



The Holy See

BEATIFICATION OF PIUS IX, JOHN XXIII, TOMMASO REGGIO,
WILLIAM CHAMINADE AND COLUMBA MARMION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Sunday, 3 September 2000

1. In the context of the Jubilee Year, it is with deep joy that I have declared blessed two Popes, Pius IX and John XXIII, and three other servants of the Gospel in the ministry and the consecrated life: Archbishop Tommaso Reggio of Genoa, the diocesan priest William Joseph Chaminade and the Benedictine monk Columba Marmion.

Five different personalities, each with his own features and his own mission, all linked by a longing for holiness. It is precisely their holiness that we recognize today: holiness that is a profound and transforming relationship with God, built up and lived in the daily effort to fulfil his will. *Holiness lives in history* and no saint has escaped the limits and conditioning which are part of our human nature. In beatifying one of her sons, the Church *does not celebrate the specific historical decisions he may have made*, but rather points to him as someone to be imitated and venerated *because of his virtues*, in praise of the divine grace which shines resplendently in him.

I extend my respectful greetings to the official delegations of Italy, France, Ireland, Belgium, Turkey and Bulgaria which have come here for this solemn occasion. I also greet the relatives of the new blessed, together with the Cardinals, Bishops, civil and religious dignitaries who have wished to take part in our celebration. Lastly, I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters who have come in large numbers to pay homage to the servants of God whom the Church today is enrolling among the blessed.

2. Listening to the words of the Gospel acclamation: "*Lord, lead me on a straight road*", our thoughts naturally turn to the human and religious life of Pope *Pius IX*, Giovanni Maria Mastai Ferretti. Amid the turbulent events of his time, he was an example of unconditional fidelity to the

immutable deposit of revealed truths. Faithful to the duties of his ministry in every circumstance, *he always knew how to give absolute primacy to God and to spiritual values*. His lengthy pontificate was not at all easy and he had much to suffer in fulfilling his mission of service to the Gospel. He was much loved, but also hated and slandered.

However, it was precisely in these conflicts *that the light of his virtues shone most brightly*: these prolonged sufferings tempered his trust in divine Providence, whose sovereign lordship over human events he never doubted. This was the source of Pius IX's deep serenity, even amid the misunderstandings and attacks of so many hostile people. He liked to say to those close to him: "In human affairs we must be content to do the best we can and then abandon ourselves to Providence, which will heal our human faults and shortcomings".

Sustained by this deep conviction, he called the First Vatican Ecumenical Council, which clarified with magisterial authority certain questions disputed at the time, and confirmed the harmony of faith and reason. During his moments of trial Pius IX found support in Mary, to whom he was very devoted. In proclaiming the *dogma of the Immaculate Conception*, he reminded everyone that in the storms of human life the light of Christ shines brightly in the Blessed Virgin and is more powerful than sin and death.

3. "*You are good and forgiving*" (*Entrance Antiphon*). Today we contemplate in the glory of the Lord another Pontiff, *John XXIII*, the Pope who impressed the world with the friendliness of his manner which radiated the remarkable goodness of his soul. By divine design their beatification links these two Popes who lived in very different historical contexts but, beyond appearances, share many human and spiritual similarities. *Pope John's deep veneration for Pius IX*, to whose beatification he looked forward, is well known. During a spiritual retreat in 1959, he wrote in his diary: "I always think of Pius IX of holy and glorious memory, and by imitating him in his sacrifices, I would like to be worthy to celebrate his canonization" (*Journal of a Soul*, Ed. San Paolo, 2000, p. 560).

Everyone remembers the image of Pope John's smiling face and two outstretched arms embracing the whole world. How many people were won over *by his simplicity of heart, combined with a broad experience of people and things!* The *breath of newness* he brought certainly did not concern doctrine, but rather the way to explain it; his style of speaking and acting was new, as was his friendly approach to ordinary people and to the powerful of the world. It was in this spirit that he called *the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council*, thereby turning a new page in the Church's history: Christians heard themselves called to proclaim the Gospel with renewed courage and greater attentiveness to the "signs" of the times. The Council was a truly prophetic insight of this elderly Pontiff who, even amid many difficulties, opened a season of hope for Christians and for humanity.

In the last moments of his earthly life, he entrusted his testament to the Church: "What counts the

most in life is blessed Jesus Christ, his holy Church, his Gospel, truth and goodness". We too wish to receive this testament, as we glorify God for having given him to us as a Pastor.

4. "*Be doers of the word, and not hearers only*" (Jas 1: 22). These words of the Apostle James make us think of the life and apostolate of *Tommaso Reggio*, a priest and journalist who later became Bishop of Ventimiglia and finally Archbishop of Genoa. He was a man of faith and culture, and as a Pastor he knew how to be an *attentive guide to the faithful in every circumstance*. Sensitive to the many sufferings and the poverty of his people, he took responsibility for *providing prompt help in all situations of need*. Precisely with this in mind, he founded the religious family of the *Sisters of St Martha*, entrusting to them the task of assisting the Pastors of the Church especially in the areas of charity and education.

His message can be summed up in two words: *truth and charity*. Truth, first of all, which means attentive listening to God's word and courageous zeal in defending and spreading the teachings of the Gospel. Then *charity*, which spurs people to love God and, for love of him, to embrace everyone since they are brothers and sisters in Christ. If there was a preference in Tommaso Reggio's choices, it was for those who found themselves in hardship and suffering. This is why he is presented today as a model for Bishops, priest and lay people, as well as for those who belong to his spiritual family.

5. The beatification during the Jubilee Year of *William Joseph Chaminade*, founder of the Marianists, reminds the faithful that it is their task to find ever *new ways of bearing witness to the faith*, especially in order to reach those who are far from the Church and who do not have the usual means of knowing Christ. William Joseph Chaminade invites each Christian *to be rooted in his Baptism*, which conforms him to the Lord Jesus and communicates the Holy Spirit to him.

Fr Chaminade's love for Christ, in keeping with the French school of spirituality, spurred him to pursue his tireless work by founding spiritual families in a troubled period of France's religious history. *His filial attachment to Mary* maintained his inner peace on all occasions, helping him to do Christ's will. His concern for human, moral and religious education calls the entire Church to *renew her attention to young people*, who need both teachers and witnesses in order to turn to the Lord and take their part in the Church's mission.

6. Today the Benedictine Order rejoices at the beatification of one of its most distinguished sons, *Dom Columba Marmion*, a monk and Abbot of Maredsous. Dom Marmion left us an authentic treasure of spiritual teaching for the Church of our time. In his writings he teaches *a simple yet demanding way of holiness* for all the faithful, whom God has destined in love to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ (cf. *Eph 1: 5*). Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and the source of all grace, is the centre of our spiritual life, our model of holiness.

Before entering the Benedictine Order, Columba Marmion spent some years in the pastoral care

of souls as a priest of his native Archdiocese of Dublin. Throughout his life Bl. Columba was *an outstanding spiritual director*, having particular care for the interior life of priests and religious. To a young man preparing for ordination he once wrote: "The best of all preparations for the priesthood is *to live each day with love, wherever obedience and Providence place us*" (*Letter*, 27 December 1915). May a widespread rediscovery of the spiritual writings of Bl. Columba Marmion help priests, religious and laity to grow in union with Christ and bear faithful witness to him through ardent love of God and generous service of their brothers and sisters.

7. Let us confidently ask the new blessed, Pius IX, John XXIII, Tommaso Reggio, William Joseph Chaminade and Columba Marmion, to help us live in ever greater conformity to the Spirit of Christ. May their love of God and neighbour illumine our steps at this dawn of the third millennium!

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