

CANONIZATION OF FR MARCELLIN CHAMPAGNAT,  
FR GIOVANNI CALABRIA AND SR AGOSTINA PIETRANTONI

***HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II***

*Sunday, 18 April 1999*

1. *"He took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him"* (Lk 24:30-31).

We have just heard again these words of Luke's Gospel: they tell of Jesus' meeting with two disciples who were on their way to the village of Emmaus, the very day of the Resurrection. This unexpected meeting brings joy to the hearts of the two discouraged travelers and rekindles their hope. The Gospel says that when they recognized him, they left "that same hour and returned to Jerusalem" (Lk 24:33). They felt the need to tell the Apostles about "what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Lk 24:35).

The desire to bear witness to Jesus arises in the hearts of believers from their personal encounter with him. This is what happened with the three new saints whom today I have the joy of raising to the glory of the altars: Marcellin Benoît Champagnat, Giovanni Calabria and Agostina Livia Pietrantoni. They opened their eyes to the signs of Christ's presence: they adored him and received him in the Eucharist; they loved him in their neediest brethren; they recognized the signs of his saving plan in the events of daily life.

They listened to Jesus' words and sought his companionship, feeling their hearts burning within them. What an indescribable attraction the Lord's mysterious presence holds for those who accept him! This is what the saints experience. It is the same spiritual experience we can have as we travel the ways of the world toward our heavenly homeland. The Risen One also comes to meet us through his Word, revealing his infinite love to us in the sacrament of the Eucharistic Bread, broken for the salvation of all humanity. May the eyes of our spirit be opened to his truth and his love, as happened to Marcellin Benoît Champagnat, to Giovanni Calabria and to Sr Agostina Livia Pietrantoni.

2. *"Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the Scriptures?"*. The burning desire for God in the disciples of Emmaus was vividly felt by Marcellin Champagnat, who was a priest captivated by the love of Jesus and Mary. Because of his unshakeable faith, he remained faithful to Christ despite difficulties, in the midst of a world sometimes lacking the sense of God. We too are called to draw strength from contemplation of the risen Christ by learning at the school of the Virgin Mary.

St Marcellin proclaimed the Gospel with a burning heart. He was sensitive to the spiritual and educational needs of his time, especially to religious ignorance and the situations of neglect experienced in a particular way by the young. His pastoral sense is an example for priests: called to proclaim the Good News, they must also be true teachers for young people who seek to give meaning to their lives, by accompanying each of them on their way and explaining the Scriptures to them. Fr Champagnat was also a model for parents and teachers, helping them to look with hope at young people, to love them with a total love which fosters their true human, moral and spiritual formation.

Marcellin Champagnat also invites us to be missionaries, to make Jesus Christ known and loved as the Marist Brothers did even in Asia and Oceania. With Mary as our guide and Mother, the

Christian is a missionary and the servant of human beings. Let us ask the Lord to give us a heart that burns like that of Marcellin Champagnat, to recognize him and to be his witnesses.

3. "*This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses*" (Acts 2:32).

"*We are all witnesses*": the one speaking is Peter, in the name of the Apostles. In his voice we recognize those of countless other disciples who down the ages have made their life a witness to the Lord who died and rose again. The saints canonized today join this chorus. Fr Giovanni Calabria joins it, an exemplary witness to the Resurrection. He is resplendent for his fervent faith, genuine charity, spirit of sacrifice, love of the truth, zeal for souls and fidelity to the Church.

In the year dedicated to God the Father which leads us into the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, we are invited to put great emphasis on the virtue of charity. Giovanni Calabria's entire life was a living Gospel, overflowing with love: love for God and for his brothers and sisters, especially the very poor. The source of his love of neighbour was his boundless faith and his filial abandonment to the heavenly Father. He loved to repeat to his co-workers these words of the Gospel: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mt 6:33).

4. The Gospel ideal of the love of neighbour, especially towards the lowly, the sick and the abandoned, also led Agostina Livia Pietrantoni to the peak of holiness. Formed in the school of St Joan Antida Thouret, Sr Agostina realized that the love of Jesus calls for generous service to one's brothers and sisters, for it is in their faces, especially those of the neediest, that the face of Christ shines. "God alone" was the "compass" that guided all the decisions of her life. "You shall love", the first and fundamental commandment put at the beginning of the "Rule of Life of the Sisters of Charity", was the inspiration for the new saint's works of solidarity, the inner stimulus which sustained her in her self-giving to others.

In the First Letter of Peter, which we have just heard, we read that Redemption was not achieved "*with perishable things such as silver or gold*", but with "*the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot*" (1 Pt 1:18-19). Awareness of the infinite value of Christ's Blood shed for us led St Agostina Livia Pietrantoni to respond to God's love with an equally generous and unconditional love, expressed in humble and faithful service to the "dear poor", as she usually called them.

Ready to make any sacrifice, a heroic witness of charity, she paid the price for fidelity to Love with her blood. May her example and intercession obtain renewed apostolic zeal for the Institute of the Sisters of Charity, who this year will celebrate the second centenary of their foundation.

5. "*Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent*" (Lk 24:29). The two exhausted travelers begged Jesus to stay at their home and share their table.

Stay with us, risen Lord! This is also our daily longing. If you remain with us, our hearts are at peace.

Accompany us, as you did the disciples of Emmaus, on our personal and ecclesial journey.

Open our eyes, so that we can recognize the signs of your ineffable presence.

Make us docile in listening to your Spirit. Nourished each day by your Body and your Blood, we will be able to recognize you and serve you in our brothers and sisters.

Mary, Queen of Saints, help us keep our faith and hope rooted in God (cf. 1 Pt 1:21).

St Marcellin Benoît Champagnat, St Giovanni Calabria and St Agostina Livia Pietrantoni, pray for us!

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