



The Holy See

CANONIZATION OF TEN MARTYRS AND TWO PRIESTS

CIRILO BERTRÁN AND EIGHT COMPANIONS,
INOCENCIO DE LA INMACULADA,
BENEDICT MENNI AND THOMAS OF CORI

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Sunday 21 November 1999

1. *"He will sit on his glorious throne" (Mt 25: 31).*

Today's liturgical solemnity is dominated by Christ the King of the universe, *Pantocrator*, as we see him shining resplendently in the apse of ancient Christian basilicas. We contemplate this majestic image today, the last Sunday of the liturgical year.

The kingship of Jesus Christ, according to the world's criteria, is paradoxical: it is *the triumph of love*, accomplished in the mystery of the Incarnation, Passion, Death and Resurrection of the Son of God. This saving kingship is fully revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross, the supreme act of mercy in which the salvation and judgement of the world are simultaneously brought about.

Every Christian shares in Christ's kingship. In Baptism he receives by grace the inner drive to make his life a free and generous gift to God and his brethren. This appears most eloquently in the witness of the saints, who are models of humanity renewed by divine love. Today we joyfully enrol among them Cirilo Bertrán and his eight companions, Inocencio de la Inmaculada, Benedict Menni and Thomas of Cori.

2. *"Christ must reign"*, we heard St Paul say in the second reading. The reign of Christ is already being established on earth through service of neighbour, by fighting against evil, suffering and human misery until death is defeated. Faith in the risen Christ makes it possible for so many men

and women to be dedicated and committed to transforming the world in order to restore it to the Father: so that "God will be everything to everyone".

This same commitment motivated Bro. Cirilo Bertrán and his eight companions, Brothers of the Christian Schools of Our Lady of Covadonga College. Born in Spain, and one of them in Argentina, their lives were crowned with martyrdom in Turón (Asturias) in 1934, together with the Passionist Father, Inocencio de la Inmaculada. Not afraid to shed their blood for Christ, they conquered death and now share in the glory of God's kingdom. This is why I have the joy of enrolling them among the saints today, holding them up to the universal Church as models of Christian life and our intercessors with God.

Joined with the group of martyrs of Turón is Bro. Jaime Hilario, of the same religious congregation, who was killed in Tarragona three years later. While forgiving his executioners, he said: "My friends, to die for Christ is to reign".

As witnesses recount, they all prepared for death as they had lived: with persevering prayer in a spirit of brotherhood, without hiding their religious state and with the firmness of those who know they are citizens of heaven. They are not heroes of a human war in which they did not participate, but educators of youth. Because of their state as consecrated persons and teachers, they faced their tragic destiny as an authentic testimony of faith, giving the last lesson of their life by martyrdom.

May their example and intercession touch the entire De La Salle family and the whole Church!

3. *"Come O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... for I was sick and you visited me"* (Mt 25: 34-36). These words of the Gospel proclaimed today would certainly have been familiar to Benedict Menni, a priest of the Order of St John of God. His devotion to the sick, lived according to the Hospitaller charism, guided his life.

His spirituality was born of his own experience of God's love for him. In his great devotion to the Heart of Jesus, King of heaven and earth, and to the Virgin Mary, he found the strength for his charitable service to others, especially the suffering: the elderly, children with scrofula and poliomyelitis and the mentally ill. He carried out his service to the order and to society with a humility based on hospitality and blameless integrity, which made him a model for many. He organized various initiatives, guiding some young women who formed the first nucleus of a new religious institute, and founding the Hospitaller Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Ciempozuelos (Madrid). His spirit of prayer led him to contemplate deeply Christ's paschal mystery, the source for understanding human suffering and the path to resurrection. On this day of Christ the King, the example of St Benedict Menni's life sheds light on those who want to follow in the footsteps of the Master along the paths of welcoming hospitality.

4. "I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out (Ez 34: 11). Thomas of Cori, a priest of the Order of Friars Minor, was the living image of the Good Shepherd. As a loving guide, he knew how to lead the brothers entrusted to his care towards the pastures of faith, ever inspired by the Franciscan ideal.

In the friary he showed his spirit of charity, making himself available for any need, even the humblest. He lived *the kingship of love and service*, according to the mind of Christ who, as today's liturgy sings, "offered his life on the altar of the Cross and redeemed the human race by this one perfect sacrifice of peace" (*Preface of Christ the King*).

As a genuine disciple of the "Poverello" of Assisi, St Thomas of Cori was obedient to Christ, the King of the universe. He meditated upon and incarnated in his life the Gospel requirement of poverty and of self-giving to God and neighbour. Thus his whole life appears as a sign of the Gospel, a witness to the heavenly Father's love revealed in Christ and active in the Holy Spirit for human salvation.

5. We give thanks to God who, on the paths of time, never ceases to raise up shining witnesses to his kingdom of justice and peace. May the 12 new saints, whom I have the joy today of presenting for the veneration of the People of God, show us the way to be prepared for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. Indeed, it is not difficult to recognize in their example certain elements which characterize the Jubilee. I am thinking in particular of martyrdom and charity (cf. *Incarnationis mysterium*, nn. 12-13). More generally, today's celebration recalls the great mystery of *the communion of saints*, which is the basis of the other distinctive element of the Jubilee, the *indulgence* (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 9-10).

The saints show us the way to the kingdom of heaven, the way of the Gospel radically lived. At the same time, they support our serene certitude that every created reality finds its fulfilment in Christ and that, through him, the world will be presented to God the Father fully renewed and reconciled in love.

May St Cirilo Bertrán with his eight Companions, St Inocencio de la Inmaculada, St Benedict Menni and St Thomas of Cori help us also to follow the way of spiritual perfection. May Mary, Queen of All Saints, whom today we contemplate in her presentation in the temple, sustain and protect us always. Following her example, may we too cooperate faithfully in the mystery of Redemption. Amen!

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