



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

**BEATIFICATION OF FR JAKOB KERN,  
SR RESTITUTA KAFKA AND FR ANTON MARIA SCHWARTZ**

*HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II*

*Sunday, 21 June 1998*

1. "*Who do the people say I am?*" (Lk 9:18).

Jesus asked his disciples this question one day as they were walking together. He also puts this question to Christians on the paths of our time: "*Who do the people say I am?*".

As it was 2,000 years ago in an obscure part of the then known world, so today, human opinions about Jesus are divided. Some attribute to him the gift of prophetic speech. Others consider him an extraordinary personality, an idol that attracts people. Others, again, believe he is even capable of ushering in a new era.

"*But who do you say that I am?*" (Lk 9:20). The question cannot be given a "neutral" answer. It requires a taking of sides and involves everyone. Today, as well, Christ is asking: *you Catholics of Austria, you Christians of this country, you citizens, "who do you say that I am?"*.

It is a question that comes from Jesus' heart. He who opens his own heart wants the person before him not to answer with his mind alone. The question that comes from Jesus' heart must move ours: *Who am I for you? What do I mean to you? Do you really know me? Are you my witnesses? Do you love me?*

2. Then Peter, the disciples' spokesman, answered: "We consider you the Christ of God" (Lk 9:20). The Evangelist Matthew reports Peter's profession in greater detail: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Mt 16:16). Today the Pope, as Successor of the Apostle Peter by the grace of God, professes on your behalf and with you: "*You are the*

*Messiah of God. You are the Christ, the Son of the living God".*

3. Down the centuries, there has been a continual struggle for the correct profession of faith. *Thanks be to Peter, whose words have become the norm!*

They should be used to measure the Church's efforts in seeking to express in time what Christ means to her. In fact, it is not enough to profess with one's lips alone. Knowledge of Scripture and Tradition is important, the study of the Catechism is valuable; but what good is all this if faith lacks deeds?

*Professing Christ calls for following Christ.* The correct profession of faith must be accompanied by a correct conduct of life. Orthodoxy requires orthopraxis. From the start, Jesus never concealed this demanding truth from his disciples. Actually, Peter had barely made an extraordinary profession of faith when he and the other disciples immediately heard Christ clarify what the Master was expecting of them: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

As it was in the beginning, so it is today: *Jesus does not only look for people to acclaim him. He looks for people to follow him.*

4. Dear brothers and sisters, whoever reflects on the history of the Church with eyes of love will discover that despite the many faults and shadows, there were and still are men and women everywhere whose lives highlight *the credibility of the Gospel.*

Today I am given the joy to enrol three Christians from your land among the blessed. Each of them individually confirmed his or her profession of faith in the Messiah through personal witness of life. All three blessed show us that "Messiah" is not only a title for Christ but also means a willingness to co-operate in the messianic work: the great become small and the weak take the lead.

*It is not the heroes of the world who are speaking today in Heroes' Square, but the heroes of the Church.* Sixty years ago from the balcony overlooking this square, a man proclaimed himself salvation. The new blessed have another message. They tell us: *Salvation [Heil] is not found in a man, but rather: Hail [Heil] to Christ, the King and Redeemer!*

5. *Jakob Kern* came from a humble Viennese family of workers. The First World War tore him abruptly from his studies at the minor seminary in Hollabrunn. A serious war injury made his brief earthly life in the major seminary and the Premonstratensian monastery of Geras - as he said himself - a "Holy Week". For love of Christ he did not cling to life but consciously offered it to others. At first he wanted to become a diocesan priest. But one event made him change direction. When a Premonstratensian left the monastery to follow the Czech National Church formed after the separation from Rome which had just occurred, Jakob Kern discovered his vocation in this sad event. He wanted to atone for this religious. Jakob Kern joined the monastery of Geras in his place, and the Lord accepted his *offering a "substitute"*.

Bl. Jakob Kern stands before us as a *witness of fidelity to the priesthood.* At the beginning, it was a childhood desire that he expressed in imitating the priest at the altar. Later this desire matured. The purification of pain revealed the profound

meaning of his priestly vocation: to unite his own life with the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and to offer it vicariously for the salvation of others.

May Bl. Jakob Kern, who was a vivacious and enthusiastic student, encourage many young men generously to accept Christ's call to the priesthood. The words he spoke then are addressed to us: "*Today more than ever there is a need for authentic and holy priests. All the prayers, all the sacrifices, all the efforts and all the suffering united with a right intention become the divine seed which sooner or later will bear its fruit*".

6. In Vienna 100 years ago, *Fr Anton Maria Schwartz* was concerned with the lot of workers. He first dedicated himself to the young apprentices in the period of their professional training. Ever mindful of his own humble origins, he felt especially close to poor workers. To help them, he founded the Congregation of Christian Workers according to the rule of St Joseph Calasanz, and it is still flourishing. He deeply longed to convert society to Christ and to renew it in him. He was sensitive to the needs of apprentices and workers, who frequently lacked support and guidance. Fr Schwartz dedicated himself to them with love and creativity, finding the ways and means to build "*the first workers' church in Vienna*". This humble house of God hidden among the modest dwellings, resembles the work of its founder, who filled it with life for 40 years.

Opinions on the "*worker apostle*" of Vienna varied. Many found his dedication exaggerated. Others felt he deserved the highest esteem. Fr Schwartz stayed faithful to himself and also took some courageous steps. His petitions for training positions for the young and a day of rest on Sunday even reached Parliament.

He leaves us a message: Do all you can to protect Sunday! Show that it cannot be a work day because it is celebrated as *the Lord's day*! Above all, support young people who are *unemployed*! Those who give today's young people an opportunity to earn their living help make it possible for tomorrow's adults to pass the meaning of life on to their children. I know that there are no easy solutions. This is why I repeat the words which guided Bl. Fr Schwarz in his many efforts: "*We must pray more!*".

7. *Sr Restituta Kafka* was not yet an adult when she expressed her intention to enter the convent. Her parents were against it, but the young girl remained faithful to her goal of becoming a *sister "for the love of God and men"*. She wanted to serve the Lord especially in the poor and the sick. She was accepted by the Franciscan Sisters of Charity to fulfil her vocation in everyday hospital life, which was often hard and monotonous. A true nurse, she soon became an institution in Mödling. Her nursing ability, determination and warmth caused many to call her *Sr Resoluta* instead of *Sr Restituta*.

Because of her courage and fearlessness, she did not wish to be silent even in the face of the National Socialist regime. Challenging the political authority's prohibitions, *Sr Restituta* had crucifixes hung in all the hospital rooms. On Ash Wednesday 1942 she was taken away by the Gestapo. In prison her "*Lent*" began, which was to last more than a year and to end in execution. Her last words passed on to us were: "*I have lived for Christ; I want to die for Christ*".

Looking at Bl. *Sr Restituta*, we can see to what heights of inner maturity a person can be led by the divine hand. She risked her life for her *witness to the Cross*. And she kept the Cross in her heart, bearing witness to it once again before being led to execution, when she asked the prison chaplain to "*make the Sign of the Cross on my forehead*".

Many things can be taken from us Christians. But we will not let the Cross as a sign of salvation be taken from us. We will not let it be removed from public life! We will listen to the voice of our conscience, which says: "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29).

8. Dear brothers and sisters, today's celebration has a particularly European tone. In addition to the distinguished President of the Republic of Austria, Mr Thomas Klestil, the Presidents of Lithuania and Romania, political leaders from home and abroad, have honoured us with their presence. I offer them my cordial greetings and through them I also greet the people they represent.

With joy for the gift of three new blessededs which we are offered today, I turn to all my brothers and sisters in the People of God who are gathered here or have joined us through radio or television. In particular, I greet the Pastor of the Archdiocese of Vienna, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, and the President of the Austrian Bishops' Conference, Bishop Johann Weber, as well as my Brothers in the Episcopate who have come to Heroes' Square from near and far. Then I cannot forget the many priests and deacons, religious and pastoral assistants in the parishes and communities.

Dear young people! I extend a special greeting to you today. Your presence in such large numbers is a great joy for me. Many of you have come a long way, and not only in a geographical sense.... But now you are here: *the gift of youth which life is waiting for!* May the three heroes of the Church who have just been enrolled among the blessededs sustain you on your way: young Jakob Kern, who precisely through his illness won the trust of young people; Fr Anton Maria Schwartz, who knew how to touch the hearts of apprentices; Sr Restituta Kafka, who gave courageous witness to her convictions.

*They were not "photocopied Christians", but each was authentic, unrepeatably and unique.* They began like you: as young people, full of ideals, seeking to give meaning to their life.

Another thing makes the three blessededs so attractive: their biographies show us that their personalities matured gradually. Thus *your life too has yet to become a ripe fruit.* It is therefore important that you cultivate life in such a way that it can bloom and mature. Nourish it with the vital fluid of the Gospel! Offer it to Christ, the sun of salvation! *Plant the Cross of Christ in your life!* The Cross is the true tree of life.

9. Dear brothers and sisters! "But who do you say that I am?".

In a short time we will profess our faith. To this profession, which puts us in the community of the Apostles and of the Church's Tradition, as well as in the ranks of the saints and blessededs, we must also add our personal response. *The persuasive power of the message also depends on the credibility of its messengers.* Indeed, the new evangelization starts with us, with our life-style.

The Church today *does not need part-time Catholics but full-blooded Christians.* This is what the three new blessededs were! We can learn from them!

Thank you, Bl. Jakob Kern, for your *priestly fidelity!*

Thank you, Bl. Anton Maria Schwartz, for your *commitment to workers!*

Thank you, Sr Restituta Kafka, for *swimming against the tide of the times!*

All of you saints and blessed of God, pray for us. Amen.

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