



Vol. 17, No. 184  
February 2023

# WORLD'S GOSPEL

*“Peter, do you love Me?”*

# ***Nothing Halfway Pleases Me: Either All or Nothing***

**O**h, if only mortals – especially my priests and religious souls – knew how much I am wounded and displeased by the indifference, separation, distrust and small inveterate imperfections [of those] who belong to Me in such a special way! No one, or perhaps only those very few souls that I enlighten, have any idea how many vocations, priestly and religious, are lost after years because of deep-seated infidelities. They want to serve Me halfway, holding on to their whims and their moods, satisfying their own wills in everything and taking liberties incompatible with their state and their vows.

That is why I cannot bear them. Nothing halfway pleases Me: either all or nothing, just as not a single drop of blood or water remained in my torn Body on the Cross. However, I continued to live with these chosen souls under the same roof, in the tabernacle, exposed to such profanation, hatred and sacrilege! I had knowledge of everything that should I should undergo sacramentally!



Portrait of Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres, one of the foundresses of the Monastery of the Immaculate Conception in Quito, Ecuador

And I call them to share in my sorrows so as to later gain eternal happiness, to progress through the years, sometimes at the cost of sacrifices and heroism, so that, when the precise moment comes to place crowns of immortal glory upon their heads, they do not stray from the path or tire of the easy yoke of my Cross or, clinging to mortal creatures and placing their trust in the flesh which perishes with death, turn away from Me and lose their souls.

In this case, I abandon them to all the desires of their perverted heart, to deny them before my Heavenly Father, since in their lives they were adverse to humiliation, to obedience, to the practice of virtues that do violence to nature and beautify souls, making them like unto Me, who am the model of the predestined, and without which likeness no one can be saved.

Woe to such men and women! Woe!

Words of the Child Jesus  
to Mother Mariana of Jesus Torres

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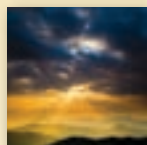
# CONTENTS

Our Readers Write ..... 4

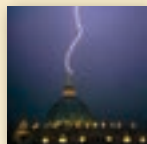
Peter, Who Are You? (Editorial) ..... 5



The Voice of the Popes –  
Divine Munus  
in Human Hands



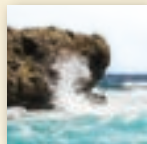
Gospel Commentary –  
“Be Reconciled  
with God!”



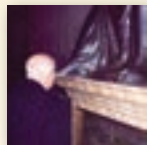
On the Death of  
Benedict XVI – The First  
and the Last Pope



The Brilliant Trajectory  
of a Historic Pope



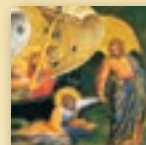
Upon the Rock That Is Peter



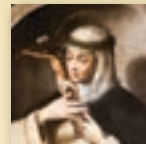
An Ever-Growing Love  
of the Church



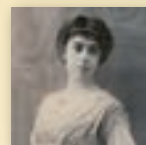
St. Walburga – A Soul  
Ever Faithful to the  
Divine Will



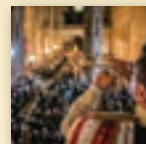
Holy Even in Exile,  
Immortal Despite Schism



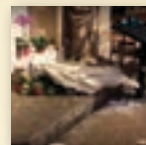
Letters From a Wise and  
Prudent Virgin



A Voyage Marked  
by Suffering



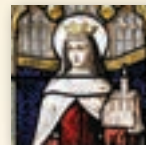
Heralds Worldwide



Church and World  
Events



Story for Children... –  
The Lamb, the Pigs  
and the Mud



The Saints of  
Each Day



Vox Prophetica



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# OUR READERS WRITE



## **"A GOOD MOTHER... AND AN APPLE!"**

A wonderful story for children, where they can learn the moral of how to adore Jesus, and honour Mary and Joseph. Well mingling of the Word of God with another story.

*Natalina Vaz*  
*Via catholicmagazine.news*

I was very touched and delighted by this beautiful story of the Holy Family and of Lucas and his family.

*Martinho Lino da Silva*  
*Via revista.arautos.org*

What a beautiful story, in which faith, charity and love of intercession stand out. Thank you, my sweet and beloved Jesus, for having left us Mary as our Mother, who is our intercessor and Mediatrix, so that through Her we may come to You.

*María Elena Lechuga Siordia*  
*Via revistacatolica.org*

## **DOES THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONG TO THOSE WHO ARE LIKE CHILDREN?**

When Jesus said that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like children – as stated in the *Editorial* of Issue No. 164 of the magazine – He was referring to the humility of the children of that time. Nowadays, ego and pride are qualities that are increasingly observed in children, especially schoolchildren, in whom competitiveness and rivalries gain more ground than friendship and cooperation, as a preparation for the world of work, where competition is seen as essential for productivity and people are

no longer the top priority, because the most important thing is to produce, and to make lots of money.

Nowadays, children are quick to learn the distorted values of humanity. However, people still have a choice. They can choose to serve money, success and riches – as is emphasized today – or they can serve their neighbour and therefore God.

*Sol Line*  
*Via revista.arautos.org*

## **"CEASE FIRE!"**

*Cease Fire!* An excellent article which, with clarity and precision, leads the reader to visualize, understand and meditate about a society and some events, "products of the Revolution," that in a certain moment of history led Europe to war and desolation. But, as Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira taught, to overcome the Revolution, the Counterrevolution is needed, the Christian Counterrevolution, the "flame of truth". If one believes in this and fights for it day by day, in the end we will be able to say: *Cease fire!* And everyone will be able to sing *Adeste Fideles*.

*Laura Vitón*  
*Via revistacatolica.org*

## **A PRAYER THAT SUMS UP WHAT WE SHOULD DESIRE**

The prayer of Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira, transcribed in the December issue, is very beautiful; it sums up everything we should desire in order to arrive prepared before the Lord.

*Lenet Pavon*  
*Via revistacatolica.org*

## **A WITNESS THAT SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE FOR SALVATION**

Phenomenal *Gospel Commentary* in the January issue of the magazine!

May Mary Most Holy envelop us in her mantle and sincerely convert our hearts so that one day we may see the true Light. And may our witness serve as an example for the conversion and salvation of many.

*Verônica Dias Gonçalves*  
*Via revista.arautos.org*

## **THE WAR OF CANUDOS: THE TRUTH COMES TO LIGHT**

I have in my hands Heralds of the Gospel magazine number 181, where I read, on page 34, the article by Eduardo José Ribeiro Matos entitled *From Defamation to Destruction*. In reality, there were historical slanders against Canudos and its people. But the truth always comes to light.

*Emanuel Lima*  
*Taguatinga – Brazil*

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT PRESENT IN EVENTS**

Thank you for the article *Regal and Victorious Presence of the Divine Infant*, in magazine number 182. I have not yet been able to read the whole thing, but from what I have read, it seems to me that the Holy Spirit was and is present in all events. To human eyes, this is something incomprehensible and difficult. But God can always make water spring from a stone, through His Spouse, the Blessed Virgin Mary!

*Ester Noeli Olmos*  
*Via revistacatolica.org*

## **A HOLY SOUL**

How marvellous are the works of God! How beautiful is the story of Blessed Maria Victoria Fornari Strata, entitled *Everything passes and all is naught, except God*. She is truly a holy soul.

*Maria Mendes*  
*Via revistacatolica.org*



## PETER, WHO ARE YOU?

On one occasion, in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asked His disciples: “Who do men say that the Son of Man is?” (Mt 16:13). Some thought John the Baptist; others Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. However, Simon Peter, without hesitation and in the name of all, pronounced: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16). This conviction did not come from flesh and blood but from the “Father who is in Heaven” (Mt 16:17).

It is revealing that immediately after Simon’s decisive answer, Jesus outlined the Petrine mission – “you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church” (Mt 16:18) – as if to reveal to him that, without help from above, it would be truncated.

Peter was a fisherman from Galilee, Prince of the Apostles, a sad rival of Judas during the Passion, herald of the Resurrection, unequalled preacher after Pentecost and perfect follower of the Crucified One in martyrdom... However, none of this defines him. Peter is first of all Pope, the “rock” upon which the Church is built.

In a similar way, many have tried to frame the personality of Benedict XVI. Under the shadow of calumnies, the media often painted him with uncompromising and rigid features, but his serene gaze and simple smile soon reveal his true face. He was, in reality, a remarkable harmonizer.

The list of his titles would be endless. For some he was the “modern-day Thomas Aquinas”; for others, the “Mozart of Theology”; for still others, the “Pope of Fatima”. In short, he is one of the most outstanding figures of the Church in the big picture of recent times.

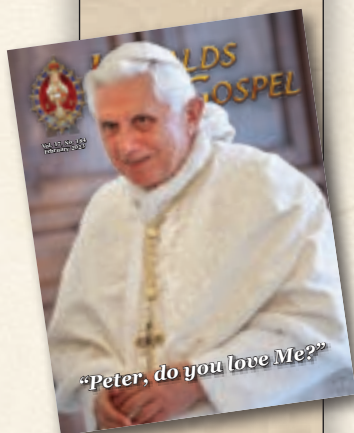
It is said that in the days of John Paul II, the faithful were drawn to *see* the Pope. In the pontificate of Benedict XVI, they flocked to *hear* the Pope. The Heralds of the Gospel were able to hear the voice of this shepherd-theologian several times, above all in the Association’s definitive pontifical approval, as well as of the Societies of Apostolic Life born from it.

The German Pontiff commented that a fundamental part of the future of the Church is decided in Brazil and affirmed, in the book-interview *Light of the World*, that the Heralds would be part of “new Catholic awakenings.” Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, for his part, confided to His Holiness, in a letter of November 26, 2018, that he felt their missions and vocations were intimately united.

With these facts in mind, the recently deceased Pontiff could even be called “herald of the Heralds”... However, as was Peter, Benedict is first and foremost Pope and, as such, he has received the same charge to love Christ unconditionally and to feed the sheep entrusted to him (cf. Jn 21:15-17). From this charge everything else follows, including the specific mission of each Successor of Peter.

And so, who was Benedict XVI and what was his mission?

It is impossible to know precisely, for it would be first necessary to ask whether he has already fulfilled his mission. Regarding who he was, we will try to offer some pointers in the following pages. As for his mission, one can answer, like Peter inspired from on high, that Benedict XVI has certainly not fulfilled it in its entirety. This is because especially chosen souls continue to fulfil their mission in eternity and in their legacy left on earth. How will this happen? Only time will tell... ✧



**Benedict XVI**  
during a meeting  
at the Vatican  
on 30/5/2009

Photo: Stefano Slaziani  
(Agefotostock.com)



# *Divine Munus in Human Hands*

On the one hand, the weakness proper to human beings is revealed in Peter's ministry, but at the same time, also God's power: in the weakness of human beings itself the Lord shows His strength.

**Y**ou are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church" (Mt 16:18). What exactly was the Lord saying to Peter with these words? With them, what promise did He make and what task did He entrust to him? And what is He saying to us – to the Bishop of Rome, who is seated on the Chair of Peter, and to the Church today?

If we want to understand the meaning of Jesus' words, it is useful to remember that the Gospels recount for us three different situations in which the Lord, each time in a special way, transmits to Peter his future task. [...]

## *Cross and glory: inseparable realities*

[In the Gospel according to St. Matthew] the promise is made at the sources of the Jordan, on the boundary of the Judaic Land, on the frontiers of the pagan world. The moment of the promise marks a crucial turning-point in Jesus' journey: the Lord now sets out for Jerusalem and for the first time, He tells the disciples that this journey to the Holy City is the journey to the Cross: "From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer

many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised" (Mt 16:21).

*Christ stays in  
His barque,  
the little boat  
of the Church;  
He also commands  
the waters today, as  
Lord of the elements*

Both these things go together and determine the inner place of the Primacy, indeed, of the Church in general: the Lord is continuously on His way towards the Cross, towards the lowliness of the servant of God, suffering and killed, but at the same time He is also on the way to the immensity of the world in which He precedes us as the Risen One, so that the light of His words and the presence of His love may shine forth in the world; He is on the way so that through Him, the Crucified and Risen Christ, God himself, may arrive in the world. In this regard,

Peter describes himself in his First Letter as "a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed" (1 Pt 5:1).

## *Christ is victorious in the suffering Church*

For the Church, Good Friday and Easter have always existed together; she is always both the mustard seed and the tree in whose boughs the birds of the air make their nests. The Church – and in her, Christ – still suffers today. In her, Christ is again and again mocked and struck; again and again an effort is made to reject Him from the world. Again and again the little barque of the Church is ripped apart by the winds of ideologies, whose waters seep into her and seem to condemn her to sink.

Yet, precisely in the suffering Church, Christ is victorious. In spite of all, faith in Him recovers ever new strength. The Lord also commands the waters today and shows that He is the Lord of the elements. He stays in His barque, in the little boat of the Church. Thus, on the one hand, the weakness proper to human beings is revealed in Peter's ministry, but at the same time, also God's power: in the weakness of human beings itself the Lord shows His strength; He demonstrates that it





The keys are given to Peter - Church of St. Peter and St. Paul,  
Scherrerwiller (France)

is through frail human beings that He himself builds His Church.

### *Jesus' prayer is the protection of the Church*

Let us now turn to the Gospel according to St. Luke, which tells us that during the Last Supper, the Lord once again confers a special task upon Peter (cf. Lk 22:31-33). This time, the Lord's words addressed to Simon are found immediately after the Institution of the Most Blessed Eucharist. [...] He says that Satan has demanded to have him so that he may sift him like wheat. This calls to mind the passage in the Book of Job, where Satan asks God for the power to afflict Job. [...]

And this also happens with Jesus' disciples. God gives a certain liberty to Satan in all times. To us it often-times seems that God allows Satan too much freedom, that He grants him the power to distress us too terribly; and that this gets the better of our forces and oppresses us too heavily.

Again and again we cry out to God: "Alas, look at the misery of your disciples! Ah, protect us!" In

*His promise is true:  
the powers of death,  
the gates of hell,  
will not prevail  
against the  
Church which  
He built on Peter*

fact, Jesus continues: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Lk 22:32). Jesus' prayer is the limit set upon the power of the devil. Jesus' prayer is the protection of the Church.

### *"Peter, I have prayed for you!"*

We can seek refuge under this protection, cling on to it and be safe. But – as He says in the Gospel – Jesus prays in a particular way for Peter: "... that *your* faith may not fail." Jesus' prayer is at the same time a promise and a duty. Jesus' prayer safeguards Peter's faith, that faith which he confessed at Caesarea Philippi: "You are

the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16).

And so, never let this faith be silenced; strengthen it over and over again, even in the face of the cross and all the world's contradictions: this is Peter's task. Therefore, the point is that the Lord does not only pray for Peter's personal faith, but for his faith as a service to others. This is exactly what He means with the words: "When you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32).

"When you have turned again": these words are at the same time a prophecy and a promise. They prophesy the weakness of Simon, who was to deny to a maid and a servant that he knew Christ. [...]

"When you have turned again": the Lord, who predicted his fall, also promises him conversion: "And the Lord turned and looked at Peter..." (Lk 22:61). Jesus' look works the transformation of Peter, and becomes his salvation: "he went out and wept bitterly" (Lk 22:62). [...]

### *Truth is stronger than death*

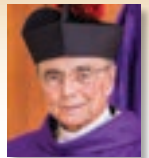
The third reference to the Primacy is found in the Gospel according to St. John (21:15-19). The Lord is risen, and as the Risen One He entrusts His flock to Peter. Here too, the Cross and the Resurrection are interconnected. Jesus predicts to Peter that he is to take the way of the Cross. In this Basilica built over the tomb of Peter – a tomb of the poor – we see that in this very way the Lord, through the Cross, is always victorious.

His power is not a power according to the ways of this world. It is the power of goodness: of truth and of love, which is stronger than death. Yes, His promise is true: the powers of death, the gates of hell, will not prevail against the Church which He built on Peter (cf. Mt 16:18). ✧

Excerpts from: BENEDICT XVI.  
*Homily, 29/6/2006*

# “Be Reconciled with God!”

Today’s Liturgy presents us with a decisive clash between the ambassadors of Christ and those of the devil, whose battleground is present-day society and each particular soul. Which side will we choose at the beginning of this Lent?



✠ Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP

## I – CONVERSION: THE INVITATION OF GOD’S AMBASSADORS

The Liturgy of Ash Wednesday opens the penitential season of Lent, which the Holy Church reserves for her faithful for a change of life. That resolution of conversion which we so often formulate at the beginning of the year and do not carry out, can be taken up again now, with the graces proper to this period.

Wise as she is, the Mystical Bride of Christ wants our souls to be cleansed of the attachments we have accumulated over the months, with a view to the most important Solemnity of the year, the Easter Triduum, in which we commemorate the mysteries of Our Lord’s Passion, Death and Resurrection. At her petition, the Holy Spirit is attentive in distributing graces of amendment to Catholics who wish to take these days seriously.

### “Remember that you are dust”

At this celebration the Church prescribes the imposition of ashes, complementing in a very symbolic way the fasting that marks the Liturgy. This rite reminds us that all earthly goods are of no worth to man who, in the normal process of nature, must die and return to the dust from which he came, as one of the formulas used in the

ceremony clearly underlines: “*Memento, homo, quia pulvis es, et in pulverem reverteris* – Remember, man, that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The readings for this day bring together some of the most authoritative voices to speak in the name of God, from both the Old and New Testaments, urging us to return to the Lord, whom, unfortunately, we often abandon in order to embrace sin...

### “Return to Me!”: the cry of the true prophets

In the Old Testament we often observe how, after immense calamities occasioned by the sins of the chosen people, God calls them to conversion through His authentic emissaries, the prophets.

This happened four hundred years before the Divine Redeemer’s coming, in the time of Joel, whose oracle is found in the first reading (cf. Jl 2:12-18). The prophet foresaw tremendous punishments for Israel:

“Blow the horn in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming! Yes, it approaches, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of thick clouds!” (Jl 2:1-2).

*As He did  
long ago in  
Israel, God  
also calls man  
to conversion  
today through  
His authentic  
emissaries,  
the prophets*



## GOSPEL

Jesus said to His disciples: <sup>1</sup>“Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.

<sup>2</sup>“When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

<sup>5</sup>“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street cor-

ners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup> But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.

<sup>16</sup>“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.

<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>18</sup> so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you” (Mt 6:1-6, 16-18).

The threat of imminent punishment has always been a resource used by God in prophetic language to urge a change of course. The Scriptures show how many times the warning was fulfilled when, ignoring the voice of the divine ambassador, the Jews failed to produce the works of conversion. To prevent the punishment, it was enough to adopt the way of penitence indicated: “return to Me with your whole heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning” (Jl 2:12). When there is clear recognition of sin, repentance and request for forgiveness, the Lord, who is Mercy, is willing to go back on His threats and forget the faults committed. And He does so even for His own glory, lest His inheritance – which in the New Testament is the Holy Church – suffer the infamy of hearing wicked say: “Where is their God?” (Jl 2:17).

We see then that in penance we find the solution for many of the problems that beset our lives. For God not only forgives those who are converted, but also gives them new gifts to work a true restoration in their souls. When the divine footsteps begin to hasten and we hear the rum-

bling of the approaching chastisement, let us therefore ask the Lord for forgiveness with a heart open to correction.

The Liturgy also offers us the example of one of the most admirable converts of the Old Testament: David, who heeded the rebuke of another ambassador of God, the prophet Nathan, and made amends. Psalm 51, known as *Miserere* was composed by him to ask God’s forgiveness for his sins of adultery and murder. It reflects the perfect posture of the contrite soul: “A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me” (51:12). How beautiful is the story of a person who heard the voice of the prophets and corrected his life! His name, far from becoming a sign of ignominy, becomes a title of glory: King David, ancestor of the Messiah!

### *Christ’s ambassador among men*

As in the Old Covenant, in the New Testament St. Paul the Apostle presents himself as the ambassador of God, this time made Man: Our Lord Jesus Christ. In the light of the mystery of the Redemption, this mission takes on a

*How many chastisements fell upon the chosen people for failing to follow the paths indicated by the divine ambassador!*

*All sin has its root in pride, which is why the followers of the devil make use of this vice to set souls on the paths that lead to hell*

new light, as the Second Reading demonstrates: “Brothers and sisters: We are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20).

Reconciliation is for those who are outside of friendship with God, that is, for those who have committed any grave sin. With the exception of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of Our Lady and certainly of St. Joseph, who does not have some reason to beat his breast? To say otherwise would be presumptuous, for even if our conscience accuses us of only minor faults, we must consider that reparation for a single venial sin – since it is an offence against an infinite Being – cannot be made even by the merits of the Blessed Virgin, added to those of all the Blessed and Angels in Heaven. In order for our reparation to be satisfactory, the Father gave His Son to die on the Cross for us: “For our sake He made Him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).

Finally, the Gospel, through the lips of the Divine Ambassador par excellence, warns us against the devil’s emissaries, whose hypocrisy, though dressed in religious garb, aims at leading us away from the path of salvation.

## II – PRIDE, WEAPON OF THE DEVIL’S AMBASSADORS

The Gospel verses of this commemoration, already amply commented upon on another occasion,<sup>1</sup> highlight the trilogy formed by almsgiving, prayer and fasting, as pious works that make us pleasing to God. In this sense, the current obligatory penance in Lent is reduced to something almost symbolic: two days of fasting – Ash Wednesday and Good Friday – in addition to abstinence from meat on Fridays. There is, however, a fast of which Our Lord speaks more

especially, a penance which will never be abolished or mitigated, but only more and more highly recommended, and which we can practise with great benefit to our souls. This fast is concerned with illusions pertaining to the spirit more than to those of the flesh.

### *Pride: the Pharisaism of every age*

There is no sin that is not rooted in pride. And to combat it, one must place oneself in the contemplation of God: the more one loves the Lord, the more one receives the light to share in His happiness. This reality, so simple to state, represents man’s great difficulty on this earth. For this reason, those who wish to serve the devil in his work of perdition, and therefore set themselves up as his ambassadors, use this terrible vice to direct others along the paths that lead to hell.

Such madness is stigmatized by the Divine Master in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew, when describing a series of customs

practised by those whom He calls “hypocrites”, referring, no doubt, to the Jews who allowed themselves to be guided by a religious practice entirely made up of the outward signs of the Pharisaic sect.

### *Do not ask for a reward already received*

Jesus said to His disciples: <sup>1</sup> “Take care not to perform righteous deeds in order that people may see them; otherwise, you will have no recompense from your heavenly Father.”

In this first verse, Our Lord reproaches those who practise justice in order to be seen by others. However, in the previous chapter, which is also part of the Sermon on the Mount, He legitimizes the actions of those whose good deeds are seen by others: “A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but



The prayer of the Pharisee -  
Lázaro Galdiano Museum, Madrid



on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house” (Mt 5:14-15).

At first sight, there seems to be a contradiction in the Saviour’s discourse. In reality, however, He teaches that one should not do good *solely* for this purpose, but above all to praise God. His warning, therefore, does not oblige one to hide good works in a safe; it only warns against the error of the Pharisees, who had so turned in on themselves as to forget the Lord.

As the word of the Divine Master is eternal and applies to all men, we too must take care not to practise justice with the intention of making ourselves the centre of attention of others. Whoever does this loses his merit and receives his recompense – that is, self-satisfaction – already on this earth. Consequently, he will not be able to appear before his particular judgement with the hope of receiving, as St. Paul did, “the crown of righteousness” (2 Tm 4:8).

### *The danger of “retributive affection”*

<sup>2</sup>“When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win the praise of others. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>3</sup>But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, <sup>4</sup>so that your almsgiving may be secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

For the Jews, as for many contemporary men, alms-giving implied an enormous sacrifice... It cost them dearly to take from their own goods in order to favour their neighbour! And they tried to compensate this “great renunciation” with the reward of recognition. Trumpets were blown and everyone stopped to acclaim the benefactor, who swelled with pride. Once again Our Lord says that he who does this has already been repaid, for he has received as reward the accolade of others – an incense which, it is sad to note, vanishes with the first passing wind.

Another nuance should be taken into consideration. There is a tendency in human nature, especially in cultures where communicativeness and affection in relationships are more accentuated, that we could define as a desire for “retributive esteem”. Like someone who works to receive his salary at the end of the month, we are sometimes generous with others expecting a reciprocity

which, when denied, produces strong resentment. Ultimately, the reproach that Our Lord makes to the Pharisees applies also to this selfish deviation of the instinct of sociability.

How can this instinct be used in an orderly fashion? It is Our Lord Jesus Christ, most perfect in His humanity, albeit with a divine personality, who answers us by His example. Without ceasing to be loving towards His brethren, throughout the Gospel He demonstrates His intense relationship with the Father, which then overflows into a disinterested desire to do good to others.

### *The emptiness of prayer for our own sake*

<sup>5</sup>“When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. <sup>6</sup>But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you.”

The Pharisaic defects of that time, which included a ridiculous religious exhibitionism, required Our Lord to urge prayer in the discretion of one’s room and not in the presence of others. Does this mean that Catholics cannot pray in a public place? Obviously not. This passage teaches us that we must avoid making a display, whether through facial expressions or postures, that is intended to convince others that we have an exceptional piety or that we are being granted an ecstasy or a revelation...

At the same time, in criticizing the ostentatious prayer that characterized the Pharisaic brood of vipers, the Saviour warns us against a defect to which all mankind is prone. In ordinary life, a good Catholic should not take any action that would imply occupying the place reserved for God and the supernatural world. And here we repeat the point just made: our dealings with one another must be for God, and God is a simple being!<sup>12</sup> The Catholic must be discreet, and not act like a child who continually shakes his rattle so that others will pay attention to him...

### *Vanity nullifies the value of any sacrifice*

<sup>16</sup>“When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites. They neglect their appearance, so that they may appear to others to be

*A Catholic should not take any action that would imply occupying the place reserved for God and the supernatural world*

*Undervaluing  
the worth  
of the  
Sacraments,  
the devil's  
emissaries  
offer human  
solutions  
whose last  
ends are found  
on this earth*

fasting. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward.<sup>17</sup> But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,<sup>18</sup> so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden. And your Father who sees what is hidden will repay you.”

On one occasion when Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira talked to the author of these lines about some migraines he noticed him suffering, he recommended that, when this happened, he should never let the discomfort show in his physiognomy or external attitudes. And he illustrated this recommendation with a quaint but eloquent expression: “One does not leave the house wearing pyjamas.” In fact, it would be seen as strange for someone to get up in the morning and go out in public wearing his nightclothes. Such behaviour, on the physical level, would be equivalent someone going about drawing everyone’s attention to an interior situation that should remain in the soul’s intimacy with God.

This was the deplorable custom of the Pharisees. When they fasted, they would put ashes on their heads, leave their beards dishevelled, go about unkempt and with a sad face, to give others the impression that they were making an exceptional sacrifice.

This is not the attitude that the contemporary apostolate requires. In a society that shuns sacrifice, especially when made for love of Our Lord, those who renounce the enticements of the world must show the joy of serving God in order to highlight the emptiness of earthly goods. And since today people dress in an increasingly vulgar manner – when they do so at all – and often do not appreciate the importance of hygiene, it is fitting to unite cleanliness with the practice of virtue, and to manifest the happiness of the children of the true Church in their countenance and outward appearance.

***Good works should be seen,  
so that the One who inspired  
them may be praised***

Just as Our Lord, in order to fully accomplish His mission, wished to manifest himself during the three years of His public life, so the Church, as a visible society, must shine before the eyes of all. Contemplating her splendours becomes an occasion of graces for men and women, continuing the action of Jesus Christ himself over hu-

manity. But this “seeing” must always have Him as its centre and end.

As far as we are concerned, when we have to be a point of reference for others, we must accept this only as a means to uplift them to God. The images presented by today’s Gospel show us how pride leads us into ridiculous behaviour; thus we are invited to simplicity of heart, and to never draw attention to ourselves. In short, these images teach us that whoever seeks his treasure on earth loses that of Heaven, and whoever renounces the rewards of the world gains those of Heaven.

### **III – THE CLASH OF TWO PROPHETISMS**

In the Gospel at the beginning of Lent, the Divine Master shows the contrast between false and authentic piety and penance. Hypocrites make a show of almsgiving, prayers and fasting in order to please men and receive the reward offered by the world. However, Jesus teaches us that we should only desire retribution from God, which is promised to us by His legitimate ambassadors.

As in the days of Joel, of St. Paul or of Our Lord, the world today is also beset by terrible catastrophes. When it is not the threat of the most diverse forms of natural cataclysms, it is the danger of a world war on the verge of becoming nuclear that looms on the horizon. In the midst of this insecurity, God offers us once again in this Lent a favourable time for conversion.

#### ***The false promises of the devil’s ambassadors***

In the year 2023, this penitential period takes on a special character. As in the epochs considered in the readings of this Liturgy, it is given to us to choose between the ambassadors of Christ, who present to us the way of salvation, and the new ambassadors of the devil who, like the Pharisees of Our Lord’s time, offer solutions based on pride and human resources, whose ultimate objective lies on this earth.

Scientific discoveries multiply in an attempt to make human life more pleasurable and prolong it indefinitely, as if full happiness were to be found in this world and not in Heaven.

Ever more daring and invasive technological advances proliferate, whose acceptance always demands some “disinterested surrender”, given





St. Paul confronts the false prophet Barjesus - Carnavalet Museum, Paris

the deleterious effects on health of the omnipresent cybernetic devices. A new religion with its own morality is imposed, whose “acts of piety” aim only at impressing the dominant opinion, generally averse to the Law of God.

It has become beautiful, for example, to ask pardon for “sins” committed against nature, sometimes going to extremes that violate common sense, or to do penance for acts considered “inappropriate” by the new morality, even if this means breaking with fidelity to the traditional teaching of Holy Church in matters of Faith and morals, while this same fidelity is considered rigidity and a lack of charity for not agreeing with the reigning relativism.

The devil’s ambassadors, while underestimating the importance of the Sacraments and therefore of divine grace, overvalue science, which claims to put an end to certain ills, without ever doing so entirely. Like their leader, they never deliver what they promise, but take away what they claim to guarantee. In every age, the devil creates a pseudo-eternal well-being for man that makes him forget God.

### *What do Christ’s ambassador’s offer?*

In a diametrically opposite direction, the ambassadors of Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose voices resound in this Liturgy which opens Lent, urge a true conversion of heart, the fruit of sincere repentance and a trusting entreaty for pardon, which manifests itself in acts of piety and authentic penance. These ambassadors, as St. Paul stresses in the Second Reading, give full value to God’s grace, urging that it not be received in vain (cf. 2 Cor 6:1).

It is worth asking ourselves: what prevents us from following the Apostle’s advice and allowing ourselves to be reconciled with God (cf. 2 Cor 5:20)?

There are several factors, including: not recognizing our own faults; not seeing in the events that surround us the hand of Providence calling us to himself; not seeing in God the kind, compassionate, patient Father, full of mercy, who consented to sacrifice His Only-begotten Son in order to redeem us (cf. 2 Cor 5:21); not seeking salvation in divine grace, granted through the Sacraments.

Simply put, we are prevented by giving more ear to the devil’s ambassadors than to Our Lord’s.

Faced with the alternative presented to us at the beginning of this penitential period, let us heed the voice of Christ coming to us through His ambassadors. And if our conscience accuses us of some fault, let us make a good Confession, which will truly reconcile us with God and be the turning point for a return to the right path, on which we shall persevere, with the help of grace, from now on. ✧

*Anchored in grace, the ambassadors of Christ urge a true conversion of heart, the fruit of a trusting entreaty for pardon*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. [God Should Always Be in the Centre](#). In: *Heralds of the Gospel*. Nobleton. No. 28 (Feb., 2010); p.10-17. Having commented at length in this article on the exegetical data concerning the customs denounced by Our Lord in the Gospel of Ash Wednesday, in the present lines more attention will be given to the moral applications beneficial for our days.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 202.

# *The First and the Last Pope*

There are those who claim that he was the last Pontiff of a bygone era. Many consider him the guardian of Tradition during a time of rupture. Few dare deny that his life marked the transition from an old era to a new one, in the world and in the Church. In the end, who was Benedict XVI?

✠ **Humberto Luís Goedert**



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**T**hat afternoon in Rome, Vatican Hill was the stage of an unprecedented execution: before the eyes of onlookers, a Galilean was crucified upside down. Given the barbarity of the method, it may have been surmised that he was a cruel criminal. In reality, he was the only mortal capable of binding Heaven and earth (cf. Mt 18:18). Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, finally surrendered his soul to the Love of his life.

Without the presence of the visible Head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the world was left literally upside down... Indeed, the nascent Church was facing its first great upheaval: the See was vacant! But there was nothing to fear, for the Divine Master had built His Church on firm rock. From it would emanate a line of successors to the first Pope who, one after the other, would transmit the power of the keys up to the present time.

The last day of 2022 saw the most recent death of a Pontiff. Benedict XVI did not follow his oldest predecessor into martyr-

dom, but wanted to echo Peter's response when he was asked by Jesus about the extent of his love (cf. Jn 21:15-19). Indeed, the Pope Emeritus' last words were: "Lord, I love You."

What other ties exist between the first and the last Pope to pass away?

***"Follow Me and I will make you a fisher of men"***

Joseph Aloisius Ratzinger was born in the very middle of the "interwar period". His birth fell on Holy Saturday, the Easter vigil, which his family interpreted as providential, as indeed it was. Benedict XVI would be called to be an announcer of Christ's victory over death, as was Peter after visiting the empty tomb.

In 1939, as a twelve-year-old boy, Joseph was enrolled in a minor seminary where he spent three years, until it was closed by the Nazis and the students were forced to return home. Despite his poor health and his opposition to the Hitler regime, he was obliged to do military service. In the most adverse situations, he felt the presence of a "special Angel" who protected him, like the one who freed Peter from prison (cf. Acts 12:7-11).

Although persecuted on account of his desire to embrace the priesthood, he was finally



**From the rock upon which Christ built His Church would emanate a line of successors to the first Pope, who would transmit the power of the keys up to the present day**

"Martyrdom of St. Peter", by Pedro Sierra - National Art Museum of Catalonia, Barcelona (Spain); above, façade of St. Peter's Basilica during the funeral Mass of Benedict XVI



ordained. He finished his academic studies in 1957 with a thesis on the Theology of History in St. Bonaventure. The following year he became a professor in Freising and in 1959 he went on to hold this post in the University of Bonn.

Later he performed one of the most important functions of his life, acting as a theological consultant of Vatican II. He would subsequently insist on the need to rediscover the true meaning of this council, in the face of such covert aggressive forces as rationalism, individualism and hedonism, which sought to distort it.<sup>2</sup> Already as Pope, he discerned the existence of a “council of the media” that had created “so many disasters, so many problems, so much suffering: seminaries closed, convents closed, banal Liturgy...”<sup>3</sup>

As Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, between 1981 and 2005, he diagnosed that “heresy still exists” and the necessity – as his earliest predecessor indicated – of preserving the people from “false prophets” with their pernicious heresies and dissolute doctrines (cf. 2 Pt 2:1-2).<sup>4</sup> Now who could these charlatans be, these “Simon Magi” (cf. Acts 8:9-24) who, like false “Simon Peters”, defile the spiritual goods of the Church? Perhaps, as in early Christianity, only in time will they be identified...

### ***Steering Peter's barque amid the storm***

When the one hundred and fifteen Cardinals gathered in conclave on April 18, 2005, few ventured to bet that Cardinal Ratzinger would be elected Pope on only the fourth ballot. For quite different reasons, few would have suggested that the uncultured and uncultivated Peter (cf. Acts 4:13), fisherman of the Sea of Galilee, could be raised to the highest dignity of the Church... God chooses what is weak

in the eyes of the world in order to confound the strong (cf. 1 Cor 1:27)!<sup>5</sup>

Ratzinger chose the name *Benedict*, in reference to Pope Benedict XV, guide of the Church in the turbulent times of the First World War, and to Benedict of Nursia, patriarch of western civilization.<sup>5</sup>

As at the time of the aforementioned war, the first Pope elected in the third millennium reigned dur-



**A Pontiff “between two eras”, to Benedict XVI fell the task of carrying out a true civilizational counter-revolution**

Benedict XVI greets the faithful gathered for Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square, in 2010

ing a period of institutional upheaval. When asked if he felt “like the last Pope of an old era or the first of a new one,” he replied: “I would say that I am between two eras.”<sup>6</sup> Benedict XVI would be, in this sense, a true *Pontiff*, that is to say a “bridge” between two worlds, as he himself portrayed it: “I no longer belong to the old world, nor does the new one exist yet.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, during his papacy, a new generation was born with electronic devices in their hands. The Revolution was taking greater strides, promoting secularization, family dissolution, and an almost tribal way of

life, as foretold by Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly the entire doctrinal legacy of the theologian Ratzinger will play its part in the quest to restore the Faith. In the history of the Church, Benedict XVI is the Pope who has written the most throughout his life. Nevertheless, as Dr. Plinio also questioned, “what would be the use of books, of thinkers, of what ultimately remains of civilization, in a tribal world in which all the whirlwinds of disordered human passions and all the deliriums of structural-tribalist ‘mysticism’ were unleashed? A tragic situation, in which no one would be anything, under the empire of Nothingness...”<sup>9</sup>

In the face of this nihilism, the mission inspired by St. Benedict has to be understood much more along the lines of what has recently been called the “Benedict option”,<sup>10</sup> that is, the search for the ideal of order and temperance, wisdom in balancing work and prayer, the integral promotion of Christian education, as well as detachment from worldly corruption, in the manner of the Benedictine rule. In other words, a true civilizational counter-revolution.

The fact is that Benedict XVI himself did not entirely fulfil the aforementioned “Benedict option”, not least because his pontificate was relatively short. Will his legacy at least fulfil it?

### ***The denial of Peter and the renunciation of Benedict***

On February 11, 2013, out of a serene sky, a bolt of lightning struck the dome of St. Peter's Basilica. Benedict XVI would be the first Pope of modern times to renounce the Petrine office. Even the heavens were surprised by the decision!

It is undeniable that this act determined a new phase in the life of Benedict XVI, in the manner of Peter's denials. We are not implying that the renunciation of the Petrine office was

With the renunciation, a bolt of lightning out of a serene sky struck the dome of St. Peter's Basilica... Does the physical weakness of the German Pontiff not bear some analogy to Peter's lack of spiritual strength during the Passion?

Dome of St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican, on the day Benedict XVI announced his renunciation

a betrayal. Far from it. However, the physical weakness of the German Pontiff is analogous to Peter's lack of spiritual strength in the face of the questions of a simple maid servant. The Pope is not said to have regretted this decision, but it is symbolic that his private secretary, Archbishop Georg Gänswein, "wept bitterly" (cf. Lk 22:62) on June 18, 2022, when he commented on the fact.

Pascal declared that "all things cover some mystery; all things are veils that cover God."<sup>11</sup> Well then, what to say about a renunciation of the pontificate?... If the movements of Peter's soul during the Passion are mysterious, how can one not wonder about Benedict XVI's reflections before his resignation? What role would a "Pope Emeritus" have from then on?

Perhaps we will never know how to answer these questions, and things become even more enigmatic if we also consider the words of Archbishop Gänswein on May 20, 2016: "Before and after his resignation, Benedict understood and understands his duty as a participation in this 'Petrine ministry'. He has left the pontifical throne; however, with the step of February 11, 2013, he has in no way abandoned that ministry."<sup>12</sup> Here, as in liturgical acts, the visible signs are less important than those hidden under the aura of mystery...

### *The last Pope?*

It is a clear fact that the eve of the year 2023 witnessed the last Pope to pass away. But did Benedict XVI close the list of Popes mentioned in the so-

called "prophecy of St. Malachy"? That was one of Peter Seewald's questions on May 23, 2016, to which the Pontiff Emeritus replied: "Anything is possible."<sup>13</sup> However, he adds that, in any case, this should not be interpreted as the end of the Papacy.

Be that as it may, with the death of Benedict XVI, we no longer have his participation in the Petrine munus. In this sense, would not the life of the German Pontiff have been a kind of *kathekon* – a restraint – against the "mystery of iniquity" (2 Thes 2:7)? If so, will there now come a new phase, that he himself had envisaged? Moreover, is this in line with the message of Fatima, whose prophetic mission, commented Benedict XVI, is not yet complete?<sup>14</sup> As Archbishop Gänswein asserted, "Popes can correctly be judged and classified only *ex post*."<sup>15</sup> One day we will know.

### *After death, the resurrection*

To human eyes, the death of St. Peter, leader of the nascent Church, would represent the end of Christianity. In reality, however, just the opposite happened. The following year, the persecutor Nero was dethroned and slain by his own cowardly hands. In 70 AD, fire was set to the temple of Jupiter and the shrines of Juno and Minerva. That same year, Jerusalem was destroyed, so that stone was not left upon stone... But as for the tiny Christian community, it continued to flourish in small nuclei, in the midst of the persecutions.<sup>16</sup>

Considering this, what point have we reached? Perhaps we are already

<sup>1</sup> RATZINGER, Joseph. *Aus meinem Leben. Erinnerungen*. München: DVA, 1998, p.41.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, Joseph. *Rapporto sulla fede*. Roma: Paoline, 1985, p.28.

<sup>3</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Meeting with the Parish Priests and the Clergy of Rome*, 14/2/2013.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, *Rapporto sulla fede*, op. cit., p.20-21.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI. *General Audience*, 27/4/2005.

<sup>6</sup> BENEDICT XVI; SEEWALD, Peter. *Benedicto XVI. Últimas conversaciones con Peter Seewald*. Bilbao: Mensajero, 2016, p.195.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, ibidem.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. *Tribalismo indígena, ideal comunio-missionário para o Brasil no século XXI*. São Paulo: Vera Cruz, 1977.

<sup>9</sup> CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plínio. *Revolução e Contra-Revolução*. 5.ed. São Paulo: Retornarei, 2002, p.204.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. DREHER, Rod. *The Benedict Option. A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*. New York: Sentinel, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> PASCAL, Blaise. Lettre du fin de octobre 1656 à Charlotte de Roannez. In: *Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1954, p.510.



on the verge of living what Ratzinger himself predicted: a community in the manner of a mustard seed, which develops in small groups, insignificant in appearance – the last ones... – but which brings good back to the world.<sup>17</sup> For him, the strength of the Church in this new millennium will come from those “who have deep roots and live from the pure fullness of their faith.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the future of the Church belongs to the Saints.<sup>19</sup>

In this vein, does not a new vitality in the Church come to mind, a “springtime of Pentecost,”<sup>20</sup> as Ratzinger envisaged in his memorable interview with Vittorio Messori? Are we not inclined to conjecture a “great Catholic renaissance,” as, for example, that which he witnessed during his pontificate among the “‘Heralds of the Gospel’, young people who are seized by the enthusiasm of having acknowledged Christ as the

Son of God and of bringing Him into the world”?<sup>21</sup> In these moments when sin abounds, how can we not hope for a superabundance of grace (cf. Rom 5:20), a kind of new descent of the Holy Spirit?

### *The first and the last*

Such a calamitous situation, but one full of hope, coincides with the letter to the Church of Philadelphia in the Book of Revelation. In this regard, St. Bonaventure speaks of the advent of a “prince defender of the Church,” who will sustain her in times of tribulation. He will hold the power of the key of David, as one “who opens and no one shall shut, who shuts and no one opens” (Rv 3:7).<sup>22</sup>

After this new eruption of the Holy Spirit, we can then expect events to take place in the manner of the accounts in the Acts of the Apostles.

First of all, a purification of the traitors of the Church is necessary:

Judas is replaced by St. Matthias (cf. Acts 1:15-26), before the advent of Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-13). Peter speaks to the crowds (cf. Acts 2:14-36), fostering the growth of the community. There are miracles, conversions and healings (cf. Acts 2:37-3:26), to show where the true Church is. Then the Petrine ministry is supported by the “Johannine” ministry, when John begins to collaborate directly in Peter’s battles before the Sanhedrin, that is, against the false Church (cf. Acts 4:1-30). Finally, there are new persecutions and missions, until peace reigns completely. Then we will stand before the “victor” and the “the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of Heaven” (Rv 3:12).

In short, those who think they are first will be last; and those who think they are last will be first... For those who have ears to hear, let them hear! ✧

**In consonance with the prophetic message of Fatima, are we not on the verge of living what the Pope himself predicted, a Church that develops in small groups, insignificant in appearance, but which brings good back to the world?**

Benedict XVI at the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima (Portugal); background, the Serra da Cantareira, Mairiporã (Brazil)



<sup>12</sup> GÄNSWEIN, Georg. *Benedetto XVI, la fine del vecchio, l'inizio del nuovo: L'analisi di Georg Gänswein*. In: [www.acistampa.com](http://www.acistampa.com).

<sup>13</sup> BENEDICT XVI; SEE-WALD, op. cit., p.195.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI. *Homily at the Shrine of Fatima*, 13/5/2010.

<sup>15</sup> GÄNSWEIN, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. WALSH, William Thomas. *Saint Peter the Apostle*. New York: Macmillan, 1948, p.307.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. RATZINGER, Joseph. *O sal da terra*. 2.ed. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 2005, p.15; 100.

<sup>18</sup> RATZINGER, Joseph. *Fe y futuro*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 1973, p.74.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Idem, p.75.

<sup>20</sup> RATZINGER, *Rapporto sulla fede*, op. cit., p.41.

<sup>21</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Light of the World. The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times*. Ig-

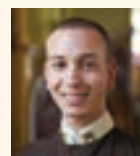
natius Press: San Francisco, 2010, p.58.

<sup>22</sup> In this regard, see: RATZINGER, Joseph. *La Teología de la Historia de San Buenaventura*. 2.ed. Madrid: Encuentro, 2010, p.67-70.



# The Brilliant Trajectory of a Historic Pope

From his youth, the sign of a special calling to the service of the Church shone in the life of Joseph Ratzinger.



✠ Miguel Ferrari

**A**n admirable theologian, a shrewd diplomat and a most influential ecclesiastic: these are some of the attributes of the one who has just departed this life, Pope Benedict XVI. Hardly anyone could more aptly fulfil all the requirements for the office of Supreme Pontiff in our times than Joseph Ratzinger; and I believe there are few who would dare deny it.

However, if it is true that he possessed such qualities, it is also true that he acquired them in the course of a very long trajectory of experiences that formed this personality, as striking as it was discreet. Therefore, the best way to gain a deeper understanding of the figure of Benedict XVI is to analyse his life.

## *A boy destined for the priesthood is born in Bavaria*

Joseph Ratzinger was born on April 16, 1927 into a modest family in the Bavarian village of Marktl am Inn, in an atmosphere of marked joy and religiosity. Such surroundings helped his faith to take root and produced in him a real attraction for the Church, which very soon awoke in his soul the desire to become a priest.

Despite the problems arising from the Second World War, during which he had to serve in the German army, he was able to complete his studies and was finally ordained a priest on June 29, 1951.

## *Influential expert during the Second Vatican Council*

Ratzinger soon stood out as an eminently learned man, assuming the post of professor in 1952 and obtaining his doctorate in Theology as early as 1953.

It was no coincidence that at the time of the Second Vatican Council, Cardinal Joseph Frings, Archbishop of Cologne, summoned him to be his private theological advisor in preparing the schemas to be read at the Council sessions.

His intellectual capacity was so outstanding that the Bavarian priest soon became one of the experts of the magna assembly, exerting a great influence on its development.

## *Guardian of the deposit of the Faith*

However, Ratzinger was not destined to remain a mere scholar. His activity in the Church would extend to a more pastoral sphere: appointed

Archbishop of Munich, he received episcopal ordination on May 28, 1977 and a month later was created Cardinal by Pope Paul VI.

In February 1982, the new Cardinal was transferred to Rome. There he would not govern a diocese, but exercise an effective ascendancy over the Universal Church as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Now we see Ratzinger, with his beret and briefcase, daily crossing St. Peter's Square to his office, where he spends the entire day – even on holidays – in intense activity: tirelessly reading countless works, always in their original language; preparing Congregation documents; judging serious offences; dealing with secret texts, such as the message of Fatima, “the most prophetic of all modern apparitions.”<sup>1</sup>

His doctrinal firmness – which earned him the epithet *Panzerkardinal* from his detractors, in an allusion to German tanks – gave him increasing prominence in the ecclesiastical body, being unanimously recognized as John Paul II's right arm, especially in the last decade of his pontificate. With the Pope's death in 2005, Ratzinger's name was the one to receive the most votes to succeed him.



## ***“Habemus papam!”***

Only on rare occasions has St. Peter’s Square been the scene of greater demonstrations of enthusiasm than on that April 19, 2005, when the election of Joseph Ratzinger – thenceforth Benedict XVI – as the 265th successor of St. Peter was announced. He chose for his papal coat of arms the same phrase as that of his episcopal office, indicating his goal as shepherd: “*Cooperatores veritatis* – Fellow workers in the truth” (3 Jn 1:8).

How would the one who was considered intransigent by his detractors act as Pope? His first encyclical, *Deus caritas est*, surprised the ecclesiastical sphere, for it brought to light the Ratzinger of harmony and union: “To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world – this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical.”<sup>2</sup>

While yet at the beginning of his pontificate, he consecrated it to the Virgin of Fatima, perhaps insinuating with this act what he would clearly state later on about the relevance of the apparitions of Our Lady in the Cova da Iria. It is quite clear that his readings as Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith deeply marked him, and gave him some insights on the future of the Mystical Body of Christ.

### ***The mustard seed***

Benedict XVI did much as the visible head of the Church; above all, much remained to be done. So it was with astonishment that, on that historic February 11, 2013, the world received the news of his resignation as Supreme Pontiff. He claimed to have already exhausted his energies, although his vital force would allow him to live for almost ten more years.

The announcement caused not only astonishment, but also sadness, for the German Pope enjoyed worldwide esteem. But there was also a certain apprehension, as everyone won-

dered about the future of the Church after his resignation.

Certainly Benedict XVI pondered the consequences of this act very carefully before carrying it out. Soon after his election, he had stated that each one would be called to render account to the Supreme Judge for all that he had done or failed to do for the full and visible unity of His disciples.<sup>3</sup> In this frame of mind he inaugurated his pontificate; in it he would bring it to a close, and in it he would enter into silence and recollection, like the seed that is embedded into the earth. The Vicar of Christ thus became a symbol of the Kingdom of God, compared by Jesus to a mustard seed (cf. Lk 13:19).

Now, if we are presently saddened by the absence of the seed, let us recognize that this is the moment when it “bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). Certain missions are only fully accomplished in eternal life. How will Benedict XVI’s vocation as a “fellow worker in the truth” be fulfilled hereafter?

The words he once uttered seem to have taken on a certain significance: “We are possibly facing a new and different epoch in the history of the Church. In it, Christianity will once again be under the sign of the mustard seed.” And once again taking up the theme later on in the same work, he added: “But it is precisely from there that [it] always rejuvenates.”<sup>4</sup>

The seed has been buried, the future will reveal to us what shoots will be born. One certainty remains: in the end, the Kingdom of God will flourish, because Christ, who promised it to us, is immortal. ✧

<sup>1</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Regina cæli*, 13/5/2007.

<sup>2</sup> BENEDICT XVI. *Deus caritas est*, n.39.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI. *Message to the Universal Church at the end of the Holy Mass with the Cardinal Electors*, 20/4/2005.

<sup>4</sup> RATZINGER, Joseph. *O sal da terra*. 2.ed. Rio de Janeiro: Imago, 2005, p.15; 100.



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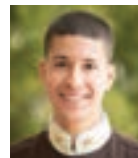
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**From top to bottom: Joseph Ratzinger at six years of age; in 1950, as a seminarian; as a cardinal; as Pope, in 2009; as Pope Emeritus, in 2019. On previous page, Benedict XVI in 2010**

# Upon the Rock That Is Peter

Every legitimate Supreme Pontiff perpetuates the primacy of Cephas. In a sense, they also receive from the Master the gaze which, beyond summoning them to office, invites them to stand firm in His love.

✠ **Javier Antonio Vásquez**



**T**echnology has made astonishing progress in the field of armaments over the past decades. Innovations of this kind are frequently reported, even more so in the context of the threatening conflict in Ukraine. Nevertheless, a nation's military power cannot be reduced to the mere production and stockpiling of weapons. In war, each side typically seeks to appropriate the enemy force's arsenal, study it and use it against the former owner.

Similarly, from its origins, the Papacy has been an institution fiercely fought by men and demons. Of course, the victor in this combat is already established, for the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church (cf. Mt 16:18). However, there are times when the core of the struggle extends

to Peter's heart, and his enemies seek to make it beat against the very institution that he is meant to protect. Under such conditions, what can the faithful who fight on earth do for him?

Let us return to the origins of the mission of the Supreme Pontiff in order to better answer this question.

## *Who is Peter?*

Throughout the centuries, very singular expressions have been devised to refer to the first Pope. Among other appellations dating back to ancient times, we find these: "Prince of the holy Apostles," "leader of that choir," "mouthpiece of all the Apostles," and "safeguard of the Church".<sup>1</sup> As Pope Leo XIII has pointed out, these titles brilliantly proclaim that Peter was placed in the highest degree of dignity and power.

In fact, Our Lord has made him – and in him all of his legitimate successors also – the visible head of the Church Militant, granting him direct and immediate primacy of a true and proper jurisdiction,

and not merely an honorary one.<sup>2</sup> In virtue of his office as representative of Christ and shepherd of the Church, the Supreme Pontiff has supreme and universal power over the whole institution.<sup>3</sup>

But the primacy of Peter, to which acknowledgment and submission are necessary for salvation,<sup>4</sup> is exercised in harmony with the collegial constitution of the Church, that is, with the bishops of the whole world who are united to him. It is, therefore, a primacy of communion.<sup>5</sup> Our Lord Jesus Christ, after all, is the One who governs His Mystical Spouse through the Pope and the legitimate shepherds.<sup>6</sup> Thus, a tyrannical and totalitarian regime does not befit the exercise of this authority.

The Holy Father also presides in charity,<sup>7</sup> that is, he has the primacy of love for Our Lord. Precedence in charity! A glance back to the dawn of the Papacy can help us to better understand the grandeur of this divine institution. Above all, it will encourage us to have more fervent devotion to it, since the selfless devotion of the sheep can help Peter in his arduous mission down through the centuries.



### *Jesus' first gaze at Simon*

The Gospel of John recounts, in singular detail, the event that transformed the life of a fisherman from Galilee.

Andrew was one of the two disciples of John the Baptist when the latter saw Jesus and said: "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (1:36). Having stayed with the Master that day, Andrew immediately went to find his brother and told him: "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). What light must have shone in Simon's soul on hearing the announcement of the Saviour's arrival!

We must consider that from all eternity Jesus knew whom He would choose as the foundation stone of His Church. But the moment had come to meet him in time. The Evangelist tells us that Andrew brought his brother to the Divine Master: "Jesus looked at him, and said, 'So you are Simon the son of John? You shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)'" (1:42).

That gaze of eternal predilection will never leave Peter. It is the initial revelation that Jesus makes to His future Vicar, and on this fundamental truth stands the mission of the "safe-guard of the Church."

The Master contemplated all those who would succeed him on the papal throne. For it is by the institution of Christ himself, and therefore by divine right, that Blessed Peter has perennial successors who have primacy over the universal Church.<sup>8</sup> Every legitimate Supreme Pontiff perpetuates the same primacy of Cephas. In a certain sense, they also receive from Our Lord the gaze which, in addition to summoning them to the office, invites them to become firmly anchored in His love.

In Jesus' first gaze at Peter, the Papacy finds its true horizon. The strength of that look has continued to sustain Cephas down the centuries, ensuring the stability of the rock on which the Church is built.

### *A confession, a reward and a charge*

With unsurpassable divine pedagogy further favoured by grace, Our Lord moulded and predisposed Simon's heart step by step so that at a certain moment he would receive a most important revelation from God the Father (cf. Mt 16:17).

St. Peter possessed the virtue of faith to such a high degree that he was the man chosen to confess the divinity of Jesus. This proclamation "was based on an insightful, illuminated, and comprehensive discernment of the divine nature of the Son of God," as Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias explains.

Thus, being with the Master in the region of Caesarea Philippi, far from gripping events and the agitation of the crowds, only the voice of faith was heard: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16:16). Then Jesus announced to Cephas that He would build an indestructible work, the Church, and would hand over to him "the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 16:19).

### *Peter and John, an evocative relationship*

The faith of the first Pope, however great, would not suffice for his correspondence to his call. Peter assured the Master that he would never abandon Him; among the Apostles, however, only John stood by the Cross (cf. Lk 22:33; Jn 19:26). Peter was afraid when Jesus worked the miraculous catch of fish on Lake Gennesaret: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Lk 5:8); John rested his head on the Heart of the Redeemer (cf. Jn 13:25), for "there is no fear in love" (1 Jn 4:18). Finally, Peter proclaimed his faith in Jesus, and John expressed with singular clarity what the centre of our faith and the Christian image of the Creator consists in, when he said: "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and



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Jesus flanked by St. Peter and St. John the Evangelist - Blessed Sacrament Church, New York

*The correlation between Peter and John seems to show that the excellence of faith depends on the sovereignty of charity*

God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16), as Benedict XVI teaches.<sup>10</sup>

We do not mean to imply a complete equality between the Prince of the Apostles and St. John. In the mid-seventeenth century, during the pontificate of Innocent X, the doctrine held by the Jansenist Martin of Barcos, who advocated for a twofold head in the Church,<sup>11</sup> was judged and declared heretical. The heretic equated the Apostle Paul with St. Peter in the supreme power and government of the universal Church.

Rather, we believe that the beautiful relationship between Cephas and John, the Apostle of love, so evident

in the Gospels, seems to underline how the excellence of faith depends on the sovereignty of charity, even though both virtues are sisters, links in the same chain.

### ***“Peter, do you love Me?”***

St. Thomas says: “Faith works through charity”<sup>12</sup>; indeed, charity makes the act of faith perfect and complete.

Now, after years of life together with Our Lord, although Peter’s faith was great, his love was still imperfect. Before ascending into Heaven, the Divine Master wished to confirm His chosen one in the mission that He had reserved for him. This happened in one of the apparitions to the Apostles after the Resurrection, by the Lake of Tiberias, when Jesus asked him three times: “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Faced with the affirmative answer, Jesus commanded, “Feed my lambs,” “feed my sheep” (Jn 21:15-17).

Charity is the condition for shepherding Christ’s flock since, as we have seen, it is an essential attribute of the Petrine primacy. Thus, by increasing the love of Cephas, the Saviour guaranteed the perpetuity of the pontifical institution.

It follows, therefore, that the weaknesses in St. Peter’s life – and those of the Papacy over the centuries – are due notably to defections in the line of love. The infallible Magisterium has defended the Faith immaculately for two millennia; but without ever lacking orthodoxy in words, a lack of love can be preached by example.

### ***Two thousand years old***

Immediately after the threefold questioning, the Saviour prophesied: “when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish to go” (Jn 21:18).



Our Lord Jesus Christ entrusts the fold of the Church to St. Peter - London

*Before ascending into Heaven, the Divine Master wished to confirm Peter in love, to guarantee the fulfilment of his mission*

The Papacy has existed for two millennia. Perhaps, in a certain historical context, this long-established institution will be subjected to what the Divine Master foretold to St. Peter: it will stretch out its hands to the executioners who wish to crucify it, it will be girded and led by strangers where it does not wish to go, where it should not go.

St. Faustina, the secretary of Jesus’ mercy, records in her diary these sorrowful words of Our Lord: “The great sins of the world are superficial wounds on My Heart, but the sins of a chosen soul pierce My Heart through and through...”<sup>13</sup>

During the Passion, being in the house of Caiaphas, Peter thrice denied the Truth, and thrice the Truth fell on the road to Calvary. Were not these unfortunate pronouncements of the first Pope like new stumbling-stones for the Saviour (cf. Mt 16:23)? Great is the power of Peter, who can bind everything on earth and in Heaven.

Nevertheless, predilection – that unfathomable mystery – marked Cephas’ soul for ever. Let us dare to affirm that, in the face of the omnipotence of divine pardon and of Mary’s prayers, even the power of the keys is impotent: “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter

remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” (Lk 22:61-62).

Undoubtedly, this extraordinary grace of contrition was purchased by Our Lady’s prayers: we can say that Mary sustained the Church at that moment, as She sustains the Papacy today.

### ***Founded on the blood of the martyrs***

It is difficult to imagine a more significant gaze for a Pope than that of the tormented Redeemer. In the suffering expression of Jesus, the triumph of the Resurrection can be contemplated in germinal form; moreover, the death of Our Lord on the Cross has purchased the immortality of His Spouse, the Church, founded on the rock that is Peter.

Following an ancient tradition, the Supreme Pontiff wore beautiful red shoes, signifying that the Church is founded on the blood of the martyrs. The footsteps of Cephas were thus symbolically followed by the witness of those who, persevering in the Faith, were offered in sacrifice for Christ.



In fact, Our Lord's holocaust is the reason for countless others. Even in our own day, the blood of the martyrs is continually renewed. Yes, because perhaps a greater and more unjust torture than that of dying for hatred of religion is that of being martyred for fidelity to love. Let us explain a little more clearly. A famous orator once said with great accuracy: to be loved and not to love is to be a tyrant; to love and not to be loved is to be a martyr.<sup>14</sup>

In the same way, it is possible to find an example of this martyrdom of the soul in the just man Job, who persevered in his innocent righteousness, impassively enduring the harrowing sufferings that Providence allowed the devil to inflict upon him, without the refreshment of any spiritual consolation. This admirable Biblical personage also represents the

men who today suffer for the Mystical Body, in union with its Head, Our Lord Jesus Christ, out of pure devotion to the unshakable rock of the Papacy.

### *A unique gem given to the Papacy*

Perhaps, in a specific historical context, Peter has failed or will fail to reciprocate the love of his children who love him so much. This would not require any ostensive gesture; there are certain forms of silence that confuse; there are indifferences and omissions that are listed among the greatest failures to love. If such an incongruity were to occur, it would be an occasion to give an immense proof of fidelity, taken to the extreme, towards the election and authority of Cephas. And one reason alone would suffice to explain this inexplicable love: simply because he is Peter.

In union with the infinite merits of the Redeemer, it remains to ask what fruits would come from blood shed with such generosity. God does not fail to reward those who sacrifice themselves for Him without seeking rewards: the day will come when these Jobs will be exalted for their unfaltering love of Peter, and their blood will shine like a most precious and unique gem in the institution of the Papacy, as if to ask: "Peter, do you love Me?"

Nothing is in vain. The apparitions of the Cova da Iria and the unconditional promise of Our Lady of Fatima acquire a special brilliance when applied to the Papacy: "In the end, my Immaculate Heart will triumph." This is the victory of Mary's love, which opens a new era of faith for the world and for Holy Church. ✧



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*Are not the  
defections of  
Peter across the  
centuries redressed  
by other Jobs who  
suffer selflessly  
for the Church?*

At left, Job visited by his friends - "Grandes Heurs of Anne of Brittany"; at right, "The Denial of Peter" - Fine Arts Museum, Cordoba (Spain)



Francisco Lecaros

<sup>1</sup> LEO XIII. *Satis cognitum*: DH 3308.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL. *Pastor aeternus*: DH 3055.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. LEO XIII, op. cit., 3309.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. BONIFACE I. *Carta "Institutio"*, aos Bispos da Tessália: DH 233; *Carta "Manet beatum"*, a Rufo e aos outros Bispos da Macedônia: DH 234;

BONIFÁCIO VIII. *Unam sanctam*: DH 875.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Lumen gentium*, n.18: DH 4142.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Idem, n.14, 4137.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH. *Lettre aux Romains*: SC 10, 107.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. FIRST VATICAN COUNCIL, op. cit., 3056-3058.

<sup>9</sup> CLÁ DIAS, EP, João Scognamiglio. *New Insights on the Gospels*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; *Heralds of the Gospel*, 2013, v.VII, p.124.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. BENEDICT XVI. *Deus caritas est*, n.1.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. INNOCENT X. *Decree of the Holy Office*, 24/1/1647: DH 1999.

<sup>12</sup> ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. II-II, q.4, a.3.

<sup>13</sup> ST. FAUSTINA KOWALSKA. *Diary. Divine Mercy in My Soul*. Stockbridge: Marian Press, 2005, p.372.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. VIEIRA, Antônio. *Sermon for the first Friday in Lent*. In: *Obra Completa*. São Paulo: Loyola, 2015, t.II, v.II, p.154.

# An Ever-Growing Love of the Church



Sérgio Hollmann

Allegory of the Church -  
Strasbourg Cathedral (France)

*For Dr. Plinio, the  
Church resembled  
an immense soul,  
a person who brought  
together a thousand  
grandeurs, sanctities  
and perfections*

Already in infancy, too young to know the name or the phenomenon, Dr. Plinio entered into a true spiritual matrimony with the Church, giving himself unconditionally and uniting himself to her with eternal bonds.

**Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP**

**T**o know the Church in all its resplendence it is necessary, at a certain point, to sense in one's inmost soul what it is. And the Author uses the term *sense* because, in fact, it would be something like a mystical tasting, hearing, seeing, breathing and, even a touching of the Church, as it were... Without a light from the Holy Spirit, all is reduced to a mathematical theorem which can serve as the basis for long conferences or weighty theoretical books in which only the intelligence will be applied, but not the heart.

Let us invoke a metaphor in order to better grasp the difference which exists between intellectual and experiential understanding, the latter originating in a mystical grace. Let us suppose that someone has never eaten a particular fruit, such as a mangosteen. It is described to him as a fruit of medium size, with tough skin, the colour of beetroot, and which when opened contains snow-white sections, whose smooth flavour seems to rival cherry mixed with honey. But an abstract definition is not enough: the person needs to take a mangosteen in his hands, put some of the pulp in his mouth and taste it... Then, yes, based on his senses, he will construct

in his mind a synthesis of everything: skin, colour and flavour, and he will promptly draw his conclusions and form a judgement.

***“The Church resembles  
an immense soul...”***

For Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira this supernatural phenomenon, a direct contact with the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Roman Church, touched his sensibility in such a way that he began to consider it as a person. This was a mystical image which he evidently developed in order to better explain to others what was going on in his heart:

“Seeing all these aspects of the Church, I sometimes had a curious impression. I would say: ‘The Church resembles a person. It does not resemble an institution, but rather an immense soul, which is manifested in a thousand different ways, which has movements, grandeurs, sanctities, perfections, as if it were a single soul expressing itself through all the Catholic churches of the world, all the statues, all the Liturgies, all the tones of the organ, all the tolling of the bells... This soul has wept at the *Requiems*, rejoiced with the ringing of the bell on Holy Saturday and at Christmas vigils; it weeps with me, it rejoices



with me. I see a soul in the Church, more than an institution.”

In the following passage, Dr. Plinio is more profuse in his explanation:

“What I am speaking of is, of course, the Divine Holy Spirit, but when one is a child, the distinction is not so clear: I had the vague notion that the Church was a living institution [...] as if it were a person, along the course of history, with the multiple mercies of a mother, the patience of a mother, the dignity of a mother, the *savoir-faire* of a mother, the knack of a mother; it is a Mother-Church! [...] The most welcoming, most intimate, the kindest, most forgiving Mother that one can imagine; but also, the Queen most worthy of praise imaginable, a virginal warrior, *à la* St. Joan of Arc, capable of winning every victory, without losing her feminine delicacy, with effective strength, surpassing every marshal; inspirer of heroes!”

From that moment onwards, a love was born within him that grew unceasingly... It was a love of devotion, so that during his entire life, the Church was his most deeply rooted passion; a love that was most pure and detached; a love unto slavery, but one which, far from being oppressive, brought him liberty; such love that it was almost an adoration of the Church. Come what may, he was ready to serve it!

“The Catholic Church is for me more than my father, more than my mother, more than my life, more than everything that I could have; I love the Catholic Church with such a love that it has overtones of adoration! For it is the Mystical Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ!”

### ***A mystical union with the Holy Church***

Dr. Plinio had been prepared since his birth, or perhaps even earlier, by a grace which led him to effect a mystical espousal with the Catholic Church. This is a singular phenom-

on, for such a supernatural alliance almost always occurs between the soul and God who usually presents Himself through the features of the most holy humanity of the Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Plinio is one of the few in History to be espoused to the Church. Already in his infancy, without yet knowing the name or the phenomenon owing to his tender age, he entered into this unimaginably profound spiritual matrimony, unconditionally surrendering himself and uniting himself to the Church with eternal bonds.<sup>2</sup> Here are his words:

“How I love this soul! I have the impression that my soul is a little resonance or repetition of it! [...] Everything that I love is like this soul. And this soul is like everything that I love. I only love this soul. And other things I do not love, for they are worth nothing. I know that this kind of soul is not a soul, but is the ideal of my life [...]. Something makes me feel a little like a drop of water reflecting the sun. I am the drop of water; there is the sun, but looking at that drop we can see the whole sun reflected in it. In the manner of a miniature and of a reflection, not substantially, I contain that soul entirely.”

Here, once again, arises a little-discussed point, but one which is extremely rich, mysterious and of paramount importance within the Church, which the Author judges to have been the “neural hyphen” by which Dr.

Plinio identified himself with it: an exalted vision of all Creation, communicated by Our Lord Jesus Christ as Head, to His Mystical Spouse. This vision, brought to its ultimate consequences, eventuates in the connection of this same order of the universe with God Himself, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, within whom all exists, and outside of whom exists nothing.

Indeed, God is present in all things in various ways: by *essence*, that is, sustaining at every instant that which He created; by *potency*, because everything is subject to Him, who has the power to annihilate any creature; and by *presence*, because from eternity everything is under His gaze.<sup>3</sup> However, this theory of the three presences, which is generally studied in theological texts, is found in the Church in a living manner!

The sacral vision with respect to the order of the universe, transfused by the Church into Dr. Plinio’s soul, completely and profoundly defined him and gave consistency to his vocation, because even before knowing the doctrine relating to the Catholic Church, to grace and to everything else that he later came to know, he loved order with all the strength of his soul because he intuited its correlation with God. The description which follows is illuminating in this respect:

“There is something which might be called the backbone of my think-

*Just as the entire  
sun can be seen  
reflected in a drop  
of water, Dr. Plinio  
perceived within  
himself the reflection  
of the Church*

The sun reflected in dewdrops

ing and which brings with it a graduated love of all that is *verum, bonum* and *pulchrum* – truth, goodness and beauty. This love constitutes the fundamental element by which I am united to the Holy Catholic Church. It is because I knew the Holy Catholic Church as the focal point of this attitude of soul and counselling it in every way and on every count, that I loved the Church so much. But it is because, originally, I loved that principle. This imparts much order and much detachment to the soul. For with this order comes the propensity to love all things, not for their relationship to me, but for the relationship they have with God. It is the practice of love of God.”

Accordingly, he grew up in complete fidelity to the covenant established at the very first moment in which he felt consonance with the soul of the Church. The following passage is both a profession of faith and an acknowledgement of this sentiment:

“The attitude of my soul every day, at every minute, at every instant is to search with my eyes for the Catholic Church, to be imbued with its spirit, and to have it within my soul, to have myself entirely within it, [...] in such a way that I can say at the moment of my death: ‘Truly, I was a Catholic man and entirely apostolic, Roman, Roman and Roman!’ [...] If you wish to know me and to follow me, seek to discern in what manner the spirit of the Church exists in my soul. [...] How could this love be as it is, if I had not seen the Church in a particular way? That which one loves is loved because one has seen it, has understood it, ultimately, because one has adhered to it with one’s entire soul. But in such a way that the term adhered is weak; one has immersed oneself, has penetrated, has let oneself be penetrated, has established an espousal of soul, in the measure that human weakness permits, that is indissoluble and complete, for life and for death, for time and for eternity! This is our belonging

to the Catholic Church, so that one can, in a sense, say what St. Paul said with respect to Our Lord Jesus Christ: ‘It is no longer I who live; but Christ who lives in me’ (Gal 2:20)! We are called to make this true in the following way: ‘It is no longer I who live, but the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church that lives in me.’”

***“Without the Catholic Church  
I would not have wisdom”***

In various conferences over the years, he adamantly declared to have taken the Holy Church as his model, in a position of continual obedience.

“Ever since I was small, looking at the Catholic Church, and not only the Church but at that which it poured out upon sacred Christian Civilization, I

*His greatest joy was  
to contemplate the  
Church’s mode of  
action in everything:  
dogmas, laws and  
institutions, and the  
celebration of the Mass*

took all of it as certain, infallible, indisputable, point by point, seeking to investigate each time I did not understand something; and the question was: ‘What is the principle of wisdom that exists behind this? I need to discover and acquaint myself with this principle of wisdom.’ [...] And this was the enthusiasm of my entire life: the Church as manifested in its dogmas, laws, disciplines, institutions, in both greater and lesser things, even in the design of a priest’s vestments.”

If his eyes rested, for example, on the celebration of the Mass, he would analyse the gestures, the measured pace with which the priest and the acolytes would move about the sanctuary, the bow they would make while praying the *Confiteor*, the splendid colours of the adornments... And he would ask himself: “Who invented this? Who was that man who first determined that things must be done in this way at Mass? It was not a man; it was the Church!” And from a single detail he would arrive at a solid understanding, permitting him to enter further into the spirit of the Church. “Only later did I come to know that the soul of the Church is the Holy Spirit. He, present in all of those manifestations, suggested to the men of the Church down through the centuries that they choose



Leandro Souza

The celebration of Holy Mass in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary, Caieiras (Brazil)



those wonders. It is He who caused these reflections of God to be born in the Church.”

In sum, the enchantments of Dr. Plinio were not restricted to one or another aspect of the Church; rather, everything to do with it was divine to him, and he did not fail to love anything...

“My spirit was fortunately incapable of functioning except in accordance with Our Lord and with the Church. Because that is the only standard by which all things can be properly evaluated. [...] I realize that I do not see, and the little that I do see, I see better by looking through it; and it is through it that I can see everything! It was thus that I was able to remain faithful; it was thus that I acquired wisdom. It was not through a composition of my own mind. With what love do I say it: it was learned from the Catholic Church, just as a son learns in the arms of his mother. Without the Catholic Church, this son would not have had any wisdom at all. Everything comes from her: grace, teaching, everything!”

### *A life distinguished by fidelity to the Church*

The Author saw Dr. Plinio moved to tears for only two reasons: on certain occasions, due to the remembrance of Dona Lucilia, especially soon after her passing away; and on others, with regard to the Holy Church. Of these, the three most striking moments were, undoubtedly: when, at the end of the 1950s, he withdrew to a small room at the back of the house where he habitually gathered with his followers, and wept long and copiously, foreseeing with his discernment of spirits, the difficult times that lay ahead for the Church; during Holy Week of 1966, speaking once again on the sufferings afflicting her; and, finally, on June 7 of 1978, the anniversary of his Baptism, on hearing himself referred to as a son and fruit of the Holy Church, “*vir catholicus, et totus apostolicus, et*



Dr. Plinio kisses the statue of the Fisherman in 1988 - St. Peter's Basilica (Vatican)

*The grace of Dr. Plinio's union with the Church was so powerful and irresistible that there remained no space in his heart for anything else*

“*totissimus*” romanus.”<sup>24</sup> This tribute enraptured his heart, for it was, in his estimation, what could most cause him honour, joy and glory.

The words he uttered on this last occasion are not a rigorous doctrinal description of the Church, but they express the poetry of a man who speaks under the influence of the Holy Spirit, as one in deep and direct contemplation of the Church:

“That Church which I love so much, that I become unable to speak of it. And simply in pronouncing its name, I am unable to go on speaking the world of praises and of love which exists in my soul. [...] If someday it were to die, I would die loving it with a love that has tones of adoration. But when I were to see it dying, I would also die, because life would be nothing any more. My very bones would disarticulate; my entire life would be undone, because the sun would be no more: the Holy Catholic Apostolic and Roman Church.”

At that moment he sought to explain the reason for his tears. The Author believes that this strong emotion overcame him because the grace of his union with it was so powerful, authentic and irresistible, that in his heart there remained no space for anything else, like St. Teresa of Avila whose intense love of God caused her to feel her soul imprisoned in her body. Such was the love Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira had for the Church during his long and luminous life, an ever-growing love unfolding in a thousand flashes. ✧

Taken, with minor adaptations, from: *O dom de sabedoria na mente, vida e obra de [The Gift of Wisdom in the Mind, Life and Work of] Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira*. Città del Vaticano-São Paulo: LEV; Lumen Sapientiae, 2016, v.I, p.211-222

<sup>1</sup> Cf. ROYO MARÍN, OP, Antonio. *Teología de la perfección cristiana*. Madrid: BAC, 2006, p.741; ARINTERO, OP, Juan González. *La evolución mística*. Madrid: BAC, 1952, p.481, nota 1.

<sup>2</sup> The essential element of mystical marriage is the permanent and indissoluble union with God, which has as its principle the simple possession of the state of grace (cf. ROYO MARÍN, op. cit., p.741-743).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I, q.8, a.3.

<sup>4</sup> From the Latin: “A Catholic man, entirely apostolic and fully Roman.”

ST. WALBURGA

# ***A Soul Ever Faithful to the Divine Will***

Walburga left her homeland to dedicate herself to the expansion of the Church in other lands, and even today she continues to shine for her virtues and miracles.



✠ **Sr. Allana Neves, EP**



**I**t is certainly not without reason that Britain has often been called the *Isle of Saints*. In fact, from the earliest times of its evangelization, countless saints were born in these northerly regions.

These saints have often distinguished themselves for their missionary zeal, which did not restrict itself to the British Isles. The Holy Spirit led them to other corners of Europe,

the continent where the Church was to put down deep roots.

St. Walburga was one such soul: for her love of Christ she left her native country and dedicated herself to the conversion of the pagans in Germanic lands.

### ***Born into a noble and holy family***

She was born in England in 710, the youngest daughter of St. Richard,

King of Saxony, and Wuna, sister of St. Boniface. She also had two brothers, Willibald and Winibald, who were also canonized by the Church.

Her childhood was spent in the affluent home of her father, where she received a thorough education until her family made a pilgrimage to Italy and the Holy Land. Walburga was then entrusted to the care of the nuns of Wimborne Abbey in Dorsetshire.



At top, St. Walburga - Church of St. Lawrence, Wœrth (France); on this and next page, stained glass windows representing scenes from the life of the Saint - St. Emma Monastery, Greensburg (PA)



The journey of her parents was only a pretext of Providence for the girl to open her eyes to a religious vocation already at a young age. During the several years she lived at Wimborne, she learned various crafts and received lessons in Latin, a language she later used to write the history of her saintly brothers. However, her main occupation in community life was singing the glories of God and devoting herself to prayer, to which her keen contemplative spirit contributed greatly.

### **Formed in the school of sanctity**

The temperament Walburga inherited from her parents was very fitting for a noble maiden. Her affectionate heart, overflowing with sympathy and kindness, made her company agreeable. She tended to empathize with the weaknesses of others and she used kindness in helping her neighbour.

However, contact with the world could be easily mar these qualities, leading her to a superficial indulgence towards evil, unaware of its dangers and snares. Souls like hers, if left uncorrected, become unable to bear reproach and are distressed by the little crosses and adversities of daily life.

However, convent life provided her with all the elements necessary for the correct formation of her character, giving her strength and constancy, and she knew how to take advantage of it during the twenty-eight years she spent under monastic discipline. The corrections and inner trials, prayer and silence, the weight of routine and the stability to which she had become accustomed in those long years forged her spirit for the mission to which she would be called in distant lands.

### **The winds and waters heard her voice**

Around that time, St. Boniface, her uncle, was working tirelessly

*Convent life provided her with all the elements necessary for the correct formation of her character, forging her spirit for her future missions*

for the evangelization of present-day Germany. He realized what precious fruits this land could bear for the Holy Church and decided to ask the superior of Wimborne Monastery to send nuns to help him in the apostolate. Walburga, Lioba, Thecla and thirty other nuns were appointed.

History tells us that, shortly after leaving port, a terrible storm broke out. Shipwreck seemed certain. Panic gripped everyone, and even the most experienced sailors doubted they would make it out alive.

Walburga, however, began to pray and then she ordered the elements of nature to be still. "The winds and waters heard the voice of God speaking through His servant, and they obeyed. A miraculous calm then followed, as if the peace and sweetness that dwelt within her had been poured out like oil upon the sea."<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the miracle, in a short time they were able to reach the continent.

### **Abbess at Heidenheim**

The nuns were joyfully received by the Archbishop St. Boniface, as well as St. Willibald, Walburga's brother and Bishop of Eichstätt, who listened with admiration to the mir-



From left to right: the Saint's family embarks on a pilgrimage, her entrance into Wimborne Abbey, religious profession, during the storm at sea, being received by her brothers, caring for the sick

Photos: Reproduction

acle that had taken place during their journey.

It was necessary to begin the mission for which they had been called. St. Thecla and St. Lioba were entrusted with the government of monasteries in other parts of Germany, while Walburga remained in the newly founded community in Heidenheim, which was made up of separate houses for men and women. There, her other brother, St. Winibald, was the abbot of the monks, and she was to be the superior of the nuns. It was the year 752.

The evangelization of Heidenheim entailed much work for them. The populace was suspicious of this new army of men who, axe in hand, felled trees they held sacred. However, as soon as they saw the benefits brought about by the teaching and agricultural techniques of the religious, they began to harbour real admiration for them.

Gradually, the monasteries were filled with converted Germans, and the nobles of the region, in support of the work of these servants of God, provided them with more and more land.

Around the year 761, Winibald, weakened by age and infirmity, surrendered his soul to God. As his death left the monks without an abbot, Bishop Willibald appointed Walburga as superior of the monks as well.

### ***Maternal kindness and exemplary teacher***

Walburga lived for another sixteen years after the death of her beloved brother. If the care of the nuns already made her worthy of the esteem of her subordinates on account of the dedication, tenderness and spirit of sacrifice she showed, the direction of the monks only increased her sanctity. She was regarded as a mother by all.



St. Willibald and St. Walburga, by Lucas Cranach, the Elder - Neue Residenz, Bamberg (Germany)

*Together with her brothers, St. Walburga dedicated herself to the evangelization of Heidenheim and the conversion of the Germanic people*

Little bibliographical data has come down to us from those years, but some of the miracles she worked date from that period.

On one occasion, late at night, she went to the house of an important nobleman whose little daughter was dying. The abbess stood at a distance from the entrance to the residence, shrouded in shadows, without identifying herself. The nobleman was a hunter and owned ferocious dogs which were hungry and threat-

ened the mysterious visitor. Fearing what might happen, he asked aloud who she was and what she wanted. He received the answer that he should not fear, for the dogs would not touch Walburga. He who had brought her there safe and sound would also lead her home unharmed.

When he heard the abbess' name, the nobleman's hope for his daughter was revived, and he invited her to come in. At the bedside of the agonizing girl, Walburga knelt down and remained in prayer all night long. The next morning, the child awoke in perfect health! God had restored her to health, thanks to the intercession of the nun. Filled with gratitude and amazed by this great miracle, the family offered her valuable gifts, which she declined, returning on foot to the monastery.

Finally, having been a mother and sister in Faith to all her subordinates, over whom she had exercised gentle authority, she entered the heavenly abode around the year 777. St. Willibald buried her body in the monastery itself, next to that of Winibald.

### ***A surprise when her relics were transferred***

About sixty years after her death, the monastery in Heidenheim was in very poor condition and in need of repair. Otgar, then Bishop of Eichstätt, decided to undertake a renovation. During the work, however, the grave where the body of the deceased abbess lay was trampled on and desecrated through the carelessness of the workmen.

That very night, she appeared in vision to the prelate and asked him sternly why her tomb had been dishonoured. "Know that you will have a sign that you have not acted well with me or with the house of God,"<sup>2</sup> she warned him.



At dawn, a monk from Heidenheim brought word that part of the restored ceiling had collapsed! Seeing that the threat had been carried out, the Bishop called together the local clergy, went to the Saint's grave and held a ceremony of reparation there. Then, to the ringing of bells and to the sound of hymns, he carried Walburga's relics in solemn procession to Eichstätt, a town in Bavaria, where they remain to this day.

When they were able to touch the bones of the precious Abbess, they had a great surprise: they were moistened with fragrant and very pure oil. The priests gathered a small portion of the precious liquid and decided to carry it in procession to the city of Monheim, which had a monastery.

From then on, miracles followed one after the other. On the way, an epileptic boy approached the litter bearing the oil and was cured. A sweet and very pleasant fragrance immediately emanated, proving the supernatural authenticity of the event.

In Eichstätt, the monastery which received her relics was renamed St. Walburga's Abbey and became a place of frequent pilgrimages. In 870, Pope Adrian II solemnly canonized her.

### ***St. Walburga's oil***

Since the day the remains of the abbess were transferred to the mon-

astery in Eichstätt, the so-called *St. Walburga's oil* has been flowing from them at regular intervals, usually on the feast of St. Mark and the commemoration of the transfer of her body on February 25. Small drops of the miraculous liquid flow from a hole made in the grave to channel the distillation, and these are collected in a silver vessel and then distributed to the faithful.

There are also reports that if used by someone irreverently or treated disrespectfully, the oil evaporates. Moreover, when a container is not immediately put in place to collect the liquid, the drops remain suspended, like grapes on a cluster or honey in a comb, refusing to flow out.

But the miracles were not restricted to the years following St. Walburga's death and the transfer of her body. It is said that in the 19th century, after having used the holy oil with faith and devotion, a resident of Eichstätt named Müller who was on the point of blindness recovered his sight. Full of gratitude, after the cure the man did not allow any blind man to pass his door without giving him some alms.

***She continues to shine through the brilliance of her virtues!***

Perhaps one of the most beautiful aspects of the Church is the variety of Saints, as St. Paul states: "some should be Apostles, some prophets,

some Evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the Saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12).

From the cloister of a monastery, St. Walburga was able to leave her mark on the history of the Church, embellishing religious life with noble virtues, drawing souls to sanctity and contributing to the uprooting of the Germanic people from paganism and barbarism.

Her life, which was perhaps lived in apparent normality, was certainly followed attentively by the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Angels. Every act of correspondence to grace meant an advance of the Church in the victory against evil in those lands and a new splendour for the civilization that would germinate there. And still today, the holy abbess continues to care for, help and heal those who turn to her with faith and devotion.

In this way St. Walburga teaches us that sanctity does not require great feats, but rather entire conformity to the divine will. Let us ask her to intercede for us before Our Lady and the throne of the Blessed Trinity so that we may completely fulfil the vocation to which we are called. ✧

<sup>1</sup> ST. JOHN HENRY NEWMAN. *The Family of St. Richard, the Saxon*. London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1844, p.82.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, p.90-91.

*From the cloister of the abbey she marked history, embellishing religious life with her virtues and leading souls towards holiness*



Tomb of St. Walburga at the Abbey of Heidenheim (Germany)

Joachim Schäfer (CC by-sa 4.0)

# *Holy Even in Exile, Immortal Despite Schism*

Two thousand years have passed since the founding of the Church. All the while, she has been the target of incessant attacks from the powers of darkness, and yet she remains standing. Is there still room to doubt her immortality?

✠ **Marcus Shing Yum Yip**



**I**t is said of Cardinal Ercole Consalvi that, in conversation with an opponent of the Catholic religion, he jokingly asked: “How do you think you can destroy the Church if not even we cardinals have managed to do it?...”

Historical or not, these words contain a profound truth. Two thousand years have passed since the foundation of the Church by Our Lord Jesus Christ. During this time, she has been the victim not only of incessant attacks from external enemies, but also of those inflicted by the spiritual weakness – if not, with all due respect, by the moral depravity and corruption – of her human element, and yet she remains unshaken.

Perhaps the greatest testimony to her immortality and divine character lies not in her survival of the Roman

persecutions, barbarian invasions or wars of religion... but in the defections of her own members. Opening any book of ecclesiastical history is enough to profoundly convince us of this; examples abound in every age and place. For brevity's sake let us choose just one of them, which took place in the middle of the fourteenth century. The tragedy began in France...

## *Goodbye, Rome?*

At the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era, serious disagreements between the religious and civil power became more marked. The question of investiture led to a dispute about the limits of jurisdiction between the two spheres, a dispute that escalated to clamorous proportions. This led to incidents such as that of September 7, 1303, when the

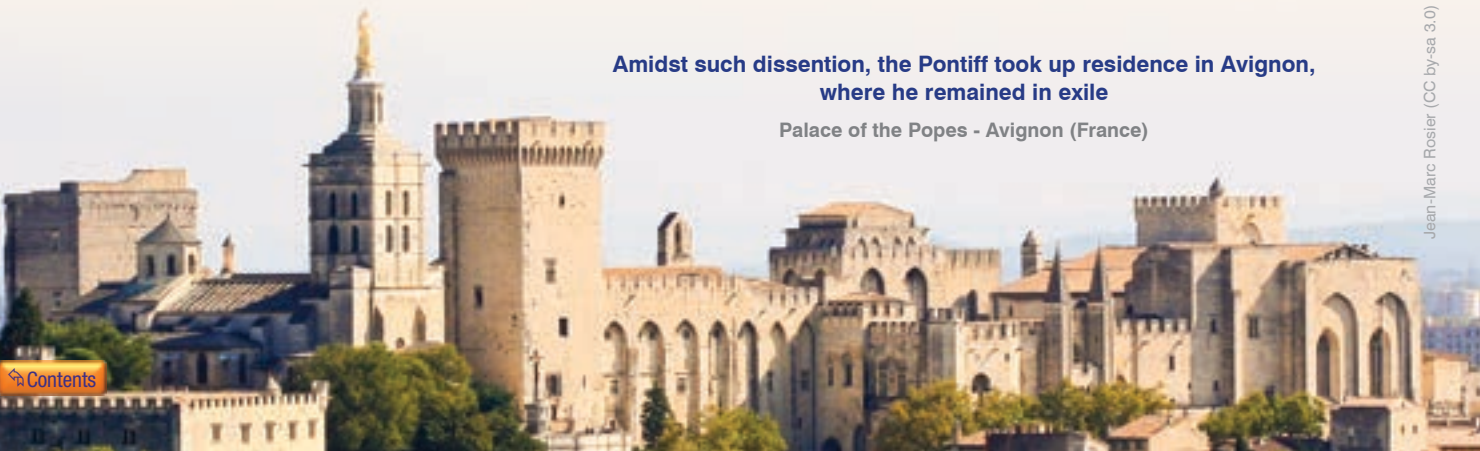
King of France, Philip the Fair, sent troops to threaten Pope Boniface VIII, and one of the soldiers struck him in the face, in what became known as the outrage of Anagni.

Not long afterwards the new Pope, Clement V, thought it his duty to remedy the dissension by making two serious concessions: he had himself crowned in Lyon and appointed nine Cardinals, all of them French. He also installed himself – at least temporarily – in Avignon, pending a solution to the disagreements with the Capets. But the Pontiff's temporary residence outlived him, and the phase he had inaugurated seemed to have come to stay. The Avignon exile had begun.

Of the seven Popes of that period – including Clement V himself – all were French. None of them ever fully renounced the idea of returning to

**Amidst such dissension, the Pontiff took up residence in Avignon,  
where he remained in exile**

Palace of the Popes - Avignon (France)







### Christendom was divided from top to bottom: the Great Western Schism had begun

At left, antipope Clement VII - Palace of the Popes - Avignon (France); centre, Pope Urban VI - Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome; at right, antipope Alexander V

Rome, but the situation in the capital of the Christian world did not encourage them to do so.

Would the Papacy be safe in the Italian peninsula? Political divisions were on the rise there, its parties at war with each other in the cities. Amidst the general tension, perhaps only one sentiment united Italians: the dislike of foreign domination. Now, not only were the Popes of Avignon of French nationality, but so was almost the entire Sacred College! On the other hand, it did not seem that the Pope could find peace in France, since a conflict with the English was brewing, the beginning of a hundred-year war...

#### *The Pope must return to Rome!*

At this difficult juncture, the voice of God did not cease to sound through His elect.

St. Bridget of Sweden reported that she heard Our Lord Jesus Christ himself condemn the greed, pride and debauchery of the court of the French Popes, and accused them of populating hell! Meeting in Rome with Urban V – the sixth Pope in exile – she begged him to remain in the Eternal City, but without success.

It was only St. Catherine of Siena who, after many difficulties, finally

persuaded Gregory XI to return the papal see to its rightful place.

#### *One Pope in Rome and another in Avignon... failure?*

Thanks be to God, in 1377 the Holy Father was in Rome, only to die the following year. The situation for the cardinals was proving to be complex, since popular unrest was pressuring the conclave to elect a Roman Pope. Bartholomew Prignano – not Roman but Italian – was chosen, and he took the name of Urban VI.

Everything seemed to promise peace. However, imprudent reforms, coupled with the Supreme Pontiff's harsh and irascible character, aroused the antipathy of the cardinals. In vain did St. Catherine warn him, begging him for greater temperance. Five months later, thirteen French cardinals claimed to have voted invalidly due to duress, and they elected an antipope, Clement VII, who returned to Avignon.

The Great Schism of the West had begun. It was the biggest schism until then known to the Catholic world – a chaotic situation, generated by a tangle of human interests, which would last for forty years.

Had Catherine been mistaken? Had not the Church been better off

before – in exile, but with one head – than now with two? It was the path of apparent failure that God was asking of her. And not only of her. Indeed, such were the infidelities of those times that, to punish men, Providence allowed divergent opinions even among the Saints.

Siding with the Roman Popes were St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Sweden, Blessed Peter of Aragon; with the Avignonese popes, St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Colette, Blessed Peter of Luxembourg. Nor did the death of both “popes” resolve the controversy, for each party elected its respective successor. Three decades of attempts at harmonization proved futile. Christendom was divided from top to bottom. How could this nightmare be brought to an end?

#### *Worse than two Popes*

In the year 1409, twenty-four Cardinals – fourteen from Rome and ten from Avignon – decided to take action. They convened a council in Pisa, condemned the two pontiffs and elected the Greek Petros Filargo, Cardinal of Milan, who adopted the name of Alexander V. Now, that assembly was completely invalid because it had not been convened by a Pope... Far from being remedied, the case had only been ag-

gravated: all the pontiffs – as if one could speak of more than one at a time, at least in those days – refused to abdicate, and there were no longer two but three pretenders to the Petrine Seat! Gregory XII in Rome, Benedict XIII in Avignon, and Alexander V in Pisa.

At the end of 1414, the successor to the “See of Pisa”, namely, antipope John XXIII, convened a council in Constance with a view to finally settling the matter. However, that act was also illegitimate. What could be expected? A fourth pontiff?

At this impasse, God raised up a providential man alongside the true Pope, Gregory XII, in order to bring the schism to an end: Blessed John Dominici, of the Order of Preachers. Helped in large measure by a series of situations that an atheist would call “coincidences”, but whose cause a man of faith can well see, he managed to settle the matter.

John XXIII, pressured from all sides, finally resigned. As for Benedict XIII, his almost insane obstinacy had so discredited him as to put him “out of the game”; he was finally deposed in 1417.

That left Gregory XII, the legitimate Pope. However, the internal situation of the Church did not allow him to remain in power. He too had to resign in order to make the manoeuvre acceptable to all Christendom. How could this be done in a council that was invalid, as the Council of Constance had been, since it had been convened by an antipope? Such an act would justify the conciliarist theses, contrary to true Tradition. It was then that the diplomatic skill of Cardinal Dominici came into play. He had in his hands a document of Gregory XII reconvening



Saliko (CC by-sa 3.0)

**The growing holiness of the Church is seen in the men and women who heroically correspond to grace**

Detail of the Fiesole Altarpiece, by Fra Angelico - National Gallery, London

the Council – thus making it official – and another in which he declared his resignation as Pontiff, ending the Great Schism without prejudice to the authority of the Vicar of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the Apostolic and still Roman Catholic Church – incredible as it may seem – returned to having only one Pope, Martin V. The schism was over, although it could not be said that peace in the Church had been fully achieved. The Renaissance was heading out to high sea, and the Fisherman’s barque would have to endure new storms... but the Holy See never left Rome again.

The Church truly is indestructible!

### ***Only indestructible?***

Does this statement not seem a logical conclusion to the account of the events we have just recalled? Yes, logical, but insufficient. It would not be in keeping with the grandeur of Our Lord to grant immortality to His Mystical Body, only for it to stagger as if in extremis until the end of time. To be immortal is not enough, more is needed.

In our profession of Faith we proclaim: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, in the *Holy* Catholic Church.” And

this is how St. Paul preached: “Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, [...] that He might present the Church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:25-27).

The Catholic Church is holy because of her intimate union with Jesus Christ, her Bridegroom, her Head and her Saviour (cf. 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:22-23; 5:23-32);<sup>2</sup> holy because she has received from Him the commission to continue His saving mission (cf. Jn 3:17; 17:18); holy... because of her members: this is the controversial question! Nevertheless, this constitutes a theological certainty.

Since the Holy Spirit is, as it were, the soul of the Church, He sanctifies her continually, sending her ever new charisms and rejuvenating her until she is brought into perfect union with Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> This growing holiness is only found in men and women who have responded heroically to grace. It is their fidelity that weighs in the balance; the rest is of no account. Can we call an apple tree bad because we find a few rotten apples fallen under its branches? Let us judge the tree, then, not by the



diseased elements that have ceased to be nourished with the divine sap of the Paraclete, but by the healthy fruit.

### **Why does God allow such disasters?**

But the perplexity continues: why does God allow Holy Church to pass through situations in which she is struck by a maelstrom of successive disasters, and from which it seems she will never recover?

First of all, let us not be unjust by imputing to the Creator alone a responsibility that falls primarily upon us men. In fact, divine mercy willed to endow us with the wonderful gift called free will, which enables us to acquire the merit necessary to reach Heaven. Now, either freedom is complete or it does not exist; if our capacity for choice were limited to only certain actions, we could not really call ourselves free. But if we

misuse this privilege granted to us, the fault is ours, not His.

Moreover, the existence of evil in the Church seems in some ways to be explained by its existence in the world. Why does not the Lord, who is so good, put an end to all imperfection on the face of the earth? St. Thomas Aquinas answers us: “God therefore neither wills evil to be done, nor wills it not to be done, but wills to permit evil to be done; and this is a good.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, Providence has mysterious designs that surpass our understanding, but which are necessarily good, because they come from the Supreme Goodness. Perhaps only at the Last Judgement, as the Catechism explains,<sup>5</sup> will we fully know the ways in which, even by the tragedies of evil and sin, He has led the world to its final repose, for which He created Heaven and earth.

Thus, it is after the storm that the Church is found purified of all that

should not be in her, left only with what is good, beautiful and true, so as to continue to lead and guide civilizations in peace.

Do the Gospels not describe how the first Pope denied the Divine Master three times? Jesus himself had just previously prayed for him – and, in him, for all Popes: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail” (Lk 22:31-32). After the fall, St. Peter’s contrition brought him even greater glory!

In the same way, the Church will remain undefiled until the end of time, in spite of everything. Whatever storms Peter’s barque may yet have to weather, this certainty can never be extinguished in our spirit: “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). ✧

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**Whatever storms Peter’s barque may yet have to weather, the Church will always remain immaculate**

“Christ Rescuing Peter from Drowning”, by Lorenzo Veneziano - State Museums of Berlin

<sup>1</sup> For more details on the role of Blessed John Dominici at the Council of Constance, see the article: CABALLERO BAZA, EP, Eduardo Miguel. A Providential Man to Resolve the Great Schism. In: *Heralds of*

*the Gospel*. Nobleton. Vol. 11. No.116 (June 2017); p.16-21.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LEO XIII. *Satis cognitum*, n.7; 22: ASS 28 (1895-1896), 712; 723.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL. *Lumen gentium*, n.4.

<sup>4</sup> ST. THOMAS AQUINAS. *Summa Theologiae*. I, q.19, a.9, ad 3. In the body of this same

question, the Angelic Doctor makes it clear that God “in no way” wills the evil of sin. Nevertheless, it remains true that He permits it.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. CCC 314.

# Letters From a Wise and Prudent Virgin

In her passionate love for Holy Church, she was not afraid to address princes, governors and clerics of every rank, in order to fulfil the mission she had received from Our Lord.



✠ Angela Maria Tomé

**F**or some decades now the age-old habit of writing letters has been disappearing. Since ancient times, written on papyrus or parchment and even on clay or stone tablets, these means of communication have always reflected the customs, education and mentality of the peoples. The millennia-old stone stelae, tablets on which messages were written in ancient Egypt, would raise no small number of practical concerns today... How thick would each sheet be? Where to store them? How to collect them? And the postman? Would he take only one at a time? Would there be a special vehicle to carry his mail?

Never would these dedicated messengers imagine that one day their

honourable task would be replaced by efficient but humdrum fibre optic cables or satellite signals. Is it not true that human life, in this 21st century, is losing its charm? Where are the monogrammed stationery, the seals, the satiny and scented paper or that of a more serious style, with barely visible lines, in which beautiful handwriting would register the vicissitudes of life, the longing for an absent person, business to be accomplished, the news that fills our existence with joy – or sadness? They are gone. The typhoon of cybernetics has swept them away. And with them, how much of the history of these dreary days of ours is vanishing.

This explains the special attraction that epistolary literature holds for us, especially when its content reveals the holiness of the writer and his specific mission on this earth, and something of the people with whom he corresponded in order to fulfil it for the greater glory of God, while at the same time calling upon others to represent their vital part in the great mosaic of the history of souls.

Such is the case with the letters of St. Catherine of Siena. This singular lady, the twenty-fourth of the twenty-five children of James di Benincasa and Lapa dei Piagenti, was born in 1347, in the city of Siena, Italy, her eponym. Her mystical life began at the age of six, with a vision of Our Lord Jesus Christ flanked by the Apostles Peter, Paul and John. At the age of seven, she secretly made a vow of virginity, which she later upheld when her parents wanted her to marry. On this occasion, faced with her family's insistence in presenting her with suitors despite her evasions, Catherine cut off her long hair and took the veil of consecrated life. As punishment, her mother left her with all the household chores, which the Saint saw as yet another opportunity to practise the ascetic life she had chosen. To this end, she



Gustavo Kralj

**Epistolary literature holds a special attraction, especially when its content reveals the holiness and the specific earthly mission of the writer**



held her father as Our Lord Jesus Christ and her mother as Our Lady.

In the end, her father received a miraculous sign and gave his daughter permission to lead the life of penance she desired. Later – around the age of fifteen or sixteen – she joined the Third Order of St. Dominic, or the Militia of Jesus Christ, as its founder called it. The *mantellate*, so called because they wore a black cloak over white robes, was made up of widows or laywomen like herself, who lived in their own homes and dedicated themselves to works of charity.

During this period, Catherine's time was divided between austere physical and spiritual sacrifices and great mystical graces, among them the espousal with Our Lord Jesus Christ: "I, your Creator and Saviour, betroth you to Me in faith. You shall keep this faith spotless until you celebrate the eternal wedding feast with Me in Heaven."<sup>1</sup> As a pledge of this promise, she also received the grace of being physically sustained by only the Eucharist for a certain period. In addition, she underwent a "mystical death", from which she returned to life to carry out a new mission for the salvation of mankind.

### **The letters**

For some years St. Catherine had been attending the Confraternity of the Disciples of the Virgin Mary, made up of devotees who gathered at the Santa Maria della Scalla Hospital, where she was serving the sick. The Confraternity was open to all who wished to take part, and everyone had a voice.

Before long, Catherine's charisms were revealed in these meetings, making her something of a spiritual director of the confreres. Her reputation for holiness gradually grew and she came to be held as an authority by some of the participants, who, moved



Danielle Janssen (CC by-sa 4.0)

**Through an abundant and fruitful epistolary activity, Catherine undertook the important task she had received from the Lord**

St. Catherine of Siena, by Sano di Pietro - Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht (Netherlands)

by grace, became her disciples. This lofty and entirely spiritual friendship was clothed in such a degree of charity that they came to call her *mamma*, although she was only twenty-four years old at the time.

After her "mystical resurrection", Catherine, on fire with divine love, undertook the new task received from Our Lord, through an abundant and fruitful epistolary activity. Her letters – more than three hundred and eighty have come down to us! – revolve around three themes: the return of the Papacy to Rome; the encouragement of a crusade for the recovery of the Holy Sites; and finally, a necessary reform of the Church.

It thrills one to see the prophetic role of this woman, whose views and concerns were fixed on a panorama so much higher than that common to people of her sex at the time. She

loved the Church so passionately that she was not afraid to address princes, governors and clerics of every rank, including Cardinals and Popes. At the end of her life she would say: "I gave my life for the Holy Church, and this, I believe, I did by an exceptional grace that the Lord granted me."<sup>2</sup>

### **To two Popes, an abbot and two clerics...**

When beginning a missive, the Saint always presents her credentials and declares the objective she has in mind, as in this one she addresses to Pope Gregory XI, then in exile: "In the name of Jesus Christ crucified and of the amiable Virgin Mary, most reverend and dear father, to you, in the Precious Blood of Christ, writes your unworthy, wretched and miserable daughter Catherine, servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ, desirous of seeing you as a fruitful tree, laden with sweet and flavourful fruit, and planted in fertile soil, that is, in the soil of self-knowledge, without which it would be fruitless."<sup>3</sup>

The messages in her letters are almost always extremely severe and reveal thoughtful and thorough prior reflection. When appropriate, her arguments are full of compassion, but they never hide the countenance of sound doctrine. Using it as a sharp spear with which to put anyone who reads it against the wall, she offers, at the same time, her affection and respect to the recipient, should he heed her advice.

"In the egoist who loves himself lives perverse pride, the principle and source of all evil in any situation [in which] he finds himself, whether prelate or subject. Such a person acts like the woman who gives birth to dead children. Precisely so, because, not possessing the life that comes from charity, he seeks only his own praise, not God's."<sup>4</sup> She continues in

the same missive to Gregory XI, reproaching the pastor or doctor who, when confronted with the error of his flock, simply uses ointment, because in this way he does not commit himself, does not make the sick suffer and is not inconvenienced. And she warns: “Such people would even like to do something, but in peace. In fact, if a wound needs to be burned with fire and cut with a knife, but only ointment is used on it, the wound not only fails to heal, but becomes entirely putrid and the person often dies.”<sup>5</sup>

This reproach directed to a Pope could well sum up the Sienese Saint’s vocation of prophetic denunciation. “My venerable father, by the goodness of God I hope that you will extinguish this evil in yourself; that you will not love your person, your neighbour and God for your own sake, but for the sake of God, who is the Supreme and Eternal Goodness, and worthy of being loved. [...] My father, sweet Christ on earth, imitate the good Gregory (the Great), for it is possible for you, as it was for him.”<sup>6</sup>

St. Catherine expresses herself with complete assurance, as if imposing her will, in such a way as to evince that the words flowing from her pen are of the Holy Spirit: “This is what I want to see in you. If perhaps up until now you have not been firm enough, I want and ask you to make use of the remaining time with fortitude, as a determined man, in imitation of Christ, of whom you are the representative [...]. Go ahead. Carry out with a diligent and holy commitment the project you have begun, that of the Holy Crusade. [...] Lift up the standard of the Holy Cross, for in its fragrance you will find peace.”<sup>7</sup>

In a letter to Guerard de Puy, Abbot of Marmoutier, written on the eve of the Great Schism of the West – from 1377 to 1417 – we read: “Woe,



**Her letters were almost always extremely severe, while revealing very deep prior reflection**

“St. Catherine before Pope Gregory XI”,  
by Blasco de Grañén - Barnes Foundation,  
Philadelphia (PA)

woe! It is for lack of correction that the members of the Church rot. Christ looks especially at the depraved vices of impurity, avarice and pride, which reign in the Bride of Christ. I speak of the prelates, who are concerned only with pleasure, social status and wealth. These prelates are aware that the demons are snatching the souls of their subjects, but are not concerned about this. They have become wolves and merchants of grace. A strong justice would be needed to correct them. Excessive leniency is an enormous cruelty. It is necessary to correct with justice and mercy.”<sup>8</sup>

No less strong is her language when addressing Urban VI: “If I say things that seem exaggerated and show presumption, may sorrow and love forgive me before God and Your Holiness! Wherever I turn, I cannot

find a place to rest my head. [...] But especially in our city. God’s temple, which is a place of prayer, has been used as a den of thieves. It is astonishing that the earth has not swallowed them up. All this was due to the fault of the pastors, who did not correct the vices by word and example of life.”<sup>9</sup>

In an opening of her soul, she tells the same Pope of a mystical ecstasy she had experienced: “The tongue does not suffice to narrate such mysteries, nor what intellect saw and affection conceived. [...] I paid heed only to what should be done, that I should make a sacrifice of myself to God for Holy Church and for the sake of removing ignorance and negligence from those whom God had put into my hands. [...] [The demons] beat upon the shell of the body; but desire became the more kindled, crying, ‘O Eternal God, receive the sacrifice of my life in this mystical body of Holy Church! I have naught to give save what Thou hast given to me. Take then my heart, and may Thy Bride lean her face upon it!’”<sup>10</sup>

To two clerics who had quarrelled, Catherine asks them to reconcile in these terms: “Be yourselves the intermediaries between yourselves and God, between sensuality and reason, expelling hatred (for your neighbour) with hatred (for yourself) and love (for yourself) with love (for your neighbour). [...] Hate hatred of your neighbour. [...] On this earth, man can savour eternal life, living with God in a dialogue of love. Is it not perchance great blindness to be worthy of hell, living with the devils in hatred and resentment? It seems that such persons do not even want to wait for the sentence of the Supreme Judge to go to the company of the devils. They themselves have already pronounced the sentence. Before the soul leaves the body, during this life, they run like the wind towards eter-



nal damnation. They go carefree, like delirious madmen...”<sup>11</sup>

### **The ending of the letters**

“My, daughter, beware of the praises of men. Never seek to be praised for any good deed you do. The door to eternity would not be opened to you. And because I consider that road (of consecrated life) excellent, I said before that I wished to see you a faithful spouse of Christ crucified. I ask and beg you to strive to be so. I add nothing more. Remain in the holy and sweet love of God. Sweet Jesus, loving Jesus.”<sup>12</sup>

To her niece Nanna, St. Catherine addresses the above words, full of affection, closing a beautiful commentary on the parable of the ten virgins from St. Matthew’s Gospel. Many years after her death, the Church chose for the entrance antiphon of the Mass in her memorial these very words: “Here is a wise virgin, from among the number of the prudent, who went forth with lighted lamp to meet Christ,”<sup>13</sup> perhaps referring to the inspired letter she sent to Nanna.

The endings of the letters of this great mystic are always the same: “Remain in the holy and sweet love of God. Sweet Jesus, loving Jesus!”

### **Prudent virgin?**

On reading the exceptional epistolary correspondence of St. Catherine of Siena, we wonder whether this privileged soul might not have been imprudent. And then we recall

the qualification of the virtue of prudence given by Dr. Plinio Corrêa de Oliveira:

“[Prudence] contains four aspects. The first is extrinsic to it, but is its *raison d’être*: well-defined goals. The other three component elements are, first of all, the meticulous, minute and attentive observation of reality, in its least aspects, in order to then study the tactics to be adopted; the second is great caution – which does not mean

fear, but savvy and, at times, ingenuity – and the third is deftness. I understood that prudence was the path to every victory, for it is the adornment of courage, just as courage is the embellishment of prudence. Boldness sings while prudence whispers! [...]

“It pronounces words of friendship and caution, which fly like arrows. The gaze of prudence traverses space and makes an inventory of dangers and enemies. [...] How can we discover the points at which conscience allows us to retreat and those at which prudence allows us to advance? ‘Advance, retreat and temporise! Enter the scene when you should, leave the scene when necessary! Measure your words well, so that each of them may be a sure footbridge over which the bold are to pass, guided by the Angel of prudence!’ Woe betide prudence without daring! It is frustration. Woe betide daring without prudence! It is catastrophe. Daring tempered with prudence and prudence tempered with daring make the perfect ensemble, whose ultimate laurel is victory.”<sup>14</sup>

In the contemplation of St. Catherine’s letters, which are as bold as they are prudent, is it not true that the preceding comments fit like a glove?

And we close this reflection by asking ourselves: what would this great Saint write to the eminent ecclesiastical and civil figures of our times, but also to each of you who are reading this article?

It is not difficult to imagine! ✧



**I understood “what should be done,  
that I should make a sacrifice  
of myself for Holy Church”**

St. Catherine of Siena - Royal Monastery of  
St. Dominic, Caleruega (Espanha)

<sup>1</sup> BLESSED RAYMOND OF CAPUA. *Santa Caterina da Siena. Legenda maior*. 5.ed. Siena: Cantagalli, 2005, p.116-117.

<sup>2</sup> Idem, p.319.

<sup>3</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 185*, n.1. All the literal quotations taken from the letters transcribed in this arti-

cle are from the work: *Cartas completas*. São Paulo: Paulus, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> Idem, n.2.

<sup>5</sup> Idem, *ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Idem, n.4.

<sup>7</sup> Idem, n.6.

<sup>8</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 109*, n.5.

<sup>9</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 305*, n.5; 7.

<sup>10</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 371*, n.8.

<sup>11</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 3*, n.2; 4.

<sup>12</sup> ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. *Carta 23*, n.5.

<sup>13</sup> MEMORIAL OF ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA. Entrance antiphon. In: THE

ROMAN MISSAL. English translation according to the Third Typical Edition approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See. Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2011, p.852.

<sup>14</sup> CORRÊA DE OLIVEIRA, Plinio. *Notas Autobiográficas*. São Paulo: Retornarei, 2012, v.III, p.90-91.

# A Voyage Marked by Suffering

Despite her condition, her demeanour was one of firmness, stability, continuity and resolution in the face of the looming risks. She would proceed, unchanging, in a straight line.

**Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP**

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**F**ar across the ocean, the Old Continent beckoned all the lovers of sound tradition and refined customs. And these were not in short supply in the “São Paulinho” of the *Belle Époque*. While Dona Lucilia, as we have seen, figured in their first ranks, esteem for Europe was neither the primary nor sole motive for her trip there in June of 1912.

## *Resignation in face of the distress of illness*

Gravely ill with gallstones, she was in need of definitive treatment for her malady.

From time to time she would be overtaken by a distressing feeling of queasiness which would be followed by sharp pains that obliged her to take to her bed. These attacks became more and more frequent, and she was consequently put on a strict diet.

Gallbladder pains can be excruciating, and the treatments used nowadays were unknown back then. In spite of everything, no one in the family ever saw her show the

least sign of inconformity, for her temperament had been shaped by resignation.

The attacks of Dona Lucilia’s illness having reached their acme, it was greatly feared that a crisis might result in death. In fact, at the time, cases of death brought on by the condition were not uncommon.

While the medical profession knew that the removal of the gallbladder was the only solution in such extreme cases, it had yet to find a way of accomplishing this without placing the patient’s life at grave risk.

So, when reports spread around the world that Dr. August Karl Bier, the Kaiser’s personal physician, had successfully removed a gall-bladder in Germany, Dona Lucilia’s relatives would spare no effort in taking her to see the famed specialist, impelled by the great esteem they had for her.

Among those accompanying her on the trip were her husband, Dr. João Paulo, her children, brothers, brothers-in-law, nephews, and in a place of honour, her mother, Dona Gabriela. The family travelled by train to San-

tos and then by ship to Rio de Janeiro, to embark for Europe aboard a comfortable transatlantic ocean liner, on June 11, 1912.

## *“Don’t worry, my child...”*

During the ocean crossing, her nephew Tito, a child with congenital deafness and a difficult temperament, was only too willing to follow the advice he received from many quarters: “Go see Aunt Lucilia; she’s the only one who can calm you down.”

During the trip, he was one of Dona Lucilia’s most faithful visitors. She always welcomed him tenderly and patiently, trying her best to resolve his childish problems.

Because of his impairments, he was neither able to control the volume of his voice, nor weigh the effect that his words could have on a person in Dona Lucilia’s painful situation. He was still young, and lacked a sense of time and place, which explains why he once told her at the top of his voice:

“Aunt Lucilia, they say you’re going to die! But I don’t want you to die!”



The typical reaction to such a tragic prognostication can be easily imagined: tears, discouragement, and the like. But this was not Dona Lucilia's response.

She pitied the suffering boy rather than herself and replied with a serene countenance and a voice filled with sweetness:

"Don't worry, my child. I will not die..."

### *In the Kaiser's university hospital*

Having crossed the torrid and tropical seas, the steamer entered European waters. Making no stops, it sailed along the Portuguese, Spanish, and French Atlantic coasts, cut through a choppy English Channel, and pushed on through the thick fog of the North Sea.

Finally it moored at the famous port of Hamburg, a city steeped in medieval tradition. Because of Dona Lucilia's condition, the family immediately took a train for Berlin, the capital of the German Empire at an approximate distance of two hundred and ninety kilometres.

Dona Lucilia had to forgo the pleasure of taking in the city sights, even though, for her, observing settings and ambiances was one of life's most appealing pursuits. Her relatives went on to the magnificent *Fürstenhof* – Hotel of the Princes – near the Potsdam station. Meanwhile, she was taken straight to the hospital.

Dona Lucilia was to be operated on early in July at the Frederick William Royal University Polyclinic, the apple of the Kaiser's eye. Every day after breakfast, Dona Gabriela and Dr. João Paulo left the children with the governess and went to be with Dona Lucilia at the hospital. The other relatives also dropped by to see her as much as they could.

A description of one of the visits by her mother, husband, and children has come down to us.

Lying in bed, Dona Lucilia seemed more a statue than a living person. Her long black hair hung loose like a curtain behind the pillow. Absorbed in thought, she gazed at the ceiling with her arms extended alongside her body.

Despite her condition, her attitude was one of firmness, stability, continuity and determination in face of the risk that had to be taken. Hers was the serene yet unshakable re-



**Everyone was in suspense over the upcoming surgery, including Dona Lucilia herself. Would it be successful?**

Above, Dr. August Karl Bier, surgeon who operated on Dona Lucilia; previous page, the latter in Paris in the year 1912

solve of one who says: "It must be so, and so it will be; God will provide."

As soon as she noticed her relatives, Dona Lucilia endeavoured to show them her customary tenderness, but it was tinted with gravity and sadness.

### *A successful operation*

The whole family was in suspense over the surgery, including Dona Lucilia herself. While he was

an eminent surgeon, Dr. Bier had performed only one gallbladder removal; it was the kind of operation that few surgeons were willing to venture.

Added to this fact were the reports of deaths, or perhaps worse, patients who had been left almost completely incapacitated by serious post-operative lesions. In those days, surgical methods were rudimentary and even anaesthesia was a significant risk.

How would Dona Lucilia's operation go? Would it be a success? On the day of the surgery, after a morning of uncertainty, her relatives gave vent to their relief when they received word that Dr. Bier had been successful.

While Dona Lucilia's life had happily been saved, her sufferings would let up only gradually. Her convalescence was painful and complicated due to shortcomings in the medical resources of the time. The pain and suffering she experienced in the days following the operation marked her forever. In less than a week, her hair showed streaks of white.

Dona Lucilia found a way of coping with the pain through her attitude of resignation. She remained reclined and avoided physical effort of any kind in order to conserve her little strength. Her face bore the marks of trauma; she looked as if she had been through an internal "earthquake."

Nevertheless, whenever her dear children came by, she welcomed them with touching tenderness. Her smile and her affection were never absent during the moments in which they could be close to their mother. Amid her sufferings, she saw the little ones as windows to a brighter tomorrow. ✧

Taken, with slight adaptations, from: *Dona Lucilia*. Città del Vaticano-Nobleton: LEV; Heralds of the Gospel, 2013, p.125-126, 129-131





Federico Morzon

Paseo La Galería Mall auditorium (Paraguay)

## Concerts in Praise of the Christ Child

**“G**lory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will” (Lk 2:14), sang the Angels when proclaiming the birth of Jesus two thousand years ago. On the eve of Christmas 2022, the Heralds of the Gospel joined their voices to those of the heavenly hosts to praise the Christ Child. They did not, however, do this only before their own Manger Scene... In this edition we highlight some of the countless concerts performed by choirs and orchestras of the institution in several cities throughout the world.

In Europe, carols in honour of the newborn Jesus echoed in the historic Cathedral of Toledo, Spain, in the presence of Metropolitan Archbishop Francisco Cerro Chaves, and in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in Madrid, with Archbishop Bernardito Cleopas Auza, the Apostolic Nuncio. In the neighbouring Portuguese nation, concerts took place at the Jeronimos Monastery in Lisbon, at the Cathedral of Porto and at Holy Cross Church in Braga.

Chords of jubilation and vivacity also resounded in Africa, in the concert held at the Metropolitan Cathedral of the Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, in Maputo, Mozambique.

Moving on to the Americas, the festive harmonies of Christmas were heard at the Majadas Forum Event Centre, in Guatemala, where two thousand people gathered to honour the Child Jesus together with Auxiliary Bishop Tulio Omar Pérez Rivera; in the El Salvadorian city of Nuevo Cuscatlán; at the Presidential House of Costa Rica, in the presence of the Head of State and the First Lady; as well as the Church of Our Lady of Fatima, in Tocancipá, and the Oratory of the Mother of Good Counsel, in Medellin, Colombia. Several Christmas performances also brightened hearts in Paraguay: at the Cathedral of St. Clare, in Villarica; at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Miracles in Caacupé, Paraguay; in the auditorium of Paseo La Galería Shopping Mall and at the Senate Chamber of the Paraguayan Capital, Asunción.

In Brazil, worthy of special mention were the musical performances by the choir and orchestra of the Heralds’ female sector, held at Immaculate Mary Parish, at the Military Chaplaincy known as the Soldiers’ Oratory, and at the institution’s house in Brasília.



Emilaine Lascovski

Brasília



Nuno Moura

Jeronimos Monastery (Portugal)





Braga (Portugal)



Toledo (Spain)



Senate Chamber (Paraguay)



Colombia



Caacupé (Paraguay)



El Salvador



Madrid



Mozambique



Costa Rica



Guatemala





## CHURCH AND WORLD EVENTS .....

### **Canadian police banned from wearing St. Michael's shield**

Based on a law passed in 2019 establishing Quebec as a secular state, the authorities of the City of Montreal Police Service have ordered officers to remove from their uniforms the shields of St. Michael the Archangel – the Patron of the Canadian police – with the words “St. Michael, protect us,” and any other religious symbol during working hours.

Since its approval, this law has been contested by several political and religious leaders, who consider it an affront to religious freedom and a clearly discriminatory act.



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### **Brazilian martyr of chastity beatified**

Isabel Cristina Mrad Campos, a Brazilian martyr of chastity, was raised to the honour of the altars on December 10, becoming a model of purity for the youth of our times. The ceremony, presided over by the Archbishop Emeritus of Aparecida, Cardinal Raymundo Damasceno Assis, took place in Barbacena, Minas Gerais, and was attended by over ten thousand faithful.

Isabel was 20 years old and was preparing to begin her studies in Medicine in Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais, when, on September 1, 1982, she was attacked by a man who was assembling a wardrobe in her apartment. After a fierce struggle, and unable to overcome the young woman's resistance, the aggressor stabbed her fifteen times, which resulted in her death. In this way Isabel crowned a life rich in piety, prayer and frequent reception of the Sacraments.

### **A miracle during Russian bombardment**

On the eve of the great Christmas celebration in the city of Kherson, Ukraine, two bombs dropped by Russian forces penetrated the roof of a Latin Rite Catholic church packed with faithful, and inexplicably did not explode. According to witnesses, one of them broke up upon impacting the ground, and the other became imbedded in a wall.

Mentioning the event, Bishop Stanislav Szyrokoradiuk, OFM, Bishop of Odessa-Simferopol, commented during his homily at the Christmas Eve Mass in the Cathedral of Odessa: “Many miraculous events are happening. God is in charge. Someone launches the bombs, but God guides them. If we pray, if we trust in God, God will guide the bombs.”

### **Summarizing a year of persecutions against the Church**

The year 2022 ends with a total of over a hundred priests and nuns kidnapped, detained or murdered around the world. The alarming figures were compiled by the Aid to the Church in Need Foundation, and demonstrate the pressing need to find concrete solutions to guarantee the safety and freedom of religious.

Among the countries with the highest number of attacks are: Nigeria, Haiti, Mexico, Democratic

Republic of Congo, Mali, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Philippines and Burkina Faso. In China the clandestine communities have suffered the loss of at least ten priests detained by the local authorities, and in Ukraine four priests were arrested while carrying out their pastoral duties in the territories occupied by Russia.

Another situation of concern is that currently faced by Catholics in Nicaragua, where at least eleven clerics remain detained by the authorities, while others have been forbidden to leave their parishes, and a dozen are prevented from returning to the country.



Samuacn (CC by-sa 3.0)

### **Msgr. Jonas Abib, founder of Canção Nova, dies**

On December 12, Msgr. Jonas Abib, founder of Canção Nova, died in Cachoeira Paulista, São Paulo, at eighty-five years of age. His death came after lengthy chemotherapy treatment for multiple myeloma.

Born on December 21, 1936, in Elias Fausto, São Paulo, he entered the Salesian seminary at the age of twelve, beginning his priestly formation and life under the motto *Become all things to all men*. In 1978, he founded the Canção Nova Community, recognized by the Vatican in 2008. Throughout his journey he promoted events and retreats for youth, started Canção Nova Radio and TV and left a flourishing institution, which currently has more than one thousand three hundred members in Brazil and abroad. In 2007, he received the title of Monsignor from Pope Benedict

XVI, in recognition of relevant services rendered to the Church.

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### ***Desecrations and vandalism in Europe during Christmas***

Christmas celebrations have been the occasion for acts of vandalism against the Church. In the chapel of the Hospital of Barbastro, Spain, aggressors opened the tabernacle and scattered the Sacred Hosts on the floor. The diocese expressed its “sadness, consternation and condemnation” for the event, while the competent authorities seek to identify the criminals.

In France, the Church of St. Roque in central Paris had its walls defaced with satanic signs, swastikas and absurd inscriptions. In the city of Lorient, the Church of Sainte-Anne d’Arvor was the target of an attack in broad daylight: the attackers smashed several statues, destroyed the nativity scene and scattered candles on the floor. Other churches suffered similar attacks in Rouen, Puy-de-Dôme, Bordeaux and Nice.

### ***Two million more Catholics in the United States***

The United States Religious Census (USRC), a study carried out every ten years by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, revealed in its latest edition, for the decade 2010-2020, that the Catholic Church in the country has received an additional two million faithful, thanks to communities of Hispanic-American migrants.

With sixty-one million members spread over nineteen thousand circumscriptions, today Catholics are about 19% of the population of the United States, and the largest religious institution in the country.

### ***Public Ministry recommends halting Our Father prayer in school***

In a new onslaught of aggressive secularism, the students of the João Etchebehere Municipal School of Basic Education of Rifaina, São Paulo, will no longer be able to start their school day by praying the Our Father. This was the surprising decision of the public prosecutor Alex Facciolo Pires, heeding a complaint filed by one of the institution’s teachers. “Public institutions should adopt a neutral position in the religious field, seek impartiality in such matters and not support or

discriminate against any religion. The fact that no parent of a student has complained about the school’s position is irrelevant,” the prosecutor said.

The other institutions of the municipal network are also to comply with the standard for the cessation of all religious activities or propagation of elements related to faith among students.



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### ***Wonderful tribute to Christmas in Assisi***

Frescoes of the Renaissance painter Giotto illuminated the city of Assisi during the Christmas period, recalling the first nativity scenes in history created by the *Poverello*.

On the façades of several churches in the city, frescoes with scenes of the Annunciation and the Birth of Jesus were projected, allowing passers-by to enter more deeply into the Christmas mysteries through more than ten thousand square metres of paintings.




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# *The Lamb, the Pigs and the Mud*

Loud squeals of laughter awaken her. Wondering how it is possible to be so jolly on such a hot day, the little lamb sets out to investigate.



 Lorena Mello

**I**t is the peak of summer. “Oh, what a hot day!” the farm animals complain. Horses are lazy; donkeys stubbornly refuse to budge; the cows do not want to leave the corral; the hens cluck crossly... Everyone is uncomfortable, it is true, but at least there is enough water and shade to make the heat bearable for almost everyone.

One little animal, however, is particularly distraught. She is due for her first shearing! And Lucinda – for that is her name – is nearly beside herself with impatience to be rid of her heavy coat of wool.

“Papa!” bleats the lamb. “When will the shepherd come to shear me?”

“It won’t be much longer, my daughter!”

“Ba-a-a-a-a!” I can’t wait another minute!”

“But you must wait, Lucinda! At least be happy that your mother and I have taken such good care to keep your coat spotless. The shepherd will be so pleased...”

Lucinda sighs and takes a little walk over to the pond to quench her thirst. As she bends down to drink, she sees the fish swimming happily about in the water.

“So, is the sun shining out there?” asks the carp in a playful tone.

“It certainly is...”

The minnow joins the conversation:

“I can tell. The water temperature is warmer at the surface, but it’s still cool here below. You must be terribly hot, ‘bundled up’ in your permanent coat. Wouldn’t you like to jump in, Lucinda?”

“I would, but I can’t swim!”

Lucinda walks a little further and finds a shady little shelter, where she settles down to rest. Peering out at the clear blue sky she thinks to herself: “Not a single white and fluffy cloud to cover the sun. I’m the only white and fluffy thing to be seen, and I wish I weren’t... Oh, it’s so hot! I think I will wait for the shepherd right here

in this shade. When he wants my wool, he can come and get it!”

Becoming drowsy, Lucinda nods off. But she is soon awoken by loud squeals of laughter coming from nearby. “How is it possible to be so jolly in this heat?” she asks herself. Curious, she gets up to investigate.

A short distance away, she finds some pigs in their pen, rolling and playing in mud. They are enjoying themselves because the soft and slimy mud cools them. As she approaches, her first reaction is a wave of disgust.

“Hey, little lamb, why the long face? We are all having a great time wallowing in this glorious mud!” grunts one of the older pigs.

A younger pig comes to the fence, close to where Lucinda is standing. There is something mean about his look, but he tries to sound friendly:

“Oh, nice to meet you! My name is Porcus. What’s yours?”

“I’m Lucinda.”

“I see you every once in a while from a distance, running and jumping in the meadow. We must be around the same age. But I have to say that I feel sorry for you.”

“Sorry for me? Why?”

“Because at this age, you should be having fun, but instead you are forced to suffer this tremendous heat! Lucinda,



**Feeling unbearably hot that day, Lucinda walked over to the pigpen and watched the animals enjoying themselves in the cool mud**

youth is to be enjoyed! We pigs know how to get the most pleasure out of life – that’s why we spend so much time in the mud. This is the only way to live. Don’t you want to try it a little?”

Hesitant, and repelled by the foul smell of the pigsty, the lamb begins to back away:

“No, I can’t! The shepherd is coming soon to shear me!”

“Oh, really? Look how long he’s taking... Afterwards, you’ll have plenty of time to wash up. You’ll be the same as ever, trust me!”

Lucinda is finally convinced. She squeezes through a gap in the fence and is soon diving into the mud with her new “friend”... “Ah, how cool and refreshing,” thinks the lamb who no longer suits her name, which means *light*.

After a few moments of comfort, she realizes it is time to return to her fold. She takes leave of the pigs, who call out:

“Goodbye for now! Come back soon!”

Heading towards home, Lucinda suddenly realizes the state she is in and stops in her tracks. “How can I appear before my family like this?” After some thought, she decides: “No, I will spend the night in that little shelter I found.”

The next day, she is horrified to find her coat caked with mud that has now hardened. “Oh, no! How will I ever wash this off?” She hurries to the pond she visited yesterday and sets to work.

“Stop, you are dirtying our water!” protest the fish.

Once wet, the clay only seems to become more deeply embedded in her coat. In tears, she decides to face the humiliation of presenting herself at home.

Everyone is shocked at her frightful appearance.

“My dear,” exclaims her mother, “what happened? Your wool was so beautiful! What did you do?”

Through sobs she confesses everything. Seeing her true repentance,



**Seeing the little lamb’s misery, the shepherd does not hesitate to gather it into his arms**

everyone sympathizes and tries to console her. Her dedicated mother gives her a good scrubbing, which works wonders. At last, her wool is restored to its original snowy splendour!

However... the weather is only getting hotter. The little lamb sometimes remembers the “delights” of the mud, but then the disastrous consequences come to mind. A struggle takes place inside her: should she go back or not? Temptation gradually gets the better of her, until one day she has a “brilliant” idea: she will shear herself! This way, she can cool off in the mud without dirtying a thick coat of wool.

On the sly, she cuts all her wool away. It is a clumsy job and the result is terrible... When she finishes, she runs to the pigpen and “flop!” She sinks into a pile of mud.

“Welcome back! You are one of us!” cheer the pigs.

“Lucinda, I think you will have to live here with us. How can you return to the fold without your wool? Ha ha ha!”

Hearing these words, shame invades her heart, making room for sincere repentance.

“How could I have done such a thing? Just look at me!”

Afraid of the disappointment she would cause her parents and especially the shepherd, she once again takes refuge that night in her secret shelter.

As darkness falls, the temperature drops. She has never felt such cold, and there is no way to get warm. At the same time, a sadness greater than she had ever felt before weighs upon her heart.

At dawn, she awakens to the sound of footstep coming close. She opens her eyes and sees the shepherd in front of her. Looking down at the dirty, bare, cold and hungry little lamb, he is filled with mercy. Fearfully, she begins to turn away, but he, without thinking twice, takes her into his arms and shelters her under his mantle.

The shepherd himself cleans her, covers her, and feeds her. Thanks to her protector’s care, which she gratefully receives, Lucinda is soon covered with a new coat, even whiter, shinier and softer than before. Never had such precious wool been seen!

Oh! Whenever we stain the whiteness of our soul with the fleeting pleasures that the mud of sin offers us, we are left with nothing but emptiness, frustration and shame. However, as long as we are willing to return to the right path, the Good Shepherd will always be ready to carry us back to the fold, so that we may continue to produce the warm wool of good works for His greater glory! ✧



Illustrations: Giuliana D’Amato

**If we are willing to return to the right path, the Good Shepherd is always ready to carry us back to His fold!**



# THE SAINTS OF EACH DAY

**1. Blessed Luigi Variara**, priest (†1923). Salesian missionary of Italian origin who died in Cúcuta, Colombia. He dedicated himself to the care of lepers and founded the Congregation of the Daughters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

## 2. Presentation of the Lord.

**St. Maria Domenica Mantovani**, virgin (†1934). First superior of the Institute of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, which she founded together with Blessed Giuseppe Nascimbeni in Verona, Italy, to serve the poor, orphans and the sick.

**3. St. Blaise**, bishop and martyr (†c. 320 Sebaste – present day Turkey).

**St. Ansgar**, bishop (†865 Bremen - Germany).

**St. Mary of St. Ignatius Thévenet**, virgin (†1837). She founded the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus and Mary in Lyon, France.

**4. St. Joan of Valois**, queen (†1505). Wife of King Louis XII of France, she consecrated herself to the service of God after her marriage was annulled. She founded the Order of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Bourges, France.

## 5. 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

**St. Agatha**, virgin and martyr (†c. 251 Catania - Italy).

**St. Luca di Demenna**, abbot (†995). He led a monastic life, first in Sicily and then in various other locations, fleeing the Saracen invasions. He died in the Monastery of Sts. Elias and Anastasio in Carbone, Italy.



**St. Polycarp of Smyrna -  
Cathedral of Chester (England)**

**6. St. Paul Miki and companions**, martyrs (†1597 Nagasaki - Japan).

**St. Amand of Elnone**, bishop (†c. 679). After several years of eremitical life, he received episcopal ordination. He preached missions in the Flanders region and along the Danube.

**7. St. Richard**, king (†c. 720). Father of Sts. Willibald, Winibald and Walburga, he died while on pilgrimage from his native England to Rome with the first two.

**8. St. Jerome Emiliani**, priest (†1537 Somasca - Italy).

**St. Josephine Bakhita**, virgin (†1947 Schio - Italy).

**St. Stephen of Muret**, abbot (†1124). Founder of the Order of Grandmont, near Limoges, France. He attracted numerous disciples through the austerity of his life.

**9. St. Apollonia**, virgin and martyr (†c. 250). After suffering numer-

ous ordeals, she was burned alive in Alexandria, Egypt, for refusing to utter blasphemies.

**10. St. Scholastica**, virgin (†c. 547 Monte Cassino - Italy).

**St. William of Maleval**, hermit (†1157). He died in a cave near Grosseto, Italy, after having given rise to many congregations of hermits with his example of life.

## 11. Our Lady of Lourdes.

**St. Paschal I**, Pope (†824). He promoted the first missions in the Scandinavian countries and transferred many relics of the martyrs from the catacombs to the churches. He rebuilt the Basilica of St. Cecilia in Rome.

## 12. 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

**Blessed Humbeline**, prioress (†1136). Convinced by her brother, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, to leave the pleasures of the world, with her husband's consent she entered the monastery of Jully-les-Nonnains near Troyes, France, of which she became the superior.

**13. St. Benignus of Todi**, priest and martyr (†fourth century). Martyred during the last persecution against the Christians, at the time of Diocletian and Maximian.

**14. St. Cyril**, monk (†869 Rome), and **St. Methodius**, bishop (†885 Velehrad – Czech Republic).

**St. Vicente Vilar David**, martyr (†1937). Renowned engineer from Manises, Spain, killed during the Civil War for helping religious and refusing to renounce his Faith.

**15. St. Onesimus**. St. Paul took him in as a runaway slave and in prison raised him as a son in



the Christian Faith, as he himself wrote to his master Philemon.

**16. St. Juliana of Nicomedia**, virgin and martyr (†century unknown). She was the only Christian in her family. At the age of eighteen, having refused to marry a pagan, she was arrested and beheaded.

**17. Seven Holy Founders of the Servites** (†c. 1262-1310 Monte Senario, near Florence - Italy).

**St. Mesrop**, monk (†c. 440). Evangelizer of the Armenians and disciple of St. Nerses, he created an alphabet to teach the people Sacred Scripture, translated the Old and New Testaments, and composed hymns and songs in the Armenian language.

**18. St. Gertrude Comensoli**, virgin (†1903). She founded the Institute of the Sacramentine Sisters of Bergamo, adorers of the Blessed Sacrament and educators of young women.

## 19. 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

**Blessed Joseph Zaplata**, religious and martyr (†1945). Member of the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, deported from Poland to the concentration camp of Dachau, Germany, where he died heroically caring for prisoners stricken by a deadly epidemic.

**20. St. Eucherius of Orleans**, bishop (†c. 738). Exiled from Orleans by Charles Martel, after being slandered by envious men, he found refuge in the monastery of Saint-Trond, Belgium, where he spent the rest of his life in prayer and contemplation.

**21. St. Peter Damian**, bishop and Doctor of the Church (†1072 Faenza - Italy).

**St. Robert Southwell**, priest and martyr (†1595). A priest of the Society of Jesus who for many years secretly exercised his ministry in London and neighbouring regions. Imprisoned for this reason, he was cruelly tortured and executed in Tyburn, London, by order of Queen Elizabeth I.

## 22. Ash Wednesday.

**Chair of St. Peter the Apostle.**

**Blessed Marie of Jesus d'Oultremont**, widow (†1879). A lady of Belgian society who, after the death of her husband and without neglecting the education of her four children, founded the Institute of the Sisters of Mary Reparatrix in Strasbourg.

**23. St. Polycarp**, bishop and martyr (†c. 155 Smyrna – present day Turkey).

**St. John**, monk (†c. 1127). His mother was enslaved by the Sar-

acens and taken to Palermo, Italy, shortly before his birth. She instructed him in the Christian Faith and, when he turned fourteen, sent him to the city of his ancestors. Strongly attracted by the heroism of the life of the Basilian monks of that region, he joined them and distinguished himself for his virtues and contemplative spirit.

**24. Blessed Ascension of the Heart of Jesus**, virgin (†1940). Co-founder of the Congregation of the Dominican Missionaries of the Most Holy Rosary in Lima.

**25. St. Gerland**, bishop (†1100). He reorganized the Church in Sicily, Italy, after it was liberated from the dominion of the Saracens.

## 26. 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent.

**St. Victor**, hermit (†seventh century). Praised in St. Bernard's sermons, he died in Arcis-sur-Aube, France, where he lived in continuous union with God through prayer and contemplation.

**27. St. Gregory of Narek**, monk and Doctor of the Church (†c. 1005 Narek - Armenia).

**St. Anne Line**, martyr (†1601). Her parents, English Calvinists, expelled her from home when she embraced the Catholic Faith. She became guardian of the residence of the missionaries from England. Denounced to the courts, she was convicted and hanged.

**28. St. Hilary**, Pope (†468). He wrote letters on the Catholic Faith, through which he confirmed the Councils of Nicaea, Ephesus and Chalcedon, extolling the primacy of the Roman See.

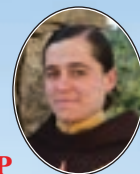


**St. Joan of Valois -  
Basilica of Notre-Dame du Roncier,  
Josselin (France)**



# Vox Prophetica

Towering majestically alongside churches, belfries remind us of the prophets who make God's voice ring out in every age.



✠ Sr. Maria Teresa Matos, EP

Journeying over mountains and through valleys, following winding rivers and rough or paved roads, one scene that commonly meets the traveller's eyes is that of a tower in the distance. Drawing nearer, it is possible to recognize a cross on it. The stained-glass windows cannot yet be seen, the sound of the organ cannot be heard, nor can the sacred statues be distinguished; yet there is no doubt: it is a church belfry.

Alongside the church and rising above it, bell towers defy time and distance, giving direction to Christian life and announcing God's presence to all.

Tall, slender and imposing, they manifest the grandeur of the sacred place and dominate with a mixture of charm and strength proper to that which rises up in search of Heaven.

Christians have been erecting towers next to churches since the 7th century in various shapes and sizes – true works of architecture. The custom developed further in the next century and, from the 11th century onwards they became an integral part of large cathedrals and monasteries, as well as of small chapels. They are admired by all, but perhaps few have stopped

to ask themselves what purpose they serve, as the typical observer would assume that they fulfil a simply aesthetic requirement.

Like the towers of medieval and even pre-medieval buildings, the belfry is a symbol of fortitude and vigilance; from its lofty vantage point, it encompasses everything around it and scrutinizes distant horizons. It is like a keep – religious rather than military – of the Lord of all the earth.

Nevertheless, its practical function is to house the bells whose ringing has long been associated with liturgical worship. Coming from the Latin word *signum* [ed. *sino* in Portuguese], the bell truly constituted a sign for the Catholic people. This is why it had to be raised aloft, to be heard by all and guide the lives of the faithful from the belfry.

When it struck the hour of the Holy Mass, they would leave their dwellings, their fields and their tasks. At the pealing of the bronze, clerics were prompted to their cells or their labours to go to the singing of the liturgical offices.

Everyone knew very well how to interpret its message, whether it was

to add grandeur to a solemnity or to call for prayers for the deceased; whether it was announcing a storm or another scourge of nature, or sounding the alarm for war. An ancient Latin distich describes the voice of command emanating from the belfry:

*Convoco, signo, noto, compello, concino, ploro, / arma, dies, horas, fulgura, festa, rogos.*<sup>1</sup>

Thus, accompanying the life of the church and guiding it, the bell tower can represent, in a more sublime symbolism, the prophets and providential men that God constitutes as a sign and sends as emissaries of His will in every time and place.

Rising from the earth to Heaven, they make themselves heard by all, recalling the primacy of divine praise, announcing chastisements and heavenly interventions, and directing the people towards God. The prophets, above all, mark the hours of the Almighty in history. ✠

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<sup>1</sup> From the Latin: I call to arms, mark the days, know the hours, foresee the lightning, chant the feasts, and weep the supplications.





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Church of St. Barbara -  
La Valle (Italy)



Francisco Lecaros

## ***The Reward for Fidelity***

**W**hen Mary and Joseph arrived at the Temple, they were met by the priest Simeon who, “inspired by the Spirit”, had gone there.

Our Lady presented him with her Son, whose demeanour was most amiable. The venerable old man experienced an indescribable joy at receiving God himself in his arms. The Child Jesus smiled and showed gracious tokens of affection as He gazed upon Simeon, strok-

ing the prophet’s beard with his little hands, which touched him to the depths of his soul.

The fidelity of Simeon had reached its apex, for which he was rewarded a superabundant consolation. Confidence was the arm with which he had won victory over all appearances of failure, and it led him to meet the Holy Family at the height of his trial.

*Msgr. João Scognamiglio Clá Dias, EP*