



The Holy See

GENERAL AUDIENCE OF JOHN PAUL II

Castelgandolfo

Wednesday, 27 August 2003

Pope John Paul I, master of clear faith

1. In the late afternoon of Saturday, 26 August 1978, my Venerable Predecessor John Paul I was elected Pope. Yesterday marked 25 years since that event.

I evoke those moments today, which I had the joy of experiencing with profound emotion. I recall how deeply his words touched the hearts of all who filled St Peter's Square. From the moment of his first appearance in the central balcony of the Vatican Basilica, he established with those present a current of spontaneous sympathy; his smiling face, his trusting and open gaze conquered the hearts of Romans and faithful throughout the world.

He came from the illustrious ecclesial community of Venice, which had already given the Church two great Pontiffs in the 20th century: St Pius X, the centenary of whose election as Pope we commemorated precisely this year, and Blessed John XXIII, the 40th anniversary of whose death we observed in June.

2. "We open ourselves with great trust to the assistance of the Lord", the new Pope said in his first radiomessage. He was above all a master of clear faith, without giving in to passing and worldly fads. He strove to adapt his teachings to the sensibility of the people, but was careful always to keep the doctrine clear and consistent in its application to life.

But, what was the secret of his charm if not an uninterrupted contact with the Lord? "You know, I try to maintain a continual conversation with You", he noted in one of his writings in the form of a

letter to Jesus. "What is important is that Christ be imitated and loved": here is the truth that, translated into lived experience, makes it possible for "Christianity and joy to go together".

3. The day after his election, in the *Angelus* of Sunday, 27 August, after having called to mind his Predecessors, the new Pope said: "I have neither the *sapientia cordis* [wisdom of the heart] of Pope John, nor the preparation and culture of Pope Paul, but I am in their place. I must seek to serve the Church".

He was very attached to the two Popes who had preceded him. He made himself small before them, manifesting that humility which was always the first rule of life for him. Humility and optimism were the characteristics of his existence. Thanks precisely to these gifts, in his fleeting passage among us, he left a message of hope that found welcome in many hearts. "To be optimistic in spite of everything", he loved to repeat, "trust in God must be the pivot of our thoughts and actions". And he observed with a realism based on faith: "The principal persons in our life are two: God and each one of us".

4. His word and person entered into the heart of all, and for this reason the news of his unexpected death, which occurred on the night of 28 September 1978, was particularly overwhelming. The smile of a Pastor, close to the people, who knew how to dialogue with the culture and the world with serenity and balance, had vanished.

The few talks and writings he has left us as Pope enrich the considerable collection of his texts which, 25 years after his death, retain surprising actuality. On one occasion he said: "Progress with men who love one another, considering themselves brothers and sons of the one Father, God, can be a marvellous thing. Progress with men who do not recognize in God the only Father, becomes a constant danger". How much truth there is in these words, also useful for the men and women of our time!

5. May humanity come to accept such a wise lesson and extinguish the numerous hotbeds of hatred and violence present in many parts of the earth, to build up... in solidarity a more just and humane world!

Through the intercession of Mary, of whom John Paul I always professed himself a tender and devoted son, we pray to the Lord that he may welcome his faithful servant into his Kingdom of peace and joy. We also pray that his teaching, which touches the reality of daily events, be light for believers and for every person of good will.

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 Scotland, Malta, the Philippines and the United States. Upon all of you I cordially invoke joy and peace in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the Polish-speaking pilgrims and visitors

Today's catechesis was dedicated to the person of Pope John Paul I. Indeed, yesterday, 25 years were completed since his election to the Chair of Peter. I also participated in that Conclave. I remember the then-elected Pope as a master of simple faith full of devotion lived according to the rule: "What is important is that Christ be imitated and loved". May this be the rule of life for us all. Praised be Jesus Christ!

To young people, the sick and newly-weds

Lastly, as is customary, I direct my thoughts to you, dear *young people*, *sick people* and *newly-weds*. May the example of St Monica, whom we commemorate today, and her son St Augustine, whom we shall celebrate tomorrow, help you look with unyielding trust upon Christ, *light* in difficulty, *support* in time of trial and *guide* in every moment of life. I impart my Blessing to all.