



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC VISIT TO TORONTO,  
TO CIUDAD DE GUATEMALA AND TO CIUDAD DE MÉXICO

**CANONIZATION OF BROTHER PEDRO DE SAN JOSÉ DE BETANCURT**

***HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II***

*Guatemala City, Tuesday July 30, 2002*

1. *"Come O blessed of my Father ... 'Truly I say to you as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me'" (Mt 25:34, 40).* How can we fail to believe that these words of Jesus, which will mark the end of human history, can also be applied to Brother Pedro, who with such generosity dedicated himself to the poorest and the most abandoned?

Today, in adding Brother Pedro de San José de Betancurt to the list of the Saints, I am convinced of the present-day importance of his message. The new Saint, travelling with only his faith and his confidence in God, sailed across the Atlantic to care for the poor and indigenous people of America: first in Cuba, then in Honduras and finally in this blessed land of Guatemala, his "promised land".

2. I cordially thank Archbishop Rodolfo Quezada of Guatemala for his kind words, introducing me to these beloved ecclesial communities. I greet the Cardinals, the Bishops of Guatemala, the Bishop of Tenerife and those who have come from other parts of the American Continent.

I also greet the priests and the consecrated men and women with great esteem, and offer a special and affectionate greeting to the Bethlehemite Brothers, and the Bethlehemite Sisters, born from the inspiration of Mother Encarnación Rosal. She was the first Guatemalan "Blessed" and the reformer of the Beguine Convent where she established her foundation to restore the fundamental values of Brother Pedro's followers.

I am particularly grateful for the presence at this celebration of the Presidents of the Republics of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, and the Dominican Republic, and for the presence of the Prime Minister of Belize and of the other civil Authorities. I also appreciate the participation in this ceremony of the Official Mission that the Spanish Government has wished to send for this happy occasion.

I would also like to express my appreciation and closeness to the many indigenous people. The Pope does not forget you and, admiring the values of your cultures, encourages you to overcome with hope the sometimes difficult situations you experience. Build the future responsibly, work for the harmonious progress of your peoples! You deserve all respect and have the right to fulfil yourselves completely, in justice, integral development and peace.

3. *"Strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith ... rooted and grounded in love"* (Eph 3:16-17). Saint Paul's words, which we have heard today, show how the inner encounter with Christ transforms the human being, filling him with mercy for his neighbour.

Already in the land of his birth, as in every phase of his life, Brother Pedro was a deeply prayerful man, especially here where, at the hermitage of Calvary, he diligently sought God's will at every moment.

Thus he is an outstanding example for Christians today, whom he reminds that training in holiness "calls for a Christian life distinguished above all in the art of prayer" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 32). I therefore renew my exhortation to all the Christian communities of Guatemala and other countries to be authentic schools of prayer where all activity is centred on prayer. An intensely devout life always bears abundant fruit.

Brother Pedro modelled his spirituality in this way, particularly in contemplation of the mysteries of Bethlehem and of the Cross. If, in the birth and childhood of Jesus, he immersed himself deeply in the fundamental event of the Incarnation of the Word — which led him to discover spontaneously, as it were, the face of God in man — then, in meditating on the Cross, he found the strength to practise mercy heroically with the lowliest and the most deprived.

4. Today we are witnesses of the profound truth of the words of the Psalm we have just recited: the righteous person *"will not be afraid.... He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever"* (Ps 112, 8-9). Justice that endures is justice which is practised humbly, compassionately sharing in the fate of the brethren, sowing the spirit of pardon and mercy everywhere.

Pedro de Betancurt was distinguished precisely by the humble spirit and austere life with which he practised mercy. The Apostle Paul's recommendation went straight to his servant's heart:

"Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men" (Col 3:23). Thus he was truly a brother to all who lived in misfortune and gave himself with tenderness and immense love to their salvation. In this way, throughout his life, his deeds showed his dedication to the sick at the little hospital of Our Lady of Bethlehem, the cradle of the Bethlehemite Order.

Today, the new Saint represents also an urgent appeal to practise mercy in modern society, especially when so many are hoping for a helping hand. Let us think of the children and young people who are homeless or deprived of an education; of abandoned women with their many needs; of the hordes of social outcasts who live in the cities; of the victims of organized crime, of prostitution or of drugs; of the sick who are neglected and the elderly who live in loneliness.

5. Brother Pedro personifies "a heritage which must not be lost; we should always be thankful for it and we should renew our resolve to imitate it" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 7). This heritage should inspire in Christians and in all citizens a desire to transform the human community into a great family, in which social, political and economic relations may be worthy of man, and in which the dignity of the person is promoted, with the effective recognition of his inalienable rights.

I would like to end by recalling how devotion to the Blessed Virgin always accompanied Brother Pedro in his life of devotion and mercy. May she guide us too, so that enlightened by the example of the "man who was charity", we may reach her Son, Jesus. Amen.

*Before the Holy Father gave the last blessing, he gave a warm farewell to Guatemala.*

Before I leave this wonderful place, the place of the canonization of the first saint of Guatemala and Tenerife, I desire to tell you that once again you have made a deep impression on me. Thank you, thank you, Guatemala. With your faith, with your cordiality, with your streets so beautifully decorated. Thank you because behind every cross there is your heart. Be faithful to God, to the Church, to your Catholic tradition, inspired by the example of the holy Brother Peter. Guatemala always be faithful, under the protection of the Holy Christ of Esquipulas. Guatemala, I carry you in my heart.

Praised be Jesus Christ!