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Press Conference to present the Study Conference “Holiness Today” (Augustinianum Patristic Institute, 3 to 6 October 2022)

At 11.30 this morning, a press conference was livestreamed from the Holy See Press Office to present the study conference “Holiness Today”, organized by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, to take place in Rome at the *Augustinianum* Patristic Institute, from 3 to 6 October 2022.

The speakers were: His Eminence Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints; Archbishop Fabio Fabene, secretary of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints; and Professor Cecilia Costa, lecturer in sociology of cultural processes and sociology of education at the University of Rome *Tre*.

The following are their interventions:

Intervention of His Eminence Cardinal Marcello Semeraro

Holiness is a theme dear to Pope Francis. During his pontificate, the number of canonized saints continues to grow, and he wrote about “the call to holiness in the contemporary world” in 2018 in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, so as to “repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time, with all its risks, challenges and opportunities” (no. 2). The Conference “Holiness Today” stems from the need to bring into dialogue with today's world the themes on which the work for the Causes of beatification and canonization is carried out on a daily basis. It is not an “alternative” moment, neither to what the Dicastery does every day, nor to the moments of exchange and formation that are organized and held internally. To organize a conference means, for the Dicastery, to carry out a task of inquiry and in-depth study, capable of involving experts in theology and spirituality, society and communication, to perform its “service” in a more complete way (cf. *Praedicate Evangelium*, I, 8 and II, 1). Already in the past the Congregation for the Causes of Saints has organized moments of reflection open to all, discussions and symposia on specific themes regarding canonized holiness, such as scientific questions – for instance, the *Colloquium Medicorum* of 1988 – or more spiritual aspects, such as *Eucharist, Holiness and Sanctification* in the year 2000. The intention is now to make these appointments more regular.

The task of the Dicastery is not to “manage” holiness, but to “recognize” it through specific and coordinated phases of discernment. Therefore, it was decided that the Conference this year would focus on two essential aspects of the Causes of beatification and canonization. The first aspect is that of the “reputation for holiness”, which must be ascertained prior to the instruction of any diocesan inquest into a Servant of God. The “reputation for holiness” combines two nuances: on the one hand, the conviction of the faithful regarding the holiness of a person, a conviction that stems from the perception of an exceptional quality and has as its consequence the request for intercession for one’s own or others’ needs; on the other, the capacity that this exceptionality awakens in the People of God the awareness of being all called to be saints: what the Second Vatican Council called the “universal vocation to holiness” (*LG*, chapter V). Canonized holiness, which proposes to the Church intercessors and models to be inspired by, has primarily this aim: through the identification of exemplary figures, who go beyond ordinary life, to call the baptized to live their everyday life in a holy manner. Saint John Henry Newman, in his *Prayers and Meditations*, proposed his *Brief Way to Perfection* (27 September 1856) as follows: “Perfect is he, who does his daily actions perfectly, and to find perfection we have no need at all to go beyond these limits”.

Linked to this first aspect is the second theme on which the Conference intends to focus. It is a reflection on the meaning of Christian “heroism”. From the earliest centuries, the Church has cherished first of all the memory of its martyrs and then also its “confessors”, as true “heroes” of the faith. Now, it is a question of understanding what heroism means today, especially in relation to the exercise of virtues, martyrdom and the offering of one’s life. The Second Vatican Council further writes: “In the lives of those who, sharing in our humanity, our however more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ, God vividly manifests his presence and his face to men” (*Lumen Gentium*, 50). In *Gaudete et exsultate*, Pope Francis explains that “The processes of beatification and canonization recognize the signs of heroic virtue, the sacrifice of one’s life in martyrdom, and certain cases where a life is constantly offered for others, even until death. This shows an exemplary imitation of Christ, one worthy of the admiration of the faithful” (no. 5). It is easy to understand that a definition of Christian heroism has a very special resonance in today’s cultural context, where so often the relative seems to prevail over the true, and instability gets the better of any courageous life project.

I therefore sincerely hope that our Conference on “Holiness Today” will mark an important moment of reflection on the Causes of beatification and canonization, not only because of the work that the Dicastery carries out, but also because of the repercussions that it inevitably has for the believing conscience of the People of God.

Intervention of Archbishop Fabio Fabene

The programme of the Convention is divided into four days, during which 11 speeches, 5 communications and 2 round tables are scheduled. In addition to our Cardinal Prefect and myself, Archbishop Bruno Forte and Bishop Orazio Francesco Piazza will take the floor. Religious men and women as well as university professors and figures from the field of communications will also speak. The conclusion of the conference will be the Audience with Pope Francis on Thursday 6 October.

In the afternoon of 3 October, after the inauguration of the conference by His Eminence Cardinal Semeraro, the work will concentrate on the theme of holiness, and holiness today. The prologue has been entrusted to the archbishop of Chieti-Vasto. Dr. Marco Tarquinio, editor of *Avvenire*, will then take the floor, along with the bishop of Sessa Aurunca.

The subsequent days will be focused on the two aspects of Christian heroism (4 October) and the reputation for holiness (5 October).

In the morning of the first day, four religious, all university professors, have been invited to speak. They will talk about how saints cannot be relegated to the past, but are a constant presence in the life of the Church; how holiness is an ever-urgent call and a decisive proposal for the man of every age. At the same time, attention will be focused on the Beatitudes, just as the Holy Father did by devoting a large part of *Gaudete et exsultate* to a

rereading of the Beatitudes according to Matthew. Pope Francis writes: “The Beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practise them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, or complacency and our pride” (n. 65).

The afternoon session will include three sessions. In the first, the relationship between the universal call to holiness and canonizable holiness will be investigated. In the second there will be a comparison between holiness and two cultural paradigms, the culture of life and the culture of waste; Professor Andrea Riccardi, founder of the *Sant’Egidio* Community, will deal with the latter theme. Finally, Professor Francesco Giorgino, professor of communication at *LUISS Guido Carli* in Rome, will moderate the round table with some of the speakers.

On Wednesday 5 October, the day will be dedicated to exploring the theme of the reputation for holiness, with a special focus on new technologies and the most current forms of social communication. One cannot speak today of the “reputation for holiness” without taking into account the dissemination potential of the new tools, which have become not only available but also increasingly popular. While they can artificially create “fame”, for which careful discernment is required, on the other hand we know the contribution that, for example, social networks have in spreading ideas, proposing models and suggesting ideals of life. This was known by a young man like Carlo Acutis, who became Blessed in 2020, and who put his passion for modern means of communication at the service of the Gospel; it is no coincidence that he is one of the most famous young Blesseds in the world, known and venerated everywhere.

In the morning we will be accompanied by the reflections of Professor Cecilia Costa, Fr. Federico Lombardi, S.J., former director of the Holy See Press Office, and Professor Mario Morcellini.

In the afternoon, a theologian, a journalist and the director of the Vatican Museums will offer, each from their specific perspective, three different faces of the reputation for holiness today. This will be followed by the round table moderated by Msgr. Dario Viganò.

It is an intense programme, which we would like not so much to exhaust the topic, but to offer ideas for further study and reflection on these issues, which guide the work of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints. If I had to pick out a transversal element of the whole conference, it seems to me that the theme of culture is decisive. The challenge is to find ways in which Church and world can share a religious and ethical code, of concepts and experiences. I am always reminded of a sentence that Saint Paul VI wrote in the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* at no. 20: “The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time”. The Saints of our time, with the concreteness of their witness, in fact contribute to overcoming that dramatic gap. The Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, with its daily work and the organization of this conference, wants to make this certainty its own.

Intervention of Professor Cecilia Costa

Every age offers its own interpretations on life and death, good and evil, eternity and truth. Every historical context has generated its own saints. Even in our advanced modernity characterized by continuous *metamorphosis*, an anorexia of meanings, an excess of technology and a historical acceleration, there is space for holiness. Ours is an age that, on the one hand, offers ample technological communicative possibilities, and on the other, produces socio-anthropological, symbolic-value dysfunctions, to the extent that *happiness* has contracted into the *mythology* of consumption; faith has become *non-binding* personal *preference*; time is summed up in a single *a-chronic* dimension of *here* and *now*; freedom is understood as a right to go beyond every limit, obligation, rule.

However, precisely in today’s cultural crisis, in which we witness the decomposition of every canon, assumption and truth, the “yearning for the infinite” (Cardinal Bergoglio) is once more gaining ground; we are in search of a *hope beyond time* and there is a need for *witnesses* of faith, who manifest this hope that goes “beyond” the

imminent horizon (*Spe Salvi*). Today, more than ever, there is a need for saints – who have been warriors, martyrs, initiators of monastic orders, bishops, popes, and, in post-modernity, “people next door” – because the example of their “fullness of life” can help contemporary humanity to reconcile the *secularity* of the world with the *radicality* of the Gospel (to paraphrase Saint Thomas). It is precisely in our historical complexity, which has given in to a *self-sufficient humanism*, that the importance of the presence of the saints is felt, because they are the authentic interpreters of *love that saves*.

Contemporary reality needs the hope, love, energy and courage of holiness because, as Pope Francis writes in *Gaudete et exultate*, the saints bear witness to an experience that goes against the grain of the logic of the moment. It suffices to think of Teresa d’Ávila whose text *The Interior Castle* is capable of responding both to the existential anguish of the men of her time, and to the vertigo of meaning of modern humanity. Or, to recall Pier Giorgio Frassati who, responding with conviction to the *con-vocation* of love of God, succeeded in his brief existence to combine the *extraordinary* with the *ordinary*. Or, again, Carlo Acutis, who explained to his peers, the *millennials*, how love for Jesus can coexist with passion for the internet.

The saints are *not a vestige of the past*, but a *plan for the future*, because they have always been the “heroes” of the *altruistic and creative love* that, as Sorokin underlined, takes the Sermon on the Mount as its *sublime model*.

The saints are part of history, but they also *make history*, and their “holy history” can enable a cultural, social, and individual “conversion” from *selfishness* to *altruism*, able to restore harmony, solidarity, brotherhood and goodness to the world.
