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Homily of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints for the Beatification of the Servant of God Anna Kolesárová

The following is the homily that His Eminence Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, pronounced this morning in Košice, in Slovakia, on the occasion of the rite of beatification of the Servant of God Anna Kolesárová, a young layperson killed in 1944 by a Soviet soldier during the occupation by the Red Army:

Homily of Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Becciu

The reading of the biography of Blessed Anna Kolesarova, which we have just heard, inspires in us feelings of deep emotion and admiration. Fortified and well prepared by her father and mother who taught her to choose God before anything else with their teachings and their example, at the age of sixteen she faced the tragic dilemma of opting for life or death. Life meant giving in to the brutal instincts of a Soviet army soldier and betraying her own conscience; death instead brought her to the embrace of God, who had learned to love above all else. She was stabbed to death on the evening of Wednesday, 22 November 1944, before her father's eyes. She was killed for her resistance and firmness in defending her physical integrity and the virtue of chastity.

These were the only reasons for which Anna was murdered. There were no unexpected heroes and certainly no saints. Anna Kolesarova arrived prepared for martyrdom thanks to her robust spiritual life, nourished by daily prayer and attendance to the sacraments. Her faith made her strong and courageous in accepting martyrdom without hesitation. The Church in Slovakia can be proud of her daughter, who today is proposed as a model of life for believers, especially young people, to rediscover the beauty of authentic love, as well as the value of purity. The beatification of Anna Kolesarova reaffirms the value of chastity as an ideal of life, which if lived as a joyful gift to the Lord and to the brothers still exerts "an irresistible and promising charm" (Pius XII, 24 June 1950).

The young Anna Kolesarova is not the only one in the history of the Church to rise to the honours of the altar for having defended her virginity with martyrdom. Our thoughts turn spontaneously to Saint Maria Goretti, canonized

by Pope Pius XII in 1950, and also a victim of the blind passion of a man. But already in the early days of Christianity we find the twelve year old Saint Agnes, who became the model of the virgin martyr. We can remember the many peers of Blessed Anna, such as Blessed Albertina Berkenbrock, killed in Brazil on 15 June 1931, at the age of twelve; or the Italian Beata Antonia Mesina from Sardinia, killed on 17 May 1935; the Blessed Pierina Morosini of Bergamo, killed in 1957; the Servant of God Saint Scorese, from Bari, killed in 1991 at the age of 23. The martyrdom of virginity continues to bear witness to the power of love of and for God, love that always prevails over man's wickedness.

The martyrdom of Blessed Anna Kolesarova occurred in the violent context of the Second World War. Today we are far from the war; Europe has been at peace for over seventy years. Yet we cannot forget that European unity was also built with the contribution of so many faithful disciples of Christ, who suffered and paid with their lives for their fidelity to the ideals of the Gospel. There are many stories of faith that, like that of this girl, Anna, contain within themselves the painful vicissitudes of so many out-of-the-ordinary gestures, not written in history books, but which should be considered as an example to those who today conceive of Europe as an abstract reality and not formed by people who have believed and believe in indispensable values. The young Anna, with her martyrdom, testified that evil, violence and injustice can be opposed by good. Anna overcame evil with the good that she kept hidden within herself, like a treasure. That evening, charged with the pain and tears of a father, witness to the murder of his only daughter, the precious pearl of chastity won.

If we live in peace we can not forget that many countries are at war and know the atrocities experienced in the past in our Europe. How many little girls and women continue to be subject to violence! Even rape is considered a weapon of war, and remains unpunished, without being recognized as a crime against humanity. But how much violence is still perpetrated on women in our civilized Europe, where femicide continues to thrive and the woman's body is often the object of trade unworthy of the human person.

With this Beatification, the Church proclaims that purity still retains its appeal. You are testimony to this. It was a group of your students who, in 1989 after learning the story of Anna, decided to go on a pilgrimage to the places where she had lived. The funeral, in 1944, was held in secret, for fear of reprisals, without even the presence of a priest. But life is more eloquent than death and the testimony of Anna has come down to our days; many, especially young people, have rediscovered in this young martyr the beauty of a life spent to remain faithful to the love of Christ.

Anna did not fear to give her life to Jesus, to defend the precious treasure of chastity, becoming, according to the testimonies of her parish priest: *hostia sanctae castitatis*. Blessed Anna had found a treasure and to buy it she sold everything she had: her own life. Speaking to young people on the occasion of the World Youth Day in Krakow, in 2016, the Holy Father Francis asked: "Where is your treasure? On what treasure does your heart rest? Yes, our hearts can attach themselves to real or false treasures, they can find an authentic repose or they can fall asleep, becoming lazy and numb. The most precious thing we can have in life is our relationship with God. Are you convinced? Are you aware of the priceless value you have in the eyes of God?" Anna was convinced of it. "Do you know that you are loved and welcomed by him unconditionally, as you are?", The Pope continued. Anna knew it. "The period of youth", the Pope continued, "is the one in which the great affective wealth present in your hearts, the deep desire for a true, beautiful and great love. How much strength is there in this capacity to love and be loved! Do not allow this precious value to be distorted, destroyed or disfigured". Anna did not allow it.

By letting herself be killed rather than betraying true love, the words Christ pronounced on the Mount of Beatitudes were fulfilled in Anna: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (*Mt 5: 8*). Yes, Anna saw God! And she contemplated Him, face to face in the joy of Paradise. We are all aware of how essential it is to safeguard creation, to work for the purity of the air, water and food. It is equally and perhaps even more necessary to preserve the purity of what is most precious to us: our hearts and our interpersonal relationships.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the testimony of Blessed Anna Kolesarova become an example of strong human and spiritual attractiveness. I especially address you, dear young people, to remind you that the Church has great trust in you, placing hope in you for a re-flowering of the Christian community and the renewal of society.

For you, a Synod was convened by Pope Francis to respond to your expectations of a more authentic and more evangelical Church. We need it. Following the example and with the intercession of Blessed Anna, strive to live the Gospel with joy every day, both in easy and difficult situations. Blessed Anna teaches us that it is worth sacrificing everything for the Lord, without ever compromising one's conscience.

Know how to overcome the difficulties of life and try to keep your heart pure, that is to say rich in love, always in an attitude of giving and attentive to the needs of others, especially the weakest and most disadvantaged. Accept in your heart the Word of Jesus and let yourself be moulded by it: only Jesus can teach us to truly love, because He himself is Love. Do not be afraid of yourself, of the feelings and also of the temptations that may arise. Christ's forgiveness helps us resume the journey with courage, even after every fall. His merciful love heals every wounded heart and fills it with true joy to be authentic witnesses to the kingdom of God in the world. The testimony of Anna, martyr of chastity, also encourages you, married couples, to experience the beauty of an indissoluble and faithful union. With good we overcome every evil and with Christ we overcome every crisis in marriage.

Dear brothers and dear sisters, the greatest good we can have in life is our relationship with God. Looking at the martyrdom of the young Anna, daughter of this beloved land and of this Church, we pray that our hearts may cling to the true treasures of Christian virtues and go every day in search of the most precious pearl, which is God. Let us safeguard the purity of our hearts to be blessed and to be able to see God one day.

Let us say together: Blessed Anna, pray for us!
