

VENERABLE COÍNTA JÁUREGUI: "ALWAYS AND IN EVERY WAY GOOD"

The saints are the sacramental expression of the ideal of holiness that the whole community of the followers of the Lord are called to make

January 23 of this year, the Company of Mary joyfully received the news declared by the Holy See in the decree recognizing the "heroism" of the virtues of Mother Coínta Osés Jáuregui, a Spanish religious of the Company of Mary who lived between 1875 and 1954. This decree was given by Pope Francis on the 22nd of the same month after receiving the favorable report from the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, Cardinal Angelo Amato. The declaration as Venerable Mother Coínta, Servant of God clears the way for her beatification and canonization. This normally occurs as a result of the recognition of a proven miracle in each of these stages.

The meaning of the Church's solemn proclamation of a person's sanctity can be better understood if one takes into account what has been the practice throughout history. In the early centuries of Christianity this practice was an act by which the veneration rendered to people recognized as saints was approved in the particular churches. Originally they were martyrs. Approval of the homage rendered was the responsibility of bishops. Later in the middle age, we know that this practice was no longer limited to the approval of the cult of martyrs. It was extended to those whom the Christian community recognized as intercessors with God by virtue of their merits as models of Christian life, for having practiced virtues to a heroic degree. With the passage of time this recognition became a duty of the Pope's ministry. However, it was not until the seventeenth century, under the pontificate of Pope Urban VIII, that this prerogative was fully recognized by him. The criteria for the proclamation of sainthood that occurred in the course of the Church's history were several: first of all, martyrdom, then heroic virtues (and in some cases the orthodoxy of writings), and finally performing miracles, especially miracles of healing the

sick. The Pope can certainly dispense the criterion of miracles, as was recently demonstrated by Pope Francis regarding the canonization of Pope John XXIII.

It is evident that the Church attaches great importance to the practice of official recognition by the Magisterium to the sanctity of its members, not only in the Catholic Church but also in the Eastern rite. In doing so, the Church does not deny that holiness is a reality solely because it is officially recognized by canonization, but that it often exists in the real life of its members who, in a hidden and silent way, live a life of holiness that goes unnoticed in the eyes of men, but certainly not in the eyes of God. In practice we speak about the sanctity of "ordinary and common" people whom we meet in everyday life. Obviously this does not mean that the proclamation of sainthood that is officially given by the Magisterium of the Church does not constitute an ecclesial act of great value and one that we appreciate very much: the recognition of the fulfillment of the aim of the life of the whole Church is indeed very important. The saints are, in this sense, the sacramental expression of the ideal of holiness that the whole community of the followers of the Lord are called to make. It's what the Second Vatican Council in the fifth chapter of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* ("The universal call to holiness") wanted us to remember by means of contextualizing the Church's sacramental dimension regarding consecrated life (chapter Six of the Constitution on "Religious life"). This is what the Church wants to express in its proclamation of saints. The rationale behind this ecclesiological view of the phenomenon of holiness is the specific criterion that helps us understand Christian existence more deeply: following the Lord, the practice of the evangelical counsels, the commitment of one's life to the building of the Kingdom of God in human life.

The biographers of Mother Coínta have written important things. On the occasion of the recognition of her heroic virtues, it would serve us well to read them: Father Antonio Garmendia de Otaola SJ. (*Star and Comet: Life of the Rev. Mother Coínta Jáuregui Osés of the Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady*, Grijelmo, 1956; Mother Maria Silvia Vallejo and Mother Mercedes Aizpuru (*This is how God works. Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady.. ... Lestonnac Edition, ODN IV Centenario, No. 4*), among others. There is, above all,

a beautiful expression that can summarize everything we know about Mother Coínta: the witness of people who wanted to testify what her life was like, an expression that admirably defines what she was and how she attained the ideal of holiness: "always and every way good".

For a community of religious like the Company of Mary, the official recognition by the Church of the sanctity of one of its sisters has to be a deep source of joy. It is a way to verify in a concrete manner that what has been lived out is ultimately its ideal and that of the entire community. Every religious community should be a seedbed of holiness, demonstrating that it is possible to realize the ideal of consecrated life as a sacrament of holiness. And, although the official recognition of holiness given by the Church for the canonization of saints is very important, we know that the most important thing in real life is what we witness in the day to day: the admirable reality of the life of many people who humbly and silently fulfill the ideal of perfection. Ultimately, that is what the "Venerable" Mother Coínta lived. This is the reason for our joy on the occasion of the recognition of the "heroism" of her virtues, a joy that we also share in a special way by the fact that this recognition takes place in the year of consecrated life convened by Pope Francis.

Alberto Ramírez
Priest of the Archdiocese of Medellín
Doctor in Theology. Professor at the Bolivariana Pontifical University and CELAM
Chaplain of the Company of Mary
+ March 31, 2015