



POPE FRANCIS

Homily: Canonisation of Four Women Religious

ST PETER'S SQUARE, 17 MAY 2015

The Acts of the Apostles have set before us the early Church as she elects the man whom God called to take the place of Judas in the college of the Apostles. It is has to do not with a job, but with service.

Indeed, Matthias, on whom the choice falls, receives a mission which Peter defines in these words: "One of these men... must become a witness with us to his resurrection", the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1:21-23). In this way Peter sums up what it means to be part of the Twelve: it means to be a witness to Jesus' resurrection. The fact that he says "with us" brings us to realize that the mission of proclaiming the risen Christ is not an individual undertaking: it is to be carried out in common, with the apostolic college and with the community. The Apostles had a direct and overwhelming experience of the resurrection; they were eyewitnesses to that event. Thanks to their authoritative testimony, many people came to believe; from faith in the risen Lord, Christian communities were born and are born continually. We too, today, base our faith in the risen Lord on the witness of the Apostles, which has come down to us through the mission of the Church. Our faith is firmly linked to their testimony, as to an unbroken chain which spans the centuries, made up not only by the successors of the Apostles, but also by succeeding generations of Christians. Like the Apostles, each one of Christ's followers is called to become a witness to his resurrection, above all in those human settings where forgetfulness of God and human disorientation are most evident.

If this is to happen, we need to remain in the risen Christ and in his love, as the First Letter of Saint John has reminded us: "He who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16). Jesus had repeated insistently to his disciples: "Abide in me... Abide in my love" (Jn 15:4, 9). This is the secret of the saints: abiding in Christ, joined to him like branches to the vine, in order to bear much fruit (cf. Jn 15:1-8). And this fruit is none other than love. This love shines forth in the testimony of Sister Jeanne Émilie de Villeneuve, who consecrated her life to God and to the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and the exploited, becoming for them and for all a concrete sign of the Lord's merciful love.

A relationship with the risen Jesus is the "atmosphere" in which Christians live, and in which they find the strength to remain faithful to the Gospel, even amid obstacles and misunderstandings. "Abiding in love": this is what Sister Maria Cristina Brando also did. She was completely given over to ardent love for the Lord. From prayer and her intimate encounter with the risen Jesus present in the Eucharist, she received strength to endure suffering and to give herself, as bread which is broken, to many people who had wandered far from God and yet hungered for authentic love.

An essential aspect of witness to the risen Lord is unity among ourselves, his disciples, in the image of his own unity with the Father. Today too, in the Gospel, we heard Jesus' prayer on the eve of his passion: "that they may be one, even as we are one" (Jn 17:11). From this eternal love between the Father and the Son, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5), our mission and our fraternal communion draw strength; this love is the ever-flowing source of our joy in following the Lord along the path of his poverty, his virginity and his obedience; and this same love calls us to cultivate contemplative prayer. Sister Mariam Baouardy experienced this in an outstanding way. Poor and uneducated, she was able to counsel others and provide theological explanations with extreme clarity, the fruit of her constant converse with the Holy Spirit. Her docility to the Spirit also made her a means of encounter and fellowship with the Muslim world. So too, Sister Marie Alphonsine Danil Ghattas came to understand clearly what it means to radiate the love of God in the apostolate, and to be a witness to meekness and unity. She shows us the importance of becoming responsible for one another, of living lives of service one to another.

To abide in God and in his love, and thus to proclaim by our words and our lives the resurrection of Jesus, to live in unity with one another and with charity towards all. This is what the four women Saints canonized today did. Their luminous example challenges us in our lives as Christians. How do I bear witness to the risen Christ? How do I abide in him? How do I remain in his love? Am I capable of “sowing” in my family, in my workplace and in my community, the seed of that unity which he has bestowed on us by giving us a share in the life of the Trinity?

When we return home, let us take with us the joy of this encounter with the risen Lord. Let us cultivate in our hearts the commitment to abide in God’s love. Let us remain united to him and among ourselves, and follow in the footsteps of these four women, models of sanctity whom the Church invites us to imitate.

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