was Fr. Inocencio de la Inmaculada (Lugo, 47 years), a Passionist priest who was about to celebrate Mass in the college when the Brothers were arrested on the orders of the revolutionary Committee. Led to the House of the People, they were all condemned to death because they were religious and executed near the wall of the cemetery on 9th October 1934.

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At the beatification of this group of witnesses the Pope added the name of another member of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, Brother Jaime-Hilario (Seo de Urgell, 39 years) who was martyred at Tarragona and that of the Teresian Sister Mercedes Prat (Barcelona, 56 years) who were martyred at Tarragona and Barcelona respectively during the Spanish civil war (1936 - 1939).

On the occasion of the beatification of the martyrs it is inevitable that I should refer to the circumstances of their death, to the historic context in which their martyrdom took place. If it is properly understood, the glorification of the martyrs invites us to overlook the causes of the injustice which led to the deaths of innocent people. It is a cause for reflection for the society which endured the sectarian intolerance of political groups which went so far as to ruin the peace of society and to destroy harmony among the peoples.

The hatred of religion shown by the extremist leaders of the revolution of 1934 and of the civil war of 1936 - 39 in Spain is an undeniable fact of history. In those circumstances the fact of belonging to a religious order, of being a priest or simply a fervent practising Catholic, could, at the height of anti-religious fury, lead to death.

How was it possible to reach such a point of confrontation among a people so deeply religious as the people of Spain? That is an important question which must find a calm, objective answer as more light is thrown on the revolutionary processes of those years and as the historic facts are studied with calm objectivity.

I have not intention of dwelling of these considerations which, on this joyful occasion, are of secondary importance. The motive which compels the Church to act in the cause of the martyrs is not one of political or social revendication. It is entirely "religious". The Church wishes to highlight the example of heroic death for the faith because such a death is "precious in the sight of the Lord" and is a divine gift which should stimulate us believers to live in a manner consistent with our beliefs and with the first commandment of the Law of God; «Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and above all things».

I invite you to look on the death of the martyrs with the eyes of faith, as a fact whose realization was part of God's plan, according to the prophetic vision unveiled for us by Christ: «You are not of this world. The world will hate you as it has hated me» (John 15: 18-21). That divine vision, according to faith and divine Providence is the back-drop to the death of the witness of Christ. Has Our Lord not warned us that we would be persecuted and that our persecutors would even think that they were serving the cause of justice?

The hatred breathed out in Spain at that time against the Church and religion was presented as the defence of a just cause. At the instigation of demagogic and sectarian leaders, the Church was often accused of being the cause of all the ills that afflicted Spanish society where the vast majority of people found themselves in misery and in a situation of high unemployment.

The glory of our martyrs does not consist in the fact that they were wrongly accused of complicity in political or social activities. Their glory arises from the fact that the real cause, their being religious or well-known representatives of the Church of Christ, came out clearly and decisively in the summary trial which led to their condemnation and execution. The Church exalts the martyrs, not because they were innocent victims, but because they were faithful witnesses of Christ. That is why she calls them martyrs, that is, witnesses to the risen Lord – witnesses par excellence.

In the death of a martyr shine forth the purity and strength of faith in Christ and the superabundance of Christian love which leads him to declare himself a disciple of Christ, help him to accept death with serenity, sustain him at the supreme moment and enable him to praise God and to die while pardoning his enemies.

The death of a martyr is like the death of Christ on the cross. It is in the peace of his death that the truth of his cause is revealed. «Truly this man was the son of God». The impression created by the death of the martyrs beatified yesterday, is engraved on the hearts of those who murdered them or who were present at their death. The martyrs of Turon prayed for and forgave their executioners. The tranquility of Brother Jaime-Hilario impressed those who fired on him twice without hitting him. Even the bullets respected him according to his biographer. Mother Mercedes Prat recited the Our Father and murmured "Jesus, Mary, Joseph". The attitude of peace and calm with which they died, their rosary beads in their hands and forgiv-

ing their executioners while praising God, expressed clearly the purity of their dedication to the cause of Christ and of the Church.

Let us thank God for the gift of these martyrs. They will be the seed from which will come new religious men and women, new priests and new committed Christians.

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In the death of the newly beatified there are values which we should accept with devotion as drops of the blood they shed and as relics which will be the seed of a new life for the whole Church.

They are witnesses of the faith at a time when there is a pressing need to rediscover the necessity of risking our comfort and of confessing our faith even at the cost of our temporal interests.

They are witnesses of the value of the Christian school at a time when so many Christians neglect their duty to provide their children with an integrated education in harmony with their religious beliefs.

They are witnesses of love for the poor by giving their lives for the education of the children of the working classes. I can personally bear witness to the love that the people of the mining valleys of the Asturias have for the Brothers of the Christian Schools. The workers of the Asturias who have attended their schools will never forget the sacrifices and generosity of their educators.

They are witnesses of love of their enemies. The temptation to resist force with force is always there. Nevertheless, «He who uses the sword will perish by the sword». Christ asked us to forgive always, even our enemies, and that our revenge be sincere love for those who persecute and claudniate us. In the last analysis, judgement of persons belong to God and we are asked not to judge our brothers but to give our life for them after the example of Christ. «Father, forgive them for they know not what they do».

Some will say that we are too fearful; others that we are under an illusion or that we are too trusting. As for us, we want to remain faithful to the words of the Master who calls us to be witnesses in his way: «Love one another as I have loved you».

let us imitate the martyrs. Let us be witnesses of the faith and of the love of God in the community of the Church and the world will believe in the Lord.