



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Wednesday, 25 June 2003

Tribute to the Servant of God Pope Paul VI

1. The passage of St John's Gospel that we have listened to just now proposes anew a fascinating evangelical scene. The Son of God entrusts to Peter his flock, his Church, against which he has already assured on a previous occasion that the gates of hell would not prevail (cf. Mt 16: 17-18).

Before making this delivery Jesus asks for a profession of love: "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?...*" (Jn 21: 15). An unsettling question repeated three times that brings to mind the Apostle's triple denial. But notwithstanding the bitter experience, Peter humbly protests: "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you!*" (Jn 21: 17).

Love is the secret of Peter's mission! Love is also the secret for those called to imitate the Good Shepherd in guiding the People of God. "*Officium amoris pascere dominicum gregem... Love's charge is to pasture the sheep of the Lord...*", Paul VI loved to say, quoting a famous phrase of St Augustine.

2. "*Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?*". How many times these words of Jesus, which we recall today, have resounded in the spirit of my venerable Predecessor, the Servant of God Paul VI. Forty years have passed since his election to the Chair of Peter on 21 June 1963, and 25 years since his death on 6 August 1978. From his youth he had worked in direct service of the Apostolic See alongside *Pius XI*. For a considerable period he was *Pius XII's* faithful and valuable collaborator. He was the immediate Successor of *Bl. John XXIII*, whom I had the joy of elevating to the honours of the altar three years ago. His ministry as universal pastor of the Church lasted 15 years and *was marked above all by the Second Vatican Council* and by a great openness to the requirements of the modern age.

I also had the grace to participate in the conciliar work and to live in the post-Council period. I personally appreciated the teaching that Paul VI unceasingly spread on the necessary "revision" of the Church to the demands of the new evangelization. Succeeding him in the Chair of Peter, I undertook to continue the pastoral action he initiated, taking my inspiration from him as a *Father* and as a *Teacher*.

3. A strong and mild Apostle, Paul VI loved the Church and worked for her unity and to intensify missionary action. In this perspective, one understands fully the innovative initiative of the *Apostolic Journeys* that today make up an integral part of the ministry of the Successor of Peter.

He desired that the ecclesial Community open itself to the world, without, however, surrendering to the spirit of the world. With prudent wisdom he knew how to resist the temptation of "ceding" to the modern mentality, sustaining difficulties and misunderstandings, and in some cases even hostility, with Gospel fortitude. Even in the most difficult moments, he always gave his illuminating word to the People of God. At the end of his days, the entire world came to know his greatness and embraced him lovingly.

4. His magisterium is rich and in large part directed to educating believers to the *sense of the Church*.

Among his many writings, I limit myself to recalling, in addition to the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* at the beginning of his Pontificate, the moving profession of faith known as the *Creed of the People of God*, proclaimed with vigor in St Peter's Square on 30 June 1968. Then how can we be silent about the courageous stance in defence of human life with the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, and in favour of the development of peoples with the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, in order to build a more just and integral society?

Then there are the personal reflections that he would customarily note down during spiritual retreats, when he "*retired*" within himself as "*in the chamber of the heart*". He meditated often on the station to which God had called him at the service to the Church "*always loved*", in the spirit of the vocation of Peter. "To this meditation", he noted during one of these retreats, "no one can be more pledged than I.... To understand it, to live it! Lord, what a reality, what a mystery!... It is an adventure in which all depends on Christ..." (Retreat 5-13, August 1963, *Meditazioni Inedite*, Ed. *Studium*).

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us give thanks to God for the gift of this Pontificate, a steady and wise guide of the Church. In his homily of 29 June 1978, a little more than a month from the end of his hard-working earthly life, Paul VI confided: "Faced with the dangers that we have outlined... [we] feel urged to go to [Christ] as our one salvation and to cry to him: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life' (Jn 6: 68). He alone is the truth, he alone is our strength, he alone is our salvation. Strengthened by him, we shall go forward together" (During Mass in St

Peter's Basilica on the Feast of Sts Peter and Paul, *ORE*, 6 July 1978, p. 3; *The Teachings of Pope Paul VI*, 1978, pp. 240-41).

In the light of the eternal destination, we understand better how urgent it is to love Christ and to serve his Church with joy. May Mary obtain this grace for us, she whom Paul VI proclaimed with filial love *Mother of the Church*. And may our Lady enfold within her arms that devoted son in the eternal beatitude reserved to the faithful servants of the Gospel.

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, Norway 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 joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

I greet, in addition, the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newly-weds*.

A look back on his recent trip to Bosnia and Herzegovina

Last Sunday, divine Providence permitted me to make another [Apostolic Journey to Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) to the city of Banja Luka, six years since my last Pastoral Visit to Sarajevo. A short trip but intense and full of hope for that Country so tried by recent conflicts.

I renew my cordial appreciation to those who welcomed me, to the Bishops and the Authorities, to the Nation's political leaders and to the members of the Interreligious Council whom I encountered, noting with pleasure their openness to dialogue. I perceived in all the will to rise above the sorrowful experiences of the past in order to build, in truth and reciprocal forgiveness, a society worthy of man and acceptable to God.

The high point of the pilgrimage was the celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy with the beatification of Ivan Merz, who I proposed as an example to the Catholics of that land, and especially to young people. Through his intercession, let us pray to the Lord that this Apostolic Visit will bear fruit for the Church and for the entire population of Bosnia and Herzegovina. I ask God that these people, helped also by the international community, may succeed in resolving the complex problems still before them, and are able to realize the legitimate aspiration of living in peace and being part of a united Europe.

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