

Remembering holiness in the particular Church

Pastoral guidelines for remembering the Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God in each diocese of Spain

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INDEX

INTRODUCTION

I. THE WITNESS OF HOLINESS IN OUR TIME

1. Letter of the Holy Father Francis. Full text
2. Pastoral keys
 - a) Holiness – a call to holiness today
 - b) The saints “next door”
 - c) Models of holiness for everyday life
 - d) In the communion of saints
3. Application in the pilgrim Church in Spain
 - a) Evangelizing at the crossroads of existence
 - b) In the footsteps of the saints in the particular Church

II. THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS AND THE CANONICAL PROCESS

1. The universal call to holiness
2. The itinerary of the beatification and canonization processes
3. Considerations for remembrance in the dioceses
 - a) The different denominations
 - b) The reputation for sanctity and the signs of sanctity
 - c) Public worship and private devotion
4. The pastoral care of holiness

III. POSSIBLE PASTORAL ACTIONS

- A) Coordinated by the Office for the Causes of Saints
 1. Publications on the Venerables and Servants of God
 2. Aids for remembrance at liturgical moments
- B) In the particular Churches
 1. Routes of holiness
 2. Popular piety: pilgrimages, brotherhoods and other devotions
 3. Study days and testimonies of local sanctity
 4. Media and cultural initiatives

CONCLUSION

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INTRODUCTION

The Jubilee Year we are celebrating brings to our hearts the message of St. John Paul II at the beginning of the new millennium, reminding us of “the words with which Jesus, after having spoken to the crowds from Simon’s boat, invited the Apostle to “put out into the deep” in order to catch fish: “*Duc in altum* (Lk 5:4). [...] These words ring out for us today, and they invite us to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future with confidence: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever’ (Heb 13:8) [...] Let us go forward in hope! A new millennium is opening before the Church like a vast ocean upon which we shall venture, relying on the help of Christ”². Twenty-five years later, the Holy Father Francis invites us to rekindle hope, which is born of love and founded on the love that flows from the Heart of Jesus, pieced on the cross, being docile to grace, under the action of the Holy Spirit,³ who nourishes us with his gifts and places companions by our side along the way, who help, comfort and inspire us to lead a fruitful, full and holy Christian life. They are the Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God of our lands, whom we remember with gratitude in order to live enthusiastically the evangelizing mission that is incumbent upon us at this time in history.

I. THE WITNESS OF HOLINESS IN OUR TIME

On 16 November 2024, Pope Francis published a *Letter for the Remembrance in the particular Churches of their own Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God*. In it, the Holy Father made it possible for the “pastoral directions and guidelines [to] eventually be drawn up and proposed” by the Episcopal Conferences.

In this first part, we will focus on the content of the *Letter* and the pastoral consequences it may have for diocesan life.

1. Letter of the Holy Father Francis. Full text

With the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate*, I wished to repropose to the faithful disciples of Christ of the contemporary world the universal calling to holiness. It is at the centre of the teaching of Vatican Council II, which recalled that “all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity” (*Lumen Gentium*, 40). Thus, we are all called to welcome God’s love which “has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit” (*Rm* 5:5). Indeed, holiness, rather than being the fruit of human effort, is making space for the action of God. Everyone can recognize in many people they meet along the way witnesses of the Christian virtues, in particular faith, hope and charity: couples who have faithfully lived their love, opening themselves to life; men and women who, in their various occupations, have supported their families and cooperated in spreading the Kingdom of God; adolescents and young people who have followed Jesus with enthusiasm; pastors who, through their ministry, have poured out the gifts of grace on God’s holy people; men and women religious who, by living the counsels of the Gospel, have been a living image of Christ the Bridegroom. We cannot forget the poor, the sick, the suffering who in their weakness have found support in the divine Master. It is about that “everyday” holiness “next door”, in which the Church scattered throughout the world has always been rich.

We are called to allow ourselves to be inspired by these models of holiness, among whom stand out first of all the martyrs who shed their blood for Christ and those who have been beatified and canonized for being examples of Christian life and our intercessors. We then think of the Venerables, men and women whose heroic exercise of virtue has been recognized, of those who in singular circumstances have made of their lives an offering of love to the Lord and to their brothers and sisters, as well as the Servants of God whose

² St. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, at the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (6-1-2001), 1, 58.

³ We are especially mindful of the documents of Pope Francis: *Spes non confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 (9-5-2024) and *Dilexit nos*, Encyclical Letter on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ (24-10-2024).

Causes for beatification and canonization are underway. These processes show how much the witness of holiness is also present in our time in which the great witnesses to the faith shine like stars (cf. *Phil* 2:15), who have marked the experience of the particular Churches and, at the same time, have been fruitful throughout history. They are all our friends, companions on the road, who help us realize our baptismal vocation to the full and show us the most beautiful face of the Church, which is holy and the mother of the Saints.

During the course of the liturgical year, the Church publicly honours the Saints and Blesseds, on pre-established dates and in predetermined ways. However, it seems important to me that all particular Churches commemorate the Saints and Blesseds on a single date, as well as the Venerables and Servants of God of their respective territories. It is not a matter of inserting a new memorial into the liturgical calendar, but of promoting with appropriate initiatives outside the liturgy, or of recalling within it, for example in the homily or at another time deemed appropriate, those figures who have characterized the local Christian path and spirituality. Therefore, I urge the particular Churches, starting from the coming Jubilee of 2025, to remember and honour these figures of holiness, every year on 9 November, the Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica.

This will enable the individual diocesan Communities to rediscover or perpetuate the memory of extraordinary disciples of Christ who have left a living mark of the presence of the Risen Lord and who are still sure guides today in the common path towards God, protecting us and supporting us. To this end, pastoral directions and guidelines will eventually be drawn up and proposed to the Episcopal Conferences. May the Saints, in whom the wonders of divine manifold grace shine forth, urge us to a more intimate communion with God and inspire us to sing the praises of the Most High with them.

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 9 November, Feast of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica.

FRANCIS

2. Pastoral keys

The Letter is structured in five paragraphs, each of which invites us to focus our attention on various aspects of a single message: God's design for each one of us as an invitation to holiness, a vocation for all, a journey of faith that each one of us must build from our fragility and with God's support.

a) Holiness, a current call

Ever since the beginning of his ministry, Pope Francis has referred to holiness on many occasions⁴, but his masterpiece in this regard is undoubtedly the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et exsultate, on the call to holiness in today's world*, dated 19 March 2018. It was the first pontifical magisterial text dedicated exclusively to this subject.

In the Letter of 16 November 2024, as in his Exhortation, Francis wishes to situate his words in clear continuity with the Second Vatican Council. The Pope suggests the universal call to holiness as a key to interpreting the Council, placing it "at the heart of the teaching" of the Council. But he specifies its content

⁴ Among others: "The Saints are not supermen, nor were they born perfect. They are like us, like each one of us. They are people who, before reaching the glory of heaven, lived normal lives with joys and sorrows, struggles and hopes. What changed their lives? When they recognised God's love, they followed it with all their heart without reserve or hypocrisy. They spent their lives serving others, they endured suffering and adversity without hatred and responded to evil with good, spreading joy and peace. This is the life of a Saint. Saints are people who for love of God did not put conditions on him in their life. ... Being holy is not a privilege for the few, as if someone had a large inheritance; in Baptism we all have an inheritance to be able to become saints. Holiness is a vocation for everyone. Thus we are all called to walk on the path of holiness, and this path has a name and a face: the face of Jesus Christ" FRANCIS, *Angelus* (01-11-2013).

very well: “Holiness, rather than being the fruit of human effort, is making space for the action of God”. This is emphasized constantly in the magisterium of Francis: the primacy of grace and the agency of God in the life of the Christian.

b) The saints “next door”

In *Gaudete et exsultate* the Pope coined the term “saints next door” to refer to those real lives that enlighten those around them⁵. Francis wants to posit two distinct but complementary levels of holiness: the universal call for all the baptized, and that of the corresponding canonical process which concludes with canonization, for only a few.

As the Council has already recalled, this call to holiness includes all states of Christian life without favouring any one specifically, and the Pope expresses this clearly: “To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves” (GeE 14). Francis, without detracting from the great saints of history, wants to call for a holiness of the everyday, the “next door”, with a special regard for the poorest and most in need.

It is an invitation to recognize, in our own personal journey, those people whose simple lives have marked us: our family, parents and grandparents especially, who have perhaps passed on the faith to us and have been shining examples; teachers and catechists; priests who have accompanied us in the stages of our Christian life; consecrated men and women whom we may have met at some personal crossroads; so many lay people with whom we have shared mission, work or fun... perhaps people with whom we have never conversed in depth but whose example has left its mark. To recognize them we must be awake, with our senses open and ready to be inspired by them. The realization that these people exist is an impetus for us on our own path to holiness.

c) Models for everyday life

In the third paragraph of the *Letter*, the Pope focuses on those whose lives have already been raised up as models – Saints and Blesseds – or who are in the process of being so – Venerables and Servants of God. Among all those who have been canonized and beatified, he puts in first place the martyrs, who have identified themselves with Christ through the shedding of their blood, affirming that “we need to treasure their testimony, in order to confirm our hope and allow it to bear good fruit”⁶.

He then refers to those who are in the process of being beatified and canonized, either due to their virtue or by having offered their lives (a new way introduced by Francis) – “of those who in singular circumstances have made of their lives an offering of love to the Lord and to their brothers and sisters”⁷.

⁵ This expression is not entirely new. He takes the idea, as he himself indicates in his Exhortation, from the French writer Joseph Malègue, who speaks of “the middle class of holiness” (cf. *Pierres noires. Les classes moyennes du Salut*, Paris 1958). For Malègue, the “middle classes” are made up of those who resist the spiritual mediocrity of their time by pursuing a discreet existence. Benedict XVI, in a General Audience devoted to holiness, also referred to this: “Actually I must say that also for my personal faith many saints, not all, are true stars in the firmament of history. And I would like to add that for me not only a few great saints whom I love and whom I know well are “signposts”, but precisely also the simple saints, that is, the good people I see in my life who will never be canonised. They are ordinary people, so to speak, without visible heroism but in their everyday goodness I see the truth of faith” BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience* (13-04-2011).

⁶ FRANCIS, *Spes non confundit*. Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025 (09-05-2024), 20.

⁷ Cf. FRANCIS, *Apostolic Letter in motu Proprio Maiorem hac dilectionem on the offer of life* (11-07-2017). To the two existing ways (martyrdom and virtue) the Pope has added a third ordinary way to reach the altars: the offer of life.

The Pope remarks that the processes regarding contemporary people provide this call to holiness with a face, real and close to us. He describes them as “friends and companions on the road”, and therefore encourages us to get to know them, to make their life and work known, and to ask for their intercession.

d) In the communion of saints

The saints have been able to respond in the first person to the question that troubles the heart: “For whom do I exist?”. Their lives immediately recall to us the Heart of Christ who gave himself for us; in the communion of the saints, we discover the wellspring that gives us new life, the blood that redeems us, and the breath that permits every one of us too to say: “I want to be saintly”.

The desire of the human heart can only be sustained by the grace that is implored and accepted. The prayer of the Church and the witness of our brothers and sisters come to our aid. For this reason, it seems important to the Pope that all the particular Churches remember the Saints and Blesseds on the same date, as well as the Venerables and Servants of God in their respective territories, reminding us on 9 November each year of those figures who have characterized the local Christian journey and spirituality.

3. Application in the pilgrim Church in Spain

a) Evangelizing at the crossroads of existence

We are in the midst of an epochal change that presents new challenges, both on a global and local level. We are witnessing a spiritual impoverishment with serious consequences for the family and society, which casts doubt on the very reality of the human person. Artificial intelligence opens us unsuspected horizons and yet makes us feel defenceless, shipwrecked in uncertainty in the absence of questions of meaning, fearful of the future, concerned with appearing more than with being, and even more than with doing or having. This has generated a disconnected, disordered and insecure society in which mistrust and confrontation are growing. On the other hand, there is a return to the local, the nearby, the most genuine; a search for roots, for identity, which leads to a new appreciation of the local environment.

It is always a good time to announce the good news of salvation; it is the time for a dynamic missionary outreach that springs from the joy of mercy. We are bearers of hope, of the good news that our life has a future and a meaning, because a Father, who loves us beyond measure, has called us by name.

How can we bring the Gospel of God’s great love to these crossroads of existence? The rupture between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly still the drama of our time, as it was in other times⁸. There is an urgent need to integrate faith into everyday life. We need a pastoral conversion that passes via personal conversion in a vocational key, and through an explicit, clear, concrete and courageous proposal of Christian anthropology and of the universal vocation to holiness.

The Holy Father’s initiative will help us to become aware of the legacy of these illustrious sons and daughters of the universal Church, to celebrate them together; it will encourage us to link the local saints with the new parishes, to refer to them in order diocesan initiatives or areas, joining forces; in short, it will be a way to develop the pastoral care of holiness.

b) In the footsteps of the saints in the particular Church

“The People of God is not merely a community of different nations, but in its very nature it is composed of different parts, the particular Churches, formed in the image of the universal Church. In them and from them exists the one and only Catholic Church. The particular Church is entrusted to the Bishop, who is the visible source and foundation of unity, and through his hierarchical communion with the head and the

⁸ Cf. St. PAUL VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, on evangelization in the contemporary world (08-12-1975), 20.

other members of the episcopal College, the particular Church is incorporated into the *plena communio ecclesiarum* of the one Church of Christ”⁹.

In carrying out the mission of sanctifying the People of God entrusted to us, according to the particular vocation of each one, we are sustained by the saints whose life, teaching and holiness enlighten and guide our spiritual journey; in a special way, “the great Bishops of the early Church, the founders of particular Churches, witnesses to the faith in times of persecution, those who were able to rebuild their dioceses after persecutions or other disasters, Bishops who gave themselves generously to the poor and the suffering by establishing hospices and hospitals, the founders of religious orders”¹⁰, without forgetting their predecessors in the episcopal see who shone for their holiness of life. These devotions and exercises of piety should be regulated “in such a way that they harmonize with the sacred liturgy, the source from which they draw their inspiration and the goal towards which they lead”¹¹.

Here the Holy Father’s wish finds great meaning, for he does not intend to add a new liturgical memorial, but rather that there should be a day every year, 9 November, when each particular Church can *remember* (not celebrate liturgically) all those who are already on the altars or whose process is ongoing. In its pastoral care, it exhorts each particular Church to preserve, present and transmit the memory of these extraordinary disciples of Christ (Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God) who are the diocesan Church’s greatest patrimony.

We all venerate the great saints who have gilded the history of the pilgrim Church in Spain. Often, however, there is little knowledge of the Blesseds themselves, and it is not widely known that within the diocese there are people whose causes are ongoing, thus restricting this diocesan wealth to specific spiritual families. The lives of children, young people and adults; bishops, priests, members of the consecrated life, lay people (several married couples) enlighten and guide evangelization in our dioceses. It is an immense treasure to be made known!

II. THE UNIVERSAL CALL TO HOLINESS AND THE CANONICAL PROCESS

A holy life is the most eloquent message that shocks the powers of the world. “Holiness ... is the living reflection of the face of Christ”, said Saint John Paul II at the beginning of the third millennium¹². His light shines in the faces of the saints, through whom it becomes visible. We understand this statement clearly when we look at the great saints in the chapels of our churches. But, as Francis points out, “Sanctity is understood not as a prerogative of the few: sanctity is a gift offered to all, no-one excluded, by which the distinctive character of every Christian is constituted”¹³. It excludes no-one, but only some reach the altars. What is the difference, and what does this gift consist of?

1. The universal call to holiness

By virtue of the grace of baptism, we are all called to a holy life. We are convinced that, “since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: ‘Do you wish to receive Baptism?’ means at the same time to ask them: ‘Do

⁹ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops “*Apostolorum Successores*” (22-02-2004), 5.

¹⁰ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops “*Apostolorum Successores*” (22-02-2004), 48. The paragraph continues: “In order to keep alive the memory of Bishops who were outstanding in the exercise of their ministry, the Bishop, together with his presbyterate or the Episcopal Conference, should take steps to make these figures known to the faithful through new biographies and, if appropriate, he should introduce the cause for their canonization”.

¹¹ CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops “*Apostolorum Successores*” (22-02-2004), 152.

¹² Cf. St. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, at the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (6-1-2001), 7.

¹³ FRANCIS, *General Audience* (19-11-2014).

you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt 5:48). As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness. The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual"¹⁴.

Holiness consists in living everyday situations in the light of the Gospel. It is not a matter of undertaking extraordinary endeavours, but of uniting oneself to Christ, of "making our own his example, his thoughts, his behaviour. The measure of holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, in as much as with the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his"¹⁵.

We can continue to ask ourselves: how can my way of thinking, my attitudes, my behaviour become the way of thinking and acting with Christ and of Christ? We learn from those who have gone before us, because we need to heal the wounds of divisions in order to live in communion with each other and with God, the Father of all. Conscious of our weakness, we are sustained by the communion of saints, in whom God's grace shines forth. There are saints of universal renown and others of unknown name. On 1 November, the Feast of All Saints, we look up to heaven and pay homage to all of them, to those who are on the altars and to so many Christians who, after a life in accordance with the Gospel, share in the eternal joy of heaven. There are our intercessors and our models of Christian life.

2. The itinerary of the beatification and canonization processes

"In the midst of this multitude of believers, whom I have called the 'saints next door'", Pope Francis reminds us, "there are those whom the Church indicates as models, intercessors and teachers. These are the beatified and canonized saints, who remind everyone that living the Gospel to the full is possible and beautiful. Holiness, in fact, is not a programme of effort and renunciation, it is not about doing 'spiritual gymnastics', no, it is something else; it is first and foremost the experience of being loved by God, of receiving his love, his mercy, freely given. This divine gift opens us up to gratitude and allows us to experience great joy, which is not the emotion of an instant or mere human optimism, but the certainty of being able to face everything with the grace and boldness that come from God"¹⁶.

From among the multitude of people who die a saintly death, the Church canonizes some; that is, she raises them up as a canon of life, as models for our Christian journey. This process is a long journey, which involves numerous specialists and is subject to the direct supervision of the diocesan bishop and the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, in order to effectively ensure the seriousness of the investigative procedure in accordance with the norms established by the Holy See¹⁷.

The starting point is the fame of holiness, or of martyrdom, or of dedication of life, that is, the persistence among the People of God of the awareness that a person lived virtue beyond the ordinary, or that he or she died due to hatred of the faith, or that he or she freely gave up his or her life for love. This reputation for holiness is accompanied by a reputation for signs: we spontaneously turn to this person to ask for their intercession, we experience their help, we recognize that as a result of this request we have received more or less important graces. Only if these elements are present can the Bishop begin a process of beatification and canonization.

These Causes are carried out at two different levels: the diocese itself and the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints.

¹⁴ St. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, at the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (6-1-2001), 31.

¹⁵ BENEDICT XVI, *General Audience* (13-04-2011).

¹⁶ FRANCIS, Address to the participants in the Congress "Holiness Today" organized by the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints (06-10-2022).

¹⁷ Cf. St. JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Constitution Divinus perfectionis Magister* (25-01-1983); CONGREGATION FOR THE CAUSES OF SAINTS, *Normae servandae in inquisitionibus ab episcopis faciendis in causis sanctorum* (07-02-1983); *Sanctorum Mater*, Instruction for Conducting Diocesan or Eparchial Inquiries in the Causes of Saints (17-05-2007).

In the *diocesan phase*, the main task is to gather as much information as possible about the life, virtues, martyrdom, surrender of life, and reputation for sanctity of the Servant of God, and includes a documentary part and a testimonial part. In this phase no judgement is made, but the aim is to collect the material that will allow the authorities of the Dicastery to proceed to the appropriate discernment of the sanctity of a person.

Once all this work has been completed in the diocese, the Dicastery validates it and the *Roman phase* of the process begins. The Postulator of the Cause is responsible for compiling all the material gathered in the diocesan phase into a single document (the *Positio*), which is then examined by the various organs of the Dicastery and will conclude, or not, with the declaration of heroic virtues or the recognition of martyrdom. The purpose of the *Positio* is to enable the historical consultants, theologians and the Cardinals and Bishops who are members of the Dicastery to reach moral certainty about the martyrdom, heroic virtues or offer of life of the Servant of God. For beatification (except in the case of martyrdom) and for canonization, both miracles must be proved. With the act of Canonization, the Pope declares definitively and solemnly that a faithful Catholic can be publicly venerated by the entire Church.

3. Considerations for remembrance in the dioceses

Remembrance in each particular Church of the Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God of the diocese, regardless of the fact that each Saint and Blessed has his or her own liturgical celebration, is a very important initiative for the pastoral care of holiness, for two reasons in particular:

- The first is the opportunity to make present to the faithful the local examples of holiness for imitation and celebration of those who are so close to them geographically and culturally, whether they be lay people, members of the diocesan clergy or of consecrated life.
- The second is to make known the Venerables and Servants of God whose causes are ongoing in the diocese. This is valuable, not only as significant data for the particular Church, but above all to foster piety towards these people, in order for them to be prayed for and for favours to be asked so that, if it is God's will, the fame of sanctity may spread or the miracle we desire for beatification and canonization may take place. You cannot love or pray to someone you do not know.

This initiative is a milestone in the history of the Causes of Saints. In order to be able to implement it correctly, we believe it is advisable to clarify some concepts, such as the difference between these four denominations (Saint, Blessed, Venerable and Servant of God), between vocation to sainthood and the canonization process, between liturgical memorial and pastoral remembrance, public worship and private devotion, and so on, in order to avoid confusion among pastoral workers and the People of God, as well as to highlight an authentic pastoral care of holiness.

a) The different denominations

The denomination refers to the point in the canonical process:

- *Servant of God*: this is the denomination given when the process of a Catholic faithful who has died, with a reputation for holiness, is initiated.
- *Venerable*: the name given to the Servant of God when the Pope authorizes the promulgation of the Decree on heroic virtues, martyrdom or the offer of life.
- *Blessed*: this is the name designating the Venerable after the beatification ceremony. From this point on, his or her liturgical memorial can be celebrated every year, only in the places provided for by law, and his or her mortal remains are considered relics.
- *Saint*: this is the name given to the Blessed after the canonization ceremony. From this moment on, his or her cult is extended to the universal Church.

b) *The reputation for sanctity and the signs of sanctity*

As we have indicated, the first requirement for the initiation of a cause of beatification and canonization is the reputation for holiness and signs.

The *reputation for holiness* is a resplendent evangelical life in the faithful following of Christ, inviting all Christians to be configured to him and to establish his Kingdom. An authentic reputation for holiness is not the same as the importance a person has had in history, the works he or she founded or created, or the media popularity he or she received during his or her lifetime. It is to be distinguished from good reputation, public esteem and social and cultural notoriety. Likewise, it cannot be based on certain extraordinary phenomena such as stigmata, visions, apparitions and so forth, which, although they constitute an important element in the life of a person, are always gifts offered by the Lord and not demonstrations of a holy life.

The regulations in force remind us that “reputation must be spontaneous and not artificially produced. It must be stable, continuous, widespread among trustworthy people and existing among a significant portion of the People of God”¹⁸.

The other element already mentioned, which accompanies the reputation for holiness (or of martyrdom), and helps to evaluate it is the *reputation for signs*, “an opinion that has spread among the faithful about the graces and favours received from God through the intercession of the Servant of God”¹⁹. If someone is convinced of a person’s holiness, he or she will address that person and ask for their intercession before God, a conviction that will increase if the requested favour is received.

c) *Public worship and private devotion*

Precisely because of this moral certainty that they are intercessors before God, the Church is very careful in the veneration of the Blessed and Saints, clearly distinguishing public worship from private devotion, to the extent that improper public worship is grounds for termination of the process of a Venerable or a Servant of God²⁰.

While the memory of Saints and Blessed can be celebrated liturgically (own prayers, own Liturgy of the Hours, public veneration of images and relics, etc), devotion to the Venerables and Servants of God can only be expressed privately and without any public manifestation of worship. The prayers for private devotion, which are said for the intercession of a Venerable or Servant of God, and which appear on their holy cards, are in no way intended to prevent the Church’s judgement.

4. The pastoral care of holiness

Pope Francis reminds us that “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” (GeE, 19). Therefore, canonization is not a closure but rather a starting point for the threefold mission set out in *Preface I* of the Saints: we are offered an example of their holy life, the help of their intercession, and participation in their destiny.

As *Lumen Gentium* teaches, “holiness is one – that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in

¹⁸ *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 7 § 2.

¹⁹ *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 6.

²⁰ Cf. *Sanctorum Mater*, Art. 88: “It is of extreme importance always to refrain from every act (e.g., liturgical celebrations, panegyric speeches in honour of the Servant of God, etc.), inside and outside of churches, that could mislead the faithful into thinking wrongly that the initiation of the Inquiry necessarily implies the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God”. *Sanctorum Mater* Art. 143 § 4: “It is of extreme importance always to refrain from any act that could mislead the faithful into thinking wrongly that the closing of the Inquiry necessarily implies the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God”.

His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (LG, 41).

We wish to propose holiness as a “pastoral priority”²¹ in the rich multiplicity of the life of the Church. The pastoral care of holiness includes the dissemination and knowledge of the life and teachings of the Saints, Blessed, Venerables and Servants of God who can help each individual Christian to walk the path of his or her own holiness.

III. POSSIBLE PASTORAL ACTIONS

These *Guidelines* take the form of pastoral actions appropriate to the peculiarity of each diocese. We set out some initiatives that help us live out the desire expressed by Pope Francis in his *Letter*, to enrich the life of our particular Churches with the examples of holiness that are close to us.

These are suggestions – some of which are already being implemented – which each diocese should consider, to ascertain whether they should be applied in their respective territories.

a) *Coordinated by the Office for the Causes of Saints*

Next year will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the creation of the Office for the Causes of Saints in our Episcopal Conference. Its subsidiary mission is to coordinate and encourage the particular Churches in their work for the Causes of Saints, in the functions of counselling and formation, with particular dedication to the processes by way of martyrdom.

For this reason, in addition to the ordinary function of accompanying the dioceses in the area of its competence, the Office will undertake two practical initiatives deriving from these *Guidelines*.

1. Publications on the Venerables and Servants of God

In collaboration with the Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, the Office for the Causes of Saints is preparing a volume summarizing the main biographical details of all the candidates whose process is ongoing. In this book, it will be possible to find, for the first time, an orderly and complete list of all the Christians in our dioceses who shine like stars in a multiform firmament.

In addition, a simple bibliography and a final study will be provided on the main characteristics of these brothers and sisters who are called to continue to accompany and enlighten our lives.

2. Aids for remembrance at liturgical moments

The dioceses will be provided with a small handbook that can be used on that day, following Pope Francis’ indications: “It is not a matter of inserting a new memorial into the liturgical calendar, but of promoting with appropriate initiatives outside the liturgy, or of recalling within it, for example in the homily or at another time deemed appropriate, those figures who have characterized the local Christian path and spirituality”.

b) *In the particular Churches*

Pope Francis wants each particular Church to turn its eyes towards those who, to paraphrase the Preface of 1 November, are “the best members of the diocesan Church”.

The Spanish context is very rich and diverse; there will be dioceses that have many Saints, Blessed and ongoing processes, and others less so. Each particular Church will find its own way to carry out this initiative. It is an opportunity to show that holiness permeates all the evangelizing work of the Church, and so it is also an opportunity to involve the various diocesan bodies in this remembrance of local holiness: catechesis, youth, vocations, seminary, family, laity, social pastoral care, etc.

In many cases it will not be a question of organizing new things, but of making the most of what we already have by contributing to this transversal line of action of holiness. The following are suggestions for possible initiatives that could help us make this “remembrance” a reality.

1. Routes of holiness

²¹ Cf. St. JOHN PAUL II, *Novo millennio Ineunte*, at the conclusion of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (6-1-2001).

The places where the Saints lived, or where their remains are preserved, are places of pilgrimage and encounter. In many of them there is a small museum that preserves their belongings and explains their life and work. To come into contact with them is also to get to know more about the great charitable work of the Church. At the origin of many hospitals, asylums, schools, soup kitchens, centres for listening to and integrating migrants, shelters, and so on, there is a saintly person.

To realize that they are men and women, of flesh and blood, to feel the places of their life, can be a good initiative and provide an opportunity for catechesis and prayer. It can also be a sign of communion between the different realities that make up the particular Church, allowing them to get to know and enrich one another.

2. Popular piety: pilgrimages, brotherhoods and other devotions

In many parts of our territory, popular piety is the cornerstone of evangelization and of generous dedication to others. The sanctuaries in honour of different invocations of the Lord and of the Blessed Virgin Mary attract hundreds of pilgrims, as do the local festivities in honour of the patron saints.

Of particular importance are the brotherhoods and confraternities, which throughout the centuries “have been crucibles of holiness for countless people who have lived in utter simplicity an intense relationship with the Lord”. Pope Francis exhorts them, to “advance with determination along the path of holiness; do not rest content with a mediocre Christian life, but let your affiliation serve as a stimulus, above all for you yourselves, to an ever-greater love of Jesus Christ”²². This love is made concrete because “‘carrying’ Christ in procession, carrying the cross that the Lord proposes to us every day, or carrying on our shoulders the brother we encounter prostrate on the road, as the Good Shepherd would do, is the same love, the same hidden charity that we find in the tabernacle of the Holy Church Cathedral, and in that of our titular church”²³. Devotion to Our Lord Jesus Christ, to his Blessed Mother Mary, to the patron Saints of our towns and cities, must always involve the commitment to bringing God’s tenderness closer to men and women who suffer in body and soul. Making the most of these occasions for suitable catechesis on holiness of life, which translates into Christian charity, is a task that demands our effort and creativity.

3. Study days and testimonies of local holiness

The remembrance of local holiness can go beyond the devotional aspect, and so it would be interesting to organize seminars, specific days or monographic conferences, in communion with the diocesan study centres, to make known, from different points of view, the Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God of the diocesan Church.

These initiatives can also be carried out by the parishes and the different areas of diocesan pastoral work. Consecrated life will have the opportunity to share the rich heritage of holiness that it has accumulated throughout its history.

4. Media and cultural initiatives

The media play a key role in today’s culture. It is common to turn to “influencers”, warns the Vatican Dicastery for Communication, but “we should all take our ‘influence’ seriously. There are not only macro-influencers with a large audience, but also micro-influencers. Every Christian is a micro-influencer [...] Every follower of Christ has the potential to establish a link, not to himself or herself, but to the Kingdom of God, even for the smallest circle of his or her relationships”²⁴. It is a clear call to personal witness. The document goes on to ask: “What does it mean to be a witness? The Greek word for witness is ‘martyr’, and it is safe to say that some of the most powerful ‘Christian influencers’ have been martyrs. The attractiveness of the martyrs is that they manifest

²² FRANCIS, *Homily at the Holy Mass on the occasion of the Day of Confraternities and of Popular Piety* (05-05-2013).

²³ FRANCIS, *Message of the Holy Father to participants in the “II International Congress of Confraternities and Popular Piety”*, 04-12-2024 (09-05-2024).

²⁴ DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION, *Towards full presence. A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media* (28-05-2023), 72 and 74.

their union with God through the sacrifice of their very lives. 'Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own' (1 Cor 6:19). The bodies of martyrs are exemplary instruments for the revelation of the love of God"²⁵.

This "remembrance" on every 9 November is an opportunity to bring influential witnesses closer through contemporary technical and audio-visual media. Putting all the means of communication at the service of the pastoral care of holiness is a challenge we can rise to. We have photographs and even videos of the most recent Saints, Blesseds, Venerables and Servants of God; being able to see them and hear their voice brings us closer to them as people and as witnesses.

It will be important to offer young people the life of the Saints through different languages that will help get to know them: films, exhibitions, musicals and so on. As Pope Francis recalled: "The heart of the Church is also full of young saints who devoted their lives to Christ, many of them even to dying a martyr's death. They were precious reflections of the young Christ; their radiant witness encourages us and awakens us from our lethargy. The Synod pointed out that 'many young saints have allowed the features of youth to shine forth in all their beauty, and in their day they have been real prophets of change. Their example shows what the young are capable of, when they open themselves up to encounter Christ'"²⁶.

CONCLUSION

We conclude these *Guidelines* with the hope that these words of Pope Francis will resound in our particular Churches: "It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God's greater glory, and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us" (GeE, 177).

²⁵ DICASTERY FOR COMMUNICATION, *Towards full presence. A Pastoral Reflection on Engagement with Social Media* (28-05-2023), 78.

²⁶ FRANCIS, *Christus vivit*, to young people and to the entire People of God (25-03-2019), 49.