

Papal Audience Address for the Canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre by Pope John Paul II

My dear pilgrims, I am happy to welcome you who have come to Rome for the canonisation of St John Gabriel Perboyre. I warmly salute my brothers in the episcopate, especially his Beatitude Patriarch Stephanos II, and the bishops who have come from China, Macao, France and several other countries. I also extend a warm greeting to the Reverend Father Robert Maloney, Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, to his confreres who have come from all of the provinces throughout the world; also to the relatives of the new saint, as well as to the members and the friends of the spiritual family of St Vincent de Paul.

In the person of John Gabriel Perboyre, a native of the diocese of Cahors, we find a perfect example of the Vincentian missionary vocation: to give oneself totally to Christ through the announcing of the Good News to the poor and the formation of the clergy. Throughout almost ten years John Gabriel put to good use his talents as educator of the young in the diocese of Amiens, then in the formation of future diocesan priests at Saint-Flour, and finally of the novices of his Congregation in Paris. But the vocation which he felt from an early age of going to the ends of the earth to announce the Gospel was at last to be fulfilled when he was called upon to leave for China. "Pray God", he said, "that my health will get stronger and that I can go to China so as to preach there and die for him". He set off in the steps of his own brother and those of Blessed Francis Regis Clet, his confrere who was martyred in 1820 in the same region. In this country which he loved John Gabriel heroically lived out his total commitment to the following of Christ. And he was then to crown this witnessing to the faith through a remarkable sharing of the Passion of Christ along a similar way of the cross.

Priests of the Mission and members of the Vincentian family, I strongly encourage you to remain faithful to the love which animated your brother John Gabriel with regard to the Chinese people. Maintain intact within you that same urge to announce to them the Good News of the Lord Jesus which we find so forceful in the martyrdom of John Gabriel and of those who, today as before, are prepared to live out their witness to the full.

In our world which is marked by so much of poverty, distress and despair, the Vincentian Family whom you are representing here, owes it to itself to continue generously with the work commenced by Monsieur Vincent. Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, lay associations which he founded or which are born from his spirit, the conditions of the present day are inviting you to coordinate more and more effectively the various services which you are carrying out. The striking figure of John

Gabriel Perboyre remains a source of missionary inspiration appealing for further and further progress along the road of the Gospel.

(Stanislaus Brindley CM, translator)