

CCEE
Saturday 5 October 2019
Morning Mass – Homily

My brothers and sisters, in these days as we seek to identify and appreciate all the signs of hope in Europe, we must look with realism and honesty. These are difficult times, with ways of life without reference to God and mentalities that wish to dismiss religious faith, such as ours, as nothing more than infantile immaturity that insults human rationality.

But our discernment is more profound than that and during our time together we have already signalled so many reasons to be confident that the Holy Spirit of God never ceases to be poured out on our world.

A fruit of the Holy Spirit is holiness of life. Our eyes, then, must be trained to see such holiness. And in this we are tutored by our holy Mother, the Church.

In a week's time, five new examples of holiness of life will be held before us, for our tutoring and imitation. These are the five saints to be canonised next Sunday.

Three of them are from our continent. They point to different aspects of the holiness of life which we can find in so many people and places today. By looking at them we shall be more attuned to the holiness of life that surrounds us.

Let me take first Sister Giuseppina Vannini, born in Rome and who died in 1911. She was, as many of you will know, the founder of the Daughters of Saint Camillus. That is not why

she is being canonised. No, it is because of the way in which she bore suffering, both her own and that of those closest to her, especially Fr Luigi Tezza. Giuseppina never allowed herself to be overwhelmed by bitterness or obsessed with blaming others for her suffering. She entrusted herself to the Lord and always placed her hope in him. Even when everything seemed lost, she sought his will. Her life teaches us to trust in the Lord, to hold firm to his call and respond generously. Then, she taught, our lives can become a gift of love to all whom we meet.

Here, then is our first lesson: look to those countless people who carry suffering with dignity and calmness, who open their hearts to the suffering of others and who do indeed make a gift of their lives. How much hope we can find in that wonderful fruit of the Holy Spirit, not letting it pass by unnoticed. Let us wake up to the goodness around us!

The second saint is from Switzerland and her name is Marguerite Bays. Perhaps she is less well known to us. She stands for all those who are faithful to their family, no matter its difficulties and failures. She is a saint for the family. One of her brothers, of the seven children of her family, was violent and served a prison sentence; another brother fathered a child outside marriage, a child for whom Marguerite cared. Her sister had to return home after the breakdown of her marriage and a sister in law consistently humiliated Marguerite, making life nearly impossible for her. Marguerite remained faithful, merciful and loving towards them all and with those same qualities reached far beyond her immediate family into the small local community in which she spent her life.

Here is a perfect example of holiness living next door to us, not in a professed religious life, but deep in the reality of family life, seemingly hidden yet radiant for those who have the eyes to see.

The third saint, to guide our reflections on signs of hope comes from England and is, of course, John Henry Newman. There is so much to say about him and I have little time. I could dwell on his courage in pursuit of truth, to the price he paid for following his intellect, his conscience and entering the Catholic Church. I could point to his forty years as a faithful priest, working quietly among the poor in a parish in Birmingham. But I want to speak, briefly, of something else, perhaps less well known.

Many of you will know of the White Rose Movement that formed in Munich during 1942. Young students wrote and distributed pamphlets denouncing Nazi lies and atrocities. They gave accounts of what was actually happening on the eastern front in Russia, informed by one of their group, Fritz Hartnagel, who was posted there with the German Army. The young members of this group were quickly arrested, tried and executed.

What is less well known is that this group drew much inspiration and courage from the writings of Cardinal Newman on Christian conscience. Fritz Hartnagel carried volumes of Newman's sermons with him to the Eastern Front, saying that reading them was like taking 'drops of precious wine'. Under interrogation, one of the members of the White Rose Movement, the young Sophie Scholl, said that their

actions were carried out under the dictate of their Christian conscience.

Newman still inspires young people today. He helps us to understand that the source of so much holiness and hope lies in that inner sanctum of conscience, 'an echo of the voice of God enlightening each person to moral truth in specific situations'.

This is such an important witness, then and now. Today there are many who act with great courage, fuelled by a desire to do what indeed they see to be right. They too, perhaps not always fully formed, are a great sign of hope for us.

Three saints; three pointers to the holiness that is in our midst. And there are two more: Sister Dulce Lopes Ponte, known as Brazil's 'Mother of the Poor' and from India Sister Mariam Thresia who courageously promoted the well-being of women in face of much opposition. But no more time.

As we continue our reflections, let us draw strength from these newly proclaimed saints and from the words of the Gospel: 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.'

Amen.

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster