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Audience with pilgrims from El Salvador, in thanksgiving for the beatification of Fr. Rutilio Grande

This morning, the Holy Father Francis received in audience, in the Vatican Apostolic Palace, a group of pilgrims from El Salvador giving thanks for the beatification of Fr. Rutilio Grande.

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

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers in the episcopate,

Mr. Vice-President of the nation, your wife,

dear brothers in Christ:

I thank Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador, for his kind and optimistic words, and all of you for the deference you have shown in organizing this pilgrimage to the tomb of Peter, to give thanks to God for the beatification of the martyrs Rutilio Grande García, Cosme Spessotto, Manuel Solórzano and Nelson Rutilio.

The martyrs, as we all know, are “a free gift of the Lord”, as Blessed Cosimo Spessotto affirmed, the most precious gift that God can give to the Church, for in them that “greater love” that Jesus showed us on the cross is realized. Their blood is not united to that of the Saviour simply by virtue of the imitation of the disciple to his master, or of the servant to his Lord, but is a form of mystical union, which the Fathers have seen represented in the drops of blood that covered the body of Jesus in Gethsemane (cf. Saint Augustine, *Exposition of Psalm 85*). These drops, like rubies embroidered on the seamless robe of Jesus, are precious jewels for which we give thanks first of all to God. It is He who called them to this combat, who gave them the strength to achieve victory, and who now presents them to us for our edification and as a path to follow, because the problems are not solved, the struggle for justice and for the love of peoples continues. And in order to fight, words are not enough,

doctrines are not enough; they are necessary, but they are not enough; witness is what we need, and that is what we have to follow. That is why I say that they are a gift for our edification, an immense gift, both for the Church on her pilgrimage in El Salvador and for the universal Church, and their significance will always remain in the mystery of God.

This reality can and must be deepened in our communities. It is interesting to note that the first fruit of the death of the Blessed was the restoration of unity in the Church. This fact was highlighted by Saint Oscar Romero at the funeral mass of Fr. Rutilio Grande, on 14 March 1977, when he wrote with emotion how “the clergy are united with their bishop”, assuming that it is in this witness of unity that “the faithful understand that there is an illumination of faith that leads us, [...] a motivation of love”. I felt the life of these martyrs very much, I lived it a lot, I lived the conflict of pro and con. And it is a personal devotion: at the entrance to my study, I have a small square with a piece of the bloody alb of Saint Óscar Romero and a small catechesis of Rutilio Grande, to remind me that there are always injustices to fight for, and they showed the way.

Saint Óscar Romero concluded his homily by saying: “let us understand this Church, let us be inspired by this love, let us live this faith and I assure you that there is a solution to our great problems”. There is a solution. It seems to me that this could be a good way to “ruminate” in prayer this word that, through the blood of these witnesses, God has spoken to the Church of El Salvador. Our realities are certainly not those of that time, but the call to commitment, to fidelity, to put faith in God and love for our brothers and sisters in first position, to live in hope, is timeless, because it is the Gospel, a living Gospel, which is not learned from books, but from the life of those who have handed down to us the deposit of faith.

At this time when we are called to reflect on the synodality of the Church, we have in these martyrs the best example of this “walking together”, for Fr. Grande was martyred while “walking towards his people” (cf. Saint Oscar Romero, *Homily 14 March 1977*). This is what each of you, bishops, priests and pastoral agents, ask the Lord today, to be like that “priest - Rutilio - with his peasants - Blessed Manuel and Blessed Nelson - always on the way to his people, to identify with them, to live with them” (cf. *ibid.*). This same message appears in a homily by Fr. Rutilio, when he says that this journey together cannot merely be a “stroll” to get to know new things, it is not a stroll. No. A walk with the saint in a devotional image, for example, implies above all bearing witness to the faith, the hope, the love that this saint left us in his life.

The message of these martyrs calls us to identify with their passion which, as we have said, is the actualization of Christ’s passion in the present moment, embracing the cross that the Lord offers to each one of us personally. And this project of a journey, of a spiritual journey, of prayer, of struggle, must sometimes take the form of denunciation, of protest, never political, but always evangelical. As long as there is injustice, as long as the just demands of the people are not met, as long as a country shows signs of not maturing on the path of the fullness of the People of God, our voice against evil, against a lukewarm attitude in the Church, against everything that leads us away from human dignity and the preaching of the Gospel, must be heard.

The cross of Jesus is the cross of all, and it is the cross of the Church as the body of Christ, which follows him to the point of sacrifice. Let us encourage one another, let us think of those who are in difficulty among our people: the poorest, the imprisoned, those who cannot make ends meet, the sick, the discarded. And let us thank God that we can walk with the strength of faith to serve our people. May God bless you and may Our Lady watch over you. Thank you.
