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SAINT MUTIEN -MARIE

(1841 - 1917)

POSSESSES ALL THE GREATNESS OF THE HUMBLE

Homily for the canonization.

John Paul II

December 10th, 1989

1. "*Repent*, because the Kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (Mt 3:2).

During this season of *Advent* the Church addresses to us once again John the Baptist's invitation. She addresses it to each one of us! John, the Precursor, was alone in the desert, in austerity. He had no other task than to prepare the way of the Lord. His voice was heard, and the crowds arrived. At John's invitation they submitted to baptism, acknowledging their sins. Their path was one of conversion.

With John, this crowd is preparing the way of the Lord. *In fact, the Kingdom of heaven is now at hand!* John announces that "he who is to come after me is mightier than I" (cf. Mt 3:11). The last and greatest of the prophets announces the *Messiah*, the shoot that has blossomed from the stump of Jesse, the one whom the prophet Isaiah awaited.

2. When we listen to the prophets today, when we listen to John Baptist who leads us on the way of the Messiah, we are not only hearing the echo of an *ancient message*. It is the *Church of Christ* which in every generation, in this generation at the end of the second millennium, returns to say that the Kingdom of heaven is at hand in the Messiah foretold by the prophets.

He is *coming* into our midst, upon whom rested "the Spirit of the Lord, a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the Lord..." (Is 11:2).

If *conversion* is asked of us, it is in order to welcome him who is coming, to receive the gifts of justice and peace, to become peacemakers because, as the prophet Isaiah says, "he shall judge the poor with

justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted" (Is 11:4). To prepare for his coming, to become his disciples, it is necessary to let ourselves be transformed by his justice and guided by his wisdom. We understand that through "the spirit of wisdom and of understanding" (Is 11:2) the Messiah discovers our sin and invites us to be conformed to the law of love and truth of his Kingdom.

3. The prophet says again of the Messiah that "*justice* shall be the band around his waist" (Is 11:5). He will inaugurate a *kingdom of peace*: "Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, ...the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them... There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain" (Is 11:6, 9).

Is this an illusory message, since the endless conflicts in so many parts of the world seem to render it vain? It would be so if this message did not come from God, if it were not addressed to consciences, if it were not of itself a source of justice, justice according to God, God's *justice!* Isaiah's message, then the ardent appeal of the Precursor, and finally the coming of Jesus himself bring the *fruits of peace* to the hearts and actions of those who allow themselves to be converted.

John the Baptist proclaims the urgency of conversion: "Even now the axe lies at the root of the trees" (Mt 3:10). Let us heed this warning well: *each person is called to produce the good fruits of justice and peace*: each moment, each act, has its importance in the function of the Kingdom which is coming and whose spirit we must not contradict. Every person, no matter how modest he or she may be, is irreplaceable in the human family; the humblest act inspired by love gives glory to God.

4. Today the Church exalts a very simple religious. Throughout his life he fulfilled the Lord's will without delay. Faithful to the demands and the renunciations of his rule, *St Mutien-Marie* has all the greatness of the humble.

Throughout sixty years of religious life lived in obscurity, he *practised the observances of the Brothers of the Christian Schools* with a total generosity. For him, nothing was more important than obedience, nothing more joyous than poverty, nothing more urgent than the obligations of the common life, the acceptance of his students or whoever came to him. Faithful to the little tasks which were entrusted to him, *day by day* Brother Mutien *gave his life* to the Lord, in a self-renunciation that became natural to him. For this reason he is already an exemplary figure; he achieved holiness in routine things, in following docilely the way of the sons of St John Baptist de La Salle.

A simple teacher of music and drawing, or busy with the many services needed in a large educational institution, Brother Mutien lived constantly illumined by

God's presence. His *sense of prayer* impressed his confreres and students, to the point that they called him "the Brother who prayed always".

He is an admirable *model of the "life of prayer"*. He spent as much time as he could in adoration and meditation *before the Blessed Sacrament*; he radiated with joy each day in communicating in the Body of Christ; he never began a task without invoking the Lord and venerating the Cross. At every moment, his rosary in hand, *he invoked the Blessed Virgin* with a total devotion as these words show us: "To arrive at an intimate union with our Lord, take the way of Mary where there is no task or shadow which could stop your progress towards Jesus" (Letter of 3 Jan. 1914).

By the intensity of his spiritual life, St Mutien-Marie "prepared the way of the Lord, making straight his path" (cf. Mt 3:3). Those who saw him at prayer were struck at finding in him "nothing but simple sincerity". In the man of God there is something like a transparency which disposes him to give authentic witness to the Lord present in him. *The Word of God dwelled in him*, the spiritual writers nourished him; *from them he drew a wisdom* which he naturally communicated. We think of the words of Isaiah which we have heard this day: "The earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as water covers the sea" (Is 11:9).

5. At Malonne Saint Mutien-Marie had a hidden influence which owed everything to the living source of his piety, his prayer. The children in the catechism classes, the students who endlessly gathered around him, understood that the strength of this man came from his intimacy with God and that his unfailing charity was more valuable than any other talent.

His message is not expressed in terms of this world's wisdom. Rather, he shows his Brothers, teachers, and students the true fruitfulness of a life that is humbly offered. He could say, like the Psalm in today's liturgy, that it is God "who shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save" (Ps 71 [72]:13).

He considered himself weak and poor, and that enabled him to help whoever confided their troubles to him. After his death they spontaneously recognized him as the intercessor whom the Church now honours, a friend of God who remains a brother to men.

With the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, with his compatriots from Belgium, we are awestruck by the influence of this humble religious. Today we give thanks for the holiness of Brother Mutien-Marie. We ask him to inspire today's teachers

that they will know how to accompany young people on the path of faith, to open them to the beauty of the Gospel message, to invite them to renew ceaselessly the conversion which Christ the Saviour asks for, to take an active part in the Church's life.

6. The long path of holiness which Brother Mutien travelled seems to be a faithful response to the words of St Paul which the Church has us listen to on this second Sunday of Advent: the holy books are written "for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4). The holy Brother gave proof of endurance and encouragement. May he help us along this path to take our support from the power of the Word of God to face the challenges in the lives of each one of us, the challenges of each of our families or communities.

St Paul added, "May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus" (Rom 15:5). After the example of the holy Brother of Malonne who was entirely imbued with the spirit of Christ, we will welcome better the Saviour who is coming among us if, in unity, we receive the Word and act in communion with the same Spirit and share the same gifts. "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). To live the season of Advent is to prepare the days when "justice will flower", the days when we shall know "profound peace" (cf. Ps 71 [72]:7), the days when "all the tribes of the earth (shall) be blessed" (ibid., 17).

7. Brothers and Sisters, the example of a saint who lived close to us can strengthen in us the courage of hope. Brother Mutien-Marie goes before us on the path of fidelity to God's invitation and of tireless service of our brothers and sisters. We ask his intercession, that we may be given in our day to make straight the way of the Lord and of man, which is the path of the Church. We invoke his intercession that we may be given the ability to produce fruits which express true conversion, to proclaim ceaselessly the Kingdom of heaven which is now at hand in him who baptizes in the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 3:2-11).

And thus we can "with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Rom 15:6).
