



The Holy See

PILGRIMAGE FROM THE DIOCESE OF BERGAMO ON THE 50th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF BLESSED POPE JOHN XXIII

ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica

Monday, 3 June 2013

Dear Friends, Members of the Diocese of Bergamo,

I am glad to welcome you here, at the tomb of the Apostle Peter, in this place which is a home to every Catholic. I greet with affection Bishop Francesco Beschi, your pastor, and thank him for his kind words on behalf of you all. I have left out a few things that should be said, but he will tell them to you.

Exactly 50 years ago, at this very time, Blessed [John XXIII](#) departed this world. Those who, like myself, have reached a certain age have vivid memories of the emotion that spread everywhere in those days. St Peter's Square had become an open-air shrine, welcoming by day and by night faithful of all ages and social backgrounds, fearful and praying for the Pope's health. The whole world had recognized Pope John as a pastor and father; a pastor because he was a father. What had made him one? How had he been able to reach the heart of people so different from each other and even many non-Christians? To answer this question we may refer to his episcopal motto, *Oboedientia et Pax*: obedience and peace. "These words", Mons. Roncalli noted on the eve of his episcopal ordination, "in a certain way sum up my story and my life". (*Journal of a Soul*, retreat in preparation for episcopal ordination, 13-17 March 1925). Obedience and peace.

I would like to start with peace, because this is the most obvious aspect, the one that people perceived in Pope John: Angelo Roncalli was a man who could communicate peace; natural, serene and cordial peace; a peace which, with his election to the Pontificate, was manifested to the whole world and was described as "goodness".

It is so beautiful to find a priest, a good priest, filled with goodness. And this reminds me of

something that St Ignatius of Loyola said to the Jesuits — but I am not advertising! — when he was talking about the qualities a superior should have. And he said: he must have this and that... a long list of qualities. Lastly, however, he says this: “and if he does not possess these virtues, he must at least have great goodness”. It is the essential. He is a father. A priest with goodness. This was undoubtedly a distinctive trait of his personality which enabled him to make firm friendships everywhere, as was particularly evident in his ministry as Papal Representative. He served in this capacity for almost three decades, frequently in touch with environments and worlds far removed from the Catholic universe in which he had been born and raised. In those very milieus he proved an effective weaver of relationships and a solid champion of unity, both in the ecclesiastical community and outside it. Moreover he was open to dialogue with the Christians of other Churches, with representatives of the Jewish and Muslim worlds and with many other people of good will.

Indeed Pope John conveyed peace because his mind was profoundly at peace: he had let the Holy Spirit create peace within him. And this mind filled with peace was the result of long and challenging work on himself, abundant traces of which have been left in the *Journal of a Soul*. In it we can see Roncalli — the seminarian, the priest, the bishop — coming to grips with the gradual process of purification of the heart. We see him, day by day, taking pains to recognize and mortify the desires that stemmed from his own selfishness and to discern the inspirations of the Lord, letting himself be guided by wise spiritual directors and be inspired by teachers such as St Francis de Sales and St Charles Borromeo. In reading these writings we truly see a soul being formed under the action of the Holy Spirit who works in his Church, in souls: it was the Spirit himself who, with these good inclinations, brought peace to Roncalli’s soul.

Here we come to the second and crucial word: “obedience”. Although peacefulness was his external feature, Roncalli’s inner disposition consisted of obedience. Obedience, in fact, was his means for attaining peace. First of all it had a very simple and practical meaning: carrying out in the Church the service that his superiors asked of him, seeking nothing for himself, not shrinking from anything requested of him, even when it meant leaving his homeland to face worlds unknown to him and staying long years in places where Catholics were few and far between. It was his willingness to be led like a child that forged his career as a priest, with which you are well acquainted; secretary to Bishop Radini Tedeschi and at the same time teacher and spiritual director at the diocesan seminary; Papal Representative in Bulgaria, in Turkey and Greece, and in France; Pastor of the Venetian Church, and, finally, Bishop of Rome. Yet through this obedience, Roncalli — as a priest and as a bishop — also lived a deeper faithfulness, which we could describe, as he might have said, as abandonment to Divine Providence. He constantly recognized in faith that through living in this way, seemingly led by others and not by his own preferences or on the basis of his own spiritual sensibility, God was designing a project of his own. He was a man of governance, he was a leader. But he was a leader led by the Holy Spirit, out of obedience.

The future Pope John experienced even more profoundly, through this daily abandonment to

God's will, a purification that enabled him to be completely detached from himself and to adhere to Christ. It was in this manner that he let the holiness shine out which the Church was later to recognize officially. "Whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it", Jesus says (Lk 9:24). This is the true source of Pope John's goodness, of the peace he disseminated throughout the world. It is here that the root of his holiness is found: in his evangelical obedience.

This is a lesson for each one of us, but also for the Church of our time: if we let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit, if we are able to mortify our selfishness to make room for the Lord's love and for his will, we will find peace, we will be builders of peace and will spread peace around us. Fifty years after his death the wise and fatherly guidance of Pope John, his love for the Church's Tradition and his awareness of the constant need for renewal, his prophetic intuition of the convocation of the Second Vatican Council and his offering of his life for its success stand as milestones in the history of the Church in the 20th century; and as a bright beacon for the journey that lies ahead.

Dear Bergamascans, you are rightly proud of the "Good Pope", a shining example of faith and virtue for entire generations of Christians in your land. Preserve his spirit, continue to deepen your knowledge in the study of his life and his writings, but above all, imitate his holiness. Let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid of taking risks, just as he was not afraid. Docility to the Spirit, love for the Church and so on.... The Lord will do everything. May he continue from heaven lovingly to accompany your Church, which he loved so deeply in his life, and obtain for her from the Lord, the gift of numerous holy priests, of vocations to the religious and missionary life, as well as vocations to family life and to be committed lay people in the Church and in the world. Thank you for your visit to Pope John! I warmly bless you all.

Many thanks.