



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 4 June 2003

John XXIII "The Good Pope"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Forty years ago the beloved and revered Pope John XXIII died. I had the joy of beatifying him, together with Pius IX, on 3 September in the Year 2000.

It comes naturally to think of Monday, 3 June 1963: of that afternoon when the faithful of Rome and pilgrims flocked by the thousands to St Peter's Square, to be as close as possible to their beloved Father and Pastor who, after a long and painful illness, was departing this world.

At seven o'clock in the evening, Cardinal Luigi Traglia, Pro-Vicar of Rome, began to celebrate holy Mass in front of the Vatican Basilica while, from his bed, which had become an altar, Pope John XXIII was completing his spiritual sacrifice, the total sacrifice of his life.

From St Peter's Square, filled to overflowing, the prayer of the Church rose in unison to Heaven. We seem to be reliving those moments of intense emotion, when all humanity's gaze was turned to the window on the third floor of the Apostolic Palace. The end of that Mass coincided with the death of the Good Pope.

2. "This bed is an altar; the altar needs a victim: here I am, ready. I offer my life for the Church, the continuation of the Ecumenical Council, the peace of the world, and Christian unity" (Discorsi, Messaggi, *Colloqui del Santo Padre Giovanni XXIII*, V, p. 618).

Ecce adsum! Here I am, I am ready! Throughout his life, the serene thought of death had accompanied Pope John who, at the hour of his farewell, turned his gaze to the future and the

expectations of the People of God and of the world. In moving tones, he said that the secret of his priesthood was to be found in the Crucifix which he had always kept jealously opposite his bed. "In my long and frequent nocturnal conversations", he noted, "the thought of the redemption of the world appeared to me to be more urgent than ever". "Those arms wide open", he added, "say that he died for us all, for us all; no one is excluded from his love, from his forgiveness" (*ibid.*).

It is not difficult to make out in these brief words the sense of his priestly ministry, wholly dedicated to making known and loved "what is more valuable than life: blessed Jesus Christ: his Holy Church, his Gospel" (*ibid.*, p. 612). Until the very end, the desire to do this was vibrant within him.

"My earthly days", Bl. John XXIII concluded, "are ending; but Christ lives on and the Church continues her task; souls, souls: *ut unum sint, ut unum sint!*" (*ibid.*, p. 619).

3. Less than two months earlier, on 11 April, John XXIII had published the most famous document of his Magisterium: the Encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, which this year I have spoken about on many occasions. This unforgettable Pontiff's entire life was a testimony to peace. His Pontificate proved to be an exalted prophecy of peace, fully expressed in *Pacem in Terris* which was, as it were, a public and universal testament.

"Everyone who has joined the ranks of Christ", he wrote, "must be a glowing point of light in the world, a nucleus of love, a leaven of the whole mass. He will be so in proportion to his degree of spiritual union with God. The world will never be the dwelling-place of peace, till peace has found a home in the heart of each and every man" (*Pacem in Terris*, Part V, nn. 164-165).

To be a point of light it is necessary to live in permanent contact with God. My venerable Predecessor, who left his mark on history, reminds the people of the third millennium too that the secret of peace and joy lie in profound and constant communion with God. The Redeemer's Heart is the source of love and peace, of hope and joy.

Our memories of beloved Pope John are thus transformed into a prayer: may he intercede from Heaven so that we too, like him, may confess at the end of our lives that we have sought nothing but Christ and his Gospel.

May Mary - whom he liked to invoke with the beautiful short prayer, *Mater mea, fiducia mea!* - help us persevere, with our words and our example, in the commitment to witness to peace, to contribute to building the civilization of love.

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors

I offer a warm welcome to all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors present at today's

Audience, especially those from England, Finland, Japan, Korea and the United States. I thank the choirs for their praise of God in song. In a special way I greet the many student groups present. Upon all of you I cordially invoke the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, joy and peace.

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

Lastly, my thoughts turn to the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*. As we prepare for the Solemnity of Pentecost, I urge you, dear *young people*, to be ever docile to the Spirit's action; I encourage you, dear *sick people*, to ask for his light and support in your suffering and trials; and I hope that you, dear *newly-weds*, will grow in the love that the Spirit of God pours out into hearts.

At the end of the General Audience, the Holy Father spoke in Italian of his forthcoming journey to Croatia:

I am getting ready to undertake with great hope, tomorrow, my third [journey to Croatia](#), a land distinguished by the witness of fearless disciples of the Gospel. Its purpose is to strengthen in the faith our brothers and sisters of the Catholic community who stayed faithful to Christ during the religious persecution, and are not afraid to face the challenges of the present time to continue to proclaim it courageously.

In the past 13 years, since recovering Independence, they have consolidated the ecclesial structures and are now more and more dedicated to an incisive evangelizing action.

Dear brothers and sisters, I invite you to accompany me with your prayers. I entrust my 100th Apostolic Visit to the Holy Virgin, so widely venerated in Croatia, so that she may guide my steps and obtain for the Croatian people a renewed springtime of faith and civil progress.