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Apostolic Letter issued Motu Proprio “maiorem hac dilectionem” on the offer of life

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

Worthy of special consideration and honour are those Christians who, following more than closely the footsteps and teachings of the Lord Jesus, have voluntarily and freely offered their life for others and persevered with this determination unto death.

Certainly the heroic offering of life, inspired and sustained by charity, expresses a true, complete and exemplary imitation of Christ, and thus is deserving of that admiration that the community of faithful customarily reserves to those who have voluntarily accepted the martyrdom of blood or have exercised Christian virtues to a heroic degree.

With the support of the favourable opinion expressed by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints which, in its Plenary Session on 27 September 2016, carefully studied whether these Christians are deserving of beatification, I establish that the following norms be observed:

Art. 1

The *offer of life* is a new cause for the beatification and canonization *procedure*, distinct from the causes based on *martyrdom* and on *the heroism of virtues*.

Art. 2

The offer of life, in order that it be valid and effective for the beatification of a Servant of God, must respond to the following criteria:

- a) a free and voluntary offer of life and heroic acceptance *propter caritatem* of a certain and untimely death;
- b) a nexus between the offer of life and premature death;

- c) the exercise, at least as ordinarily possible, of Christian virtues before the offer of life and, then, unto death;
- d) the existence of a reputation of holiness and of signs, at least after death;
- e) the necessity of a miracle for beatification, occurring after the death of the Servant of God and through his or her intercession.

Art. 3

The celebration of the diocesan or eparchial Inquest and the relative *Positio* are regulated by the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus perfectionis Magister* of 25 January 1983, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* Vol. lxxv (1983, 349-355), and by the *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopis facendis in Causis Sanctorum* of 7 February of the same year, in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* Vol. lxxv (1983, 396-403), except as follows.

Art. 4

The *Positio* on the offer of life must respond to the *dubium*: *An constet de heroica oblatione vitae usque ad mortem propter caritatem necnon de virtutibus christianis, saltem in gradu ordinario, in casu et ad effectum de quo agitur.*

Art. 5

The following articles of the said Apostolic Constitution are thus modified:

Art. 1:

*“It is the right of diocesan Bishops or Bishops of the Eastern Rite and others who have the same powers in law, within the limits of their own jurisdiction, either ex officio or upon the request of individual members of the faithful or of legitimate groups and their representatives, to inquire about the life, virtues, **the offer of life** or martyrdom and reputation of sanctity, **of the offer of life or martyrdom**, alleged miracles, as well as, if it be the case, ancient cult of the Servant of God, whose canonization is sought”.*

Art. 2.5:

*“The inquiry into alleged miracles is to be conducted separately from the inquiry into virtues, **the offer of life or martyrdom**”.*

Art. 7.1:

*“to study the causes entrusted to them, together with collaborators from outside the Congregation, and to prepare the Positions on virtues, **on the offer of life or on martyrdom**”.*

Art. 13.2:

*“If the meeting judges that the cause was conducted according to the norms of law, it decides to which Relator the cause is to be assigned; the Relator, then, together with a collaborator from outside the Congregation, will prepare the Position on virtues, **on the offer of life or on martyrdom** according to the rules of critical hagiography”.*

Art. 6

The following Articles of the said *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab Episcopi facendis in Causis Sanctorum* are thus modified:

Art. 7:

*“A cause can be recent or ancient; it is called recent if the martyrdom or virtues **or the offer of life** of the Servant of God can be proved through the oral depositions of eye witnesses; it is ancient, however, when the proofs for martyrdom or virtues can be brought to light only from written sources”.*

Art. 10.1:

*“in both recent and ancient causes, a biography of any historical import of the Servant of God, should such exist, or otherwise an accurate, chronologically arranged report on the life and deeds of the Servant of God, on his virtues **or on his offer of life** or martyrdom, on his reputation of sanctity and of signs. Nor should anything be omitted which seems to be contrary or less favorable to the cause”.*

Art. 10.3:

*“in recent causes only, a list of persons who can help bring to light the truth about the virtues **or the offer of life** or the martyrdom of the Servant of God, and about his reputation of sanctity or of signs. Those with contrary opinions must also be included”.*

Art. 15.a:

*“Once the report has been accepted, the Bishop is to hand over to the promotor of justice or to another expert everything gathered up to that point so that he might formulate the interrogatories most effective in searching out and discovering the truth about the life of the Servant of God, his virtues, **his offer of life** or martyrdom, his reputation of holiness, **of the offer of life** or of martyrdom”.*

Art. 15.b:

*“In ancient causes, however, the interrogatories are only to consider the reputation of sanctity, **of the offer of life** or martyrdom existing until the present as well as, if it be the case, the cult given to the Servant of God in more recent times”.*

Art. 19:

*“In order to prove the martyrdom or the practice of virtues or **the offer of life** and the reputation of signs of the Servant of God who belonged to any institute of consecrated life, a significant number of the proposed witnesses must be from outside the Institute unless, on account of the particular life of the Servant of God, this should prove impossible”.*

Art. 32:

*“The inquiry on miracles is to be instructed separately from the inquiry on virtues or **the offer of life** or martyrdom and is to be conducted according to the norms which follow”.*

Art. 36:

*“Any solemn celebrations or panegyric speeches about Servants of God whose sanctity of life is still being legitimately examined are prohibited in Churches. Furthermore, one must also refrain, even outside of Church, from any acts which could mislead the faithful into thinking that the inquiry conducted by the Bishop into the life of the Servant of God and his virtues or martyrdom or **offer of life** carries with it the certitude that the Servant of God will be one day canonized”.*

All that I have deliberated with this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio*, I order be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even should it merit particular mention, and I establish that it be promulgated by publication in *L’Osservatore Romano*, entering into force on the same day of its promulgation and that, subsequently, it be inserted into the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter’s, on 11 July, Fifth Year of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS
