



# The Holy See

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**LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II  
TO CARDINAL ENNIO ANTONELLI  
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CENTENARY  
OF THE BIRTH OF GIORGIO LA PIRA**

*To my Venerable Brother  
Cardinal Ennio Antonelli  
Archbishop of Florence*

1. I learned with pleasure that the Church in Florence intends to commemorate with fitting celebrations the centenary of the birth of Giorgio La Pira, who was a highly esteemed Mayor of Florence and an exemplary lay Christian. I had the opportunity to remember him last April, on the occasion of the meeting with the National Association of Italian Communes. I recalled then in particular his political, social and administrative work. On this happy occasion, I would like to reflect briefly on his spiritual profile.

2. Outwardly frail, Mr La Pira was endowed with great intellectual and moral energy, strengthened and refined by extensive daily study, thought, asceticism and prayer. Intuitive by nature, he felt called to develop his Christian commitment in the footsteps of Jesus, sent "*to preach good news to the poor*" (Lk 4: 18). It was necessary to avoid the "temptation of Tabor", as he called it (cf. *Diario*, 14 September 1951), in order to go down to the planes of daily dedication to the many needs of his neighbour in difficulty.

The unique features of Mr La Pira, that upright lay Christian, were shaped by fruitful tension between contemplation and action. From this also derived the spiritual heritage that he bequeathed to the Church of Florence and to the entire Ecclesial Community. His spirituality was, as it were, "immanent" in his daily work. He went from Eucharistic communion to meditation, cultural commitment and social and political action without a break. He was intensely aware of the presence of the Most Holy Trinity who attracted him and gathered him, heart and soul, in contemplation and adoration. "The root of action", he wrote, "is always here: in this 'ecstasy' of

the soul in love, shedding tears and saying to the Lord: My God, my Lord! My God and my all!" (*ibid.*).

Consequently, he liked the motto "*contemplata aliis tradere*", which he had learned from St Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican school that had contributed so much to his formation.

3. Giorgio La Pira sought light and inspiration for his prayers and his life in the Risen Jesus, Lord of history, relying on the Church, the Body of Christ, under the motherly protection of Mary Most Holy. His mind, illumined by faith, was capable of premonitory intuitions concerning the progress of the Church and of the world, and especially concerning the need for peace between peoples and for overcoming atheistic and materialistic ideologies.

Faithful to the Church's Magisterium, he had an authentic sense of the secularity and proper autonomy of the faithful in the area of the world's realities. He understood the public role as a service to the common good, free from the conditioning of power and the quest for prestige or personal interests.

We like to think of him now, after his earthly life has ended, immersed for ever in the contemplation of the Face of God as a citizen of that Heavenly Jerusalem that he so often pointed to as a model for the earthly city. Let us pray that his example may be an encouraging incentive to all who strive in contemporary society to witness with their lives to the Gospel and put themselves at the service of others, especially those "poor people" who always found in him a concerned and faithful friend.

4. As I entrust these thoughts to you, Venerable Brother, I join in spirit in the celebrations through which the diocesan and civil Communities of Florence will pay homage to this unforgettable servant of Christ and of humankind. May honouring his memory impel everyone to cherish his teaching.

With these wishes, I cordially send to you and to all those entrusted to your pastoral care, the implored Apostolic Blessing.

*From the Vatican, 1 November, Solemnity of All Saints*

**JOHN PAUL II**