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Homily of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints during Mass for the Beatification of Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz

The following is the homily pronounced by His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, during the Mass for the beatification of Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz, priest of the Society of Jesus (+1926), held this morning in the Cathedral of Malaga, Spain:

Homily of Cardinal Angelo Becciu

“I tell you, whoever publicly acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man will also acknowledge before the angels of God” (Lk 12: 8).

Dear brothers and sisters,

These words we have heard in the Gospel remind us of our responsibility to be witnesses to Jesus. While He was surrounded by the crowd that followed Him, Jesus, before speaking to the thousands of people, addresses His disciples and reminds them of an event that will happen at the end of time: the final judgment. This will be pronounced by God the Father, a just judge, surrounded by angels, and in the decisive presence of the Son of man. This is none other than Jesus himself. He, while speaking to the disciples, is aware that the Father has intended Him to act as the Son of man on the last day, when He will act as the advocate of the just, that is, the One Who has the power to decide for each person before God’s tribunal. And this is what will happen: whoever is recognized by Him will be saved; whoever is not recognized by Him will be condemned. The intervention of the Son of man in our favour will depend on a specific fact: have we recognized Jesus or not in the course of our life? To recognize or deny him in this world will be decisive for our final destiny. The position we assume before Christ will be decisive for our eternal destiny; everything will be played out in two phrases: “he will acknowledge me” or “he will deny me”.

To recognize Christ means not to have the fear of declaring oneself Christians, being witnesses of His Gospel and of the values contained therein. To deny Christ means to reject both Him and His teaching of life, of love, of justice, of peace, of fraternity. Moreover, denying Christ means not having experienced His love!

And the acknowledgment of Jesus must be performed “before men”, that is, publicly; indeed, shortly before He Himself had remembered: “what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs” (*Lk* 12: 3). The love of God that has touched our hearts at some point in our life must come forth and become effusive and operative. If it were dry, everything would lose colour, meaning and light. We would be like branches separated from the vine, which serve only to be thrown onto the fire.

The faith professed with the lips must be manifested in an attitude of total love towards the world and towards the realities that surround us. The believer is called to be a living and penetrating presence of the Gospel in the cultural and social fabric in which he lives. In this sense, the Holy Father Francis affirmed: “Let us all remember this: one cannot proclaim the Gospel of Jesus without the tangible witness of one’s life. Those who listen to us and observe us must be able to see in our actions what they hear from our lips” (Homily in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside-the-Walls, 14 April 2013).

Blessed Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz, with the intense flavour of his faithful testimony of the Gospel to heroism, knew how to imbue the environment in which he lived the doctrine of Christ, thus contributing to the mission of the Church in the world. With his life, marked by good works, he offers us a clear example of sincere and profound faith, enriched by the sense of the presence of God and by the willingness to conform his existence to the divine will. The intense and fruitful apostolic ministry of this zealous priest and spiritual son of Saint Ignatius of Loyola was exercised on the foundation of faith and charity, all oriented towards the edification of souls and the salvation of those who were the object of his pastoral care. His lively and warm preaching became a decisive motive for the conversion of many, especially during the popular missions, through which he carried out intense and fruitful evangelization and social promotion.

He was a pastor following the heart of Christ and a missionary of faith and charity. He was a typical example of the “shepherd with the odour of his sheep”, as Pope Francis would say today. He was an intrepid herald of the Gospel, especially among the most humble and forgotten of the so-called “corralones”, the poorest neighbourhoods and also the most hostile to the Church of Malaga, spending his life for his neighbour, sustained by a great love for God. He found the fundamental value of his priestly and religious life precisely in the gift of himself and in the fervent ministry of the Word. With this essential feature of his pastoral approach, he enlisted a group of lay faithful committed to catechesis in rural areas, who even today, in the society of apostolic life of the rural Missionaries of the Doctrines, carry out an appreciable apostolate.

Where did all the apostolic ardour of Blessed Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz come from? From an intense spiritual life, which found its culmination in prayer and in the Eucharist: precisely from here he obtained the strength to be able to spend himself without reserve in the priestly ministry. This union with the Lord, the fruit of faith, was the reason for his hope and then manifested itself in love for others. In the prayerful encounter with Christ, heart to heart, he gradually matured in that knowledge of the Lord (cf. *Eph* 1, 17), to which Saint Paul invites us in the second reading, thus obtaining a “spirit of wisdom” (ibid.) through which he formed and guided consciences in the tireless activity of the confessional, a point of reference in the Church of the Heart of Jesus for the penitents of Malaga and elsewhere, of spiritual direction, of retreats and, above all, of the Spiritual Exercises preached to people of all social classes.

Dear brothers and sisters, what is the message that Blessed Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz offers to the Church and to today's society? He represents for all of us, especially for priests and consecrated persons, the example of a man who was not satisfied with what had already been conquered but who, in obedience to the demands of the spirit, intended to surrender himself to God with greater radicalism. This was at the origin of his decision to enter the Society of Jesus after twelve years of diocesan ministry. He responded to God’s love through a growing commitment to his ministry and love for the least, the rejected. How great a need there is, in our times, to open our hearts to the spiritual and material needs of so many of our brothers and sisters, who expect from us words of faith, consolation and hope, as well as gestures of attentive welcome and generous solidarity!

To present Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz, today, to the Church, means to reaffirm the priestly sanctity, but above all it means to make known a minister of God who made of his existence a constant, luminous and heroic path of total dedication to God and to brothers, especially the weakest. He felt co-responsible for spiritual and moral evils, as well as the social wounds of his time, and he was aware that he could not save himself without saving others.

This assumption of responsibility, this maturity of faith, this style of priestly and Christian presence in the world, are also necessary in the current ecclesial and social context, which is in extreme need of the presence and commitment of priests, consecrated persons and lay faithful who know how to bear witness with courage and firmness, with enthusiasm and impetus, to their own feeling of being with Christ, in Christ and for Christ, thus becoming credible witnesses of the Gospel.

The new Blessed represents for the Church today a model who encourages us to live of Christ, and for all of society he is a beacon capable of illuminating the history of our times.

May his example be with us and his intercession sustain us. Therefore, let us invoke him: Blessed Tiburcio Arnáiz Muñoz, pray for us!
