

Rome, Urbaniana 8 March 2022

Dear organisers, dear professors, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very honoured to be here and to welcome you to the second day of this academic conference on “Female Doctors of the Church and Patron Saints of Europe in Dialogue with Today’s World”. And I am particularly pleased that I can give my welcome remarks on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, International Women’s Day.

I would like to congratulate the Catholic University of Avila (UCAV), the Pontifical Urbaniana University and the Institute for Advanced Studies on Women of the Pontifical University Regina Apostolorum for organising this timely conference. I would also like to mention the contributions made by some EU Member States, and notably France, Germany and Italy.

Our contribution to this conference is in the form of a booklet on the Female Doctors of the Church and the three female Patrons Saints of Europe.

The booklet recalls the *Iter Europaeum* project carried out last year to mark the 50 years of EU-Holy See diplomatic relations. It consisted of a walkway of churches in Rome, each EU Member State having selected one to which it or its community had a special connection. Over eight weekends we visited all of these churches, mostly Catholic ones, but also Orthodox and evangelical, at any event all of them very beautiful. In the context of the *Iter Europaeum*, we also celebrated also the Patrons Saints of Europe.

Bridget of Sweden, Catherina of Siena and Teresa Benedicta of the Cross were declared Patrons of Europe by Saint John Paul in 1999. He added them to the three Patron Saints of Europe whom he had named already in 1980, namely Saint Benedict and brothers Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius.

I would like to refer to a quotation of the apostolic letter of Saint John Paul II with which he declares the three women Patron Saints of Europe “... *I feel the decision to choose this ‘feminine’ model is particularly significant within the context of the providential tendency in the Church and society of our time to recognise ever more clearly the dignity and specific gifts of women.*”

And allow me to quote another sentence of his letter that seems to me of special value in these days of a war on the European continent *“May Europe grow! May it grow as a Europe of the spirit, in continuity with the best of its history of which holiness is the highest expression. The Unity of the continent which is gradually maturing in people’s consciousness and receiving a more precise political definition, certainly embodies a great hope ...”*

I wish you a very successful discussion this afternoon and hope you can shed even more light on the lives and work of these outstanding women in the history of Europe.