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Audience with the members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints

This morning, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, the Holy Father Francis received in audience the members of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its institution.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters,

I am pleased to meet the large family of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which carries out its work in the service of the universal Church with regard to the recognition of the holiness of those who have faithfully followed Christ. I greet with affection Cardinal Angelo Becciu, prefect of the Dicastery, and I thank him for his words. I greet the member cardinals and bishops; the secretary Msgr. Marcello Bartolucci, the under-secretary, the officials, the consultants and the postulators.

It is a significant occasion that motivates our meeting today: the Congregation for the Causes of Saints celebrates half a century of life this year. Indeed, on 8 May 1969, Saint Paul VI decided to replace the Congregation for the Sacred Rites with two Dicasteries: the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Congregation for Divine Worship. With this decision he made it possible to devote adequate resources, in terms of people and labour to two clearly distinct large areas, in order to better respond both to the ever more numerous requests of the particular Churches and to the Conciliar sensibility.

In this half-century of activity, your Congregation has examined a large number of biographical and spiritual profiles of men and women, to present them as models and guides of Christian life. The many beatifications and canonizations that have been celebrated in recent decades mean that the Saints are not unreachable human beings, but are close to us and can sustain us on the path of life. In fact, "they are people who ... experienced the daily toil of existence with its successes and failures, finding in the Lord the strength to rise again and again,

and to continue on their journey” (*Angelus*, 1 November 2019). And it is important to measure our coherence with the Gospel with different types of holiness, since “each saint is a mission, planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel” (Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, 19).

The witness of the Blesseds and Saints enlightens us, attracts us and also challenges us, because it is the “word of God” embodied in history and close to us. Holiness always permeates and accompanies the life of the pilgrim Church in time, often in a hidden and almost imperceptible way. Therefore, we must learn to “contemplate the holiness present in the patience of God’s people: in those parents who raise their children with immense love, in those men and women who work hard to support their families, in the sick, in the elderly religious who never lose their smile. ... Very often it is a holiness found in our next door neighbours, those who, living in our midst, reflect God’s presence” (*ibid.*, 7).

Your Dicastery is called to verify the various modalities of heroic holiness, both the one that shines most visible and the most hidden and least conspicuous, but equally extraordinary. Holiness is the true light of the Church: as such, it must be placed on the candelabrum so that it can illuminate and guide the path to God of all redeemed people. It is a daily verification carried out by your Dicastery, which since ancient times has been carried out with scrupulousness and accuracy in investigative research, with seriousness and skill in the study of procedural and documentary sources, with objectivity and rigour in the examination and at every level of judgment, concerning martyrdom, the heroic nature of virtues, the offering of life and the miracle. These are fundamental criteria, which are required by the seriousness of the subject matter, by legislation and by the just expectations of the people of God, who entrust themselves to the intercession of the Saints and are inspired by their example of life.

By following this path, the work of the Congregation makes it possible to clear the field of any ambiguity or doubt, achieving full certainty in the proclamation of holiness. I can therefore only exhort each of you to continue along the path carved out and followed for around four centuries by the Congregation of the Sacred Rites, and continued for the last fifty years by the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints. In this I encourage superiors, cardinals, and bishops who are members of the Dicastery, and all officials.

The consultors, in the historical, theological and medical fields, are called to carry out their work with full freedom of conscience, carefully studying the cases entrusted to them and formulating the relative judgments with mature reflection, in an impartial manner and without taking into account any conditioning, from whatever side they may come from. The Regulations and practice of the Dicastery, as well as the vigilance of the Superiors, should favour a relationship of absolute independence between the authors of the individual vows and those who form or coordinate the particular Congresses. It is a matter of always keeping in mind the specific aims of the Causes, which are the glory of God and the spiritual good of the Church, and are closely linked to the search for truth and evangelical perfection.

For their part, postulators should be increasingly aware that their function requires an attitude of service to the truth and cooperation with the Holy See. They should not allow themselves to be guided by material visions and economic interests, should not seek their own personal affirmation and, above all, should avoid anything that is in contradiction with the meaning of the ecclesial work which they carry out. May the postulators never fail to be aware that the Causes of beatification and canonization are realities of a spiritual nature; not only procedural, spiritual. Therefore, they must be treated with marked evangelical sensitivity and moral rigour. Indeed, once, with Cardinal Amato, we spoke about the necessity of the miracle. It takes a miracle because it is precisely the hand of God there. Without a clear intervention of the Lord, we cannot go ahead with the causes of canonization.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank you for your diligent service to the whole Church. Through your work, you are especially at the side of the bishops to support their commitment to spreading the awareness that holiness is the deepest need of every baptized person, the soul of the Church and the priority aspect of her mission. I entrust your daily work to the motherly intercession of Mary, Queen of Saints, and as I ask you to pray for me, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to you.

