



The Holy See

DIVINE LITURGY WITH BEATIFICATIONS

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER

Lviv (Racecourse)

Wednesday 27 June 2001

1. "*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (Jn 15:13).

This solemn statement of Christ echoes among us today with particular eloquence, as we proclaim Blessed *a group of sons and daughters of this glorious Church of Lviv of the Ukrainians*. Most of them were killed in hatred of the Christian faith. Some underwent martyrdom in times close to us, and among those present at today's Divine Liturgy there are some who knew them personally. This land of Halytchyna, which in the course of history has witnessed the growth of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, has been covered, as the unforgettable Metropolitan Yosyf Slipyi used to say, "with mountains of corpses and rivers of blood".

Yours is *a living and fruitful community* which goes back to the preaching of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius, to Saint Vladimir and Saint Olga. The example of the martyrs from different periods of history, but especially from the past century, testifies to the fact that *martyrdom is the highest measure of service of God and of the Church*. With this celebration we wish to pay homage to the martyrs and to thank the Lord for their fidelity.

2. With this evocative rite of beatification, it is likewise my desire to express the whole Church's gratitude to the People of God in Ukraine for Mykola „arneckyj and his 24 companion Martyrs, as well as for the Martyrs Teodor Romóa and Omeljan Kov..., and for the Servant of God Josaphata Michaëlina Hordashevská. Just as the grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies in order to give life to the new plant (cf. Jn 12:24), so too did the Blessed offer their lives so that the field of God would bear fruit in a new and more abundant harvest.

As we remember them, I greet all who are taking part in this concelebration: Cardinals Lubomyr Husar and Marian Jaworski, with the Bishops and priests of the Greek-Catholic and Latin Churches. As I greet the present Major Archbishop of Lviv of the Ukrainians, I recall his predecessors, the Servant of God Andrey Sheptytskyi, the heroic Cardinal Yosyf Slipyj, and the late lamented Cardinal Myroslav Lubachivskyj, who died only recently. As I recall these Pastors, my heart turns with affection to all the sons and daughters of the Greek-Catholic Church of Ukraine, including those in other cities and countries who are following this event by radio and television.

3. The Servants of God who are today inscribed in the Book of the Blessed represent *all categories of the ecclesial community*: among them are Bishops and priests, monks, nuns, and lay people. They were tested in many ways by the followers of the infamous Nazi and Communist ideologies. Aware of the sufferings which these faithful disciples of Christ were undergoing, my Predecessor Pius XII, sharing in their anguish, expressed his solidarity with those "who are persevering in faith and resisting the enemies of Christianity with the same unswerving fortitude with which their ancestors once resisted". He praised their courage in remaining "faithfully joined to the Roman Pontiff and their Pastors" (Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Ecclesias*, 15 December 1952: AAS 45 [1953], 8).

Strengthened by God's grace they travelled the path of victory to the end. This is the path of forgiveness and reconciliation, the path that leads to the brilliant light of Easter, after the sacrifice of Calvary. These brothers and sisters of ours are the representatives that are *known* out of a multitude of *anonymous* heroes – men and women, husbands and wives, priests and consecrated men and women, young people and old – who in the course of the twentieth century, the "century of martyrdom", underwent persecution, violence and death rather than renounce their faith.

How can we fail to recall the far-sighted and solid pastoral activity of the Servant of God, *Metropolitan Andrey Sheptytskyi*, whose cause of Beatification is proceeding and whom we hope to see one day in the glory of the Saints? We must refer to his heroic apostolic activity if we are to understand the humanly inexplicable fruitfulness of the Greek-Catholic Church of Ukraine during the dark years of persecution.

4. In my youth I myself was a witness of this kind of "apocalypse". "My priesthood, even at its beginning, was in some way marked by the great sacrifice of countless men and women of my generation" (*Gift and Mystery*, p. 39). Their memory must not be lost, for it is a blessing. *We admire them and we are grateful to them*: like an icon of the Gospel of the Beatitudes which they lived even to the shedding of blood, they are *a sign of hope* for our times and for the times to come. They have shown that love is stronger than death.

In their resistance to the mystery of evil, the strength of faith and of the grace of Christ was able to shine brightly, despite human weakness (cf. *2 Cor* 12:9-10). Their unconquered witness has

shown itself to be the seed of new Christians (cf. Tertullian, *Apol.*, 50, 13: *CCL* 1, 171).

Together with them *Christians of other confessions* were also persecuted and killed on account of Christ. Their joint martyrdom is a pressing call for reconciliation and unity. This is *the ecumenism of the martyrs and witnesses to faith*, which indicates the path of unity to the Christians of the twenty-first century. May their sacrifice be a practical lesson of life for all. This is certainly not an easy task. During the last centuries too many stereotyped ways of thinking, too much mutual resentment and too much intolerance have accumulated. The only way to clear the path is to forget the past, *ask forgiveness of one another and forgive one another* for the wounds inflicted and received, and unreservedly trust the renewing action of the Holy Spirit.

These martyrs teach us to be faithful to the twofold commandment of love: love of God, love of our brothers and sisters.

5. Dear *priests, religious, seminarians, catechists and students of theology!* For you in particular I wish to emphasize the shining example of these heroic witnesses to the Gospel. Like them be faithful to Christ unto death. If God blesses your land with many vocations and if the seminaries are full – and this is a source of hope for your Church – that is surely one of the fruits of their sacrifice. But it is a great responsibility for you.

For this reason I wish to say to those in charge: give careful attention to the *training of future priests and of those called to the consecrated life*, in line with the principles of the Eastern monastic tradition. On the one hand the value of celibacy for the Kingdom of Heaven ought to be emphasized, on the other the importance of the Sacrament of Matrimony with its connected responsibilities ought to be made clear. The Christian family – as the Council reminds us – is like a "domestic church", in which parents must be the first proclaimers of the faith to their children (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 11).

I encourage all the Church's sons and daughters to seek with constant commitment an ever more genuine and profound knowledge of Christ. May the clergy be always eager to give serious evangelical and ecclesial formation to the laity. May the spirit of sacrifice never fail among Christians. And may the courage of the Christian community in the defence of those hurt and persecuted never grow weak, as it pays great attention to discerning the signs of the times in order to respond to the social and spiritual challenges of the moment.

In this context I wish to assure you that I will follow with interest the development of the Third Session of the Synod of your Church, which will take place in 2002 and will be devoted to the Church's reading of the social problems of Ukraine. The Church cannot remain silent when the safeguarding of human dignity and the common good are at stake.

6. "*Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*" (Jn 15:13). The

martyrs declared Blessed today followed the Good Shepherd to the end. May their witness not be simply a boast for you: rather, may it become an invitation to imitate them. In Baptism, *every Christian is called to holiness*. Unlike the newly beatified martyrs, not all are called to undergo the supreme trial of shedding their blood. But everyone is entrusted with the task of following Christ with daily and faithful generosity, as did Blessed Josaphata Michaëlina Hordashevskaja, co-foundress of the Handmaids of Mary Immaculate. She lived her daily dedication to the Gospel in an extraordinary way, in the service of children, the sick, the poor, the illiterate and the marginalized, often in difficult situations marked by suffering.

May holiness be the desire of all of you, dear Brothers and Sisters of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church. On this journey of holiness and renewal, may you be accompanied by Mary "who 'precedes' us all at the head of the long line of witnesses of faith in the one Lord" (*Redemptoris Mater*, 30).

The Saints and Beati, who gained the crown of justice in this land of Ukraine, and the Beati whom we celebrate in a particular way today, all intercede for you. May their example and protection help you to follow Christ and faithfully serve his Mystical Body, the Church. Through their intercession, may God pour upon your wounds the oil of mercy and consolation, that you may be able to look with confidence to what awaits you, knowing in your hearts that you are the children of a Father who loves you tenderly.

At the end of the Mass, the Holy Father thanked the faithful in Polish and in Ukrainian for participating in the beautiful celebration. Here are his remarks in translation.

I cordially greet the faithful who have come from Poland and particularly the Greek Catholics who have come from Lviv to participate with their brothers from Ukraine in this particular Liturgy. I also desire to express my warm regards for and spiritual union with your Metropolitan Ivan Martyniak, who was unable to join his people. May God bless you.

God has given us a beautiful day. How can we not thank him? Dear brothers and sisters, I greet you cordially, in this last event of my particular and moving pilgrimage among the people of God in Ukraine who have gathered in such great numbers. I thank you for your prayers, especially for the choral chants which are also prayer. Thank you for your goodness and sincerity, thank you for your love and fidelity to the Apostolic See. I carry all of you in my heart and I am with you and embrace you in prayer. May God bless you.

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