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Talk of His Holiness John Paul II to the Audience after the Canonizations of the Martyrs of China. Rome, 2 October 2000

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**Address of John Paul II to
the Pilgrims who have come to Rome
for the Canonizations
Monday, 2 October 2000**

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. Yesterday we experienced an extraordinary moment of joy in St Peter's Square, as we celebrated the canonization of a number of saints. Today Providence has granted us the opportunity to meet, in order to prolong our thanksgiving to God, who gives the Church ever new models of Gospel life, and to contemplate together the exemplary figures of the *Martyrs in China*, of *María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, of *Katharine Drexel* and of *Josephine Bakhita*.

I greet you all again, pilgrims from various countries, and express my heartfelt appreciation for the moving scene you have created around this ecclesial event by your presence.

2. I now turn in a special way to the pilgrims who have come for the canonization of the 120 Martyrs in China. First of all you, faithful of Chinese origin, with whom I would like to share my deep joy over these sons and daughters of the Chinese people who are presented to the whole Church and to the entire world for the first time, with their heroic fidelity to Christ the Lord and the greatness of their souls. Yes, they are a true honour for the noble people of China!

My joy increases with the thought that closely united with us are all the faithful of Mainland China, who know - as you do - that in the martyrs they have not only an example to follow, but also intercessors with the Father. We need their help, in fact, because we are called to face daily life with the same dedication and fidelity that the martyrs showed in their time.

You all know that the majority of the 120 Martyrs shed their blood in historical periods which rightly have a special meaning for your people. In reality, they were tragic situations marked by violent social disturbances. With yesterday's canonization, the Church certainly does not wish to make a historical judgement on those periods, much less to justify certain actions taken by governments of the time which weighed heavily on the history of the Chinese people. She wishes, instead, to highlight the heroic fidelity of these worthy children of China, who did not let themselves be intimidated by the threats of a ferocious persecution.

I am also grateful for the presence of many pilgrims from the various countries of origin of the 33 missionaries who died as martyrs in China, together with those Chinese faithful to whom they had proclaimed the Gospel. Some people, through a partial and non-objective reading of history, see only limitations and errors in their missionary activity. If there were any - is man ever free of faults? - we ask forgiveness. But today we contemplate them in

glory and give thanks to God, who makes use of poor instruments for his great works of salvation. By the gift of their lives they proclaimed the saving Word and undertook important projects for human advancement. Be proud of them, you pilgrims who are their fellow citizens and brothers and sisters in faith! By their witness they show us that man is the true way for the Church: a way interwoven with profound and respectful intercultural dialogue, as Fr Matteo Ricci wisely and skilfully taught, a way consisting in the daily offering of one's life.

3. I affectionately greet the many pilgrims who have come to take part in the canonization of *St María Josefa of the Heart of Jesus Sancho de Guerra*, those from the Basque country, where the new saint was born and died, as well as those from other parts of Spain and various countries of Europe, America and the Philippines where the Servants of Jesus of Charity live and work, spreading the charism and teaching of this illustrious daughter of the Church. I offer you all my most cordial welcome.

You have a great love and devotion for St María Josefa. Her spiritual traits, in fact, reveal her generosity and self-giving in accepting the Lord's words: "I was sick and you visited me" (Mt 25: 36). Demanding with herself, she spared no effort or toil to serve the sick, founding the Servants of Jesus of Charity for them. She entrusted them with the mission of showing the merciful face of God to the suffering by helping to alleviate their pain with generous care for them at home and in hospitals. Her eloquent witness should help everyone to discover the beauty of a life consecrated totally to the Lord and the importance of service dedicated to wiping the tears of those who are suffering under the burden of illness.

4. It is a special joy for me to greet *Cardinal Bevilacqua* and the many pilgrims who have come to Rome for the canonization of *Mother Katharine Drexel*, especially her spiritual daughters, the *Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament*. St Katharine Drexel took to heart the words of Jesus to the young man in the Gospel: "If you seek perfection, go and sell your possessions, and give to the poor. You will then have treasure in heaven" (Mt 19: 21).

Devoting her family fortune to missionary and educational work among the poorest members of society, Mother Drexel made a trip to Rome, during which she asked Pope Leo XIII to send missionaries to help with the various projects she was funding. The Pontiff responded by inviting her to become a missionary herself. That was certainly a turning-point in St Katharine's life, and with great courage she placed her confidence in the Lord and gave her life and wealth totally to his service. Her apostolate bore fruit in the establishment of numerous schools for Native Americans and blacks, and served to raise awareness of the continuing need, even in our own day, to fight racism in all its manifestations. May the example of St Katharine Drexel be a beacon of light and hope inspiring all of us to make an ever greater gift of our time, talent and treasure for the benefit of those most in need.

5. I am pleased to greet as well the Sudanese Bishops and faithful who have journeyed to Rome for the canonization of *Sr Josephine Bakhita*. In a special way, I also greet the Daughters of Charity, the great Canossian family to which St Josephine Bakhita belonged. This holy daughter of Africa showed herself truly to be a child of God: the love and forgiveness of God were tangible realities that transformed her life in an extraordinary way. She even came to feel gratitude to the slave-traders who captured her and to those who

mistreated her: for, as she herself would later say, if these things had not happened, she would not have become a Christian or a professed sister in the Canossian community.

Through the intercession of St Bakhita let us pray that all men and women will come to know the saving presence of the Lord Jesus and thus be freed from slavery to sin and death. And in particular, let us be mindful of her homeland, Sudan, where war and violence continue to sow destruction and despair: may the Lord's healing hand touch the hearts of those responsible for this suffering and open the way to reconciliation, forgiveness and peace.

6. Dear friends, before saying goodbye, I would like to tell you of a burden that at the moment weighs heavily on my heart. For several days the Holy City of Jerusalem has been the scene of violent clashes, in which many have been killed or injured, including several children. Spiritually close to the families of those who have lost their lives, I make a heartfelt appeal to everyone responsible: may weapons be silenced, provocations be avoided and the way of dialogue be resumed. The Holy Land must be the land of peace and brotherhood. That is what God wants!

I ask the new saints to intercede, so that the hearts of all will turn to thoughts of mutual understanding and peace. With this wish I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you and to your loved ones.