



SECULAR FRANCISCANS: COMMITTED TO PEACE AND JUSTICE

June 2007

SFO National Peace and Justice

Blessed

JOHN XXIII, POPE, BREACH MENDER, SECULAR FRANCISCAN

About a month before his 77th birthday, Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Patriarch of Venice, was elected pope, October 28, 1958.

Rather than being the “transitional” pope that many thought he would be, in the 4 ½ years of his pontificate he exercised a profound good upon the Church and the world. He ushered in a new era in the history of the Church by calling for and convoking the first session of the Second Vatican Council. He made the College of Cardinals more international than it had ever been. He established a commission for the revision of the Code of Canon Law as he felt the Church was becoming pharisaical with its many laws.

At the same time it became evident that he was a truly good, humble and saintly follower of Christ and the Poor Man of Assisi. John asked to be known as “the good shepherd defending truth and goodness.”

To members of the Franciscan Order he said, “I am Joseph (Giuseppe), your brother.” He loved to recall his reception into the Secular Franciscan Order, “...from our youth of fourteen years, on the first day of March 1896...We like to thank our Lord for this grace which happily coincided with the act whereby we began ecclesiastical life (the tonsure).” In 1896 he was admitted to the SFO by the spiritual director of the Bergamo seminary, Fr. Luigi Isacchi; he made a profession of the Rule on May 23, 1897.

Angelo Roncalli was born on November 25, 1881, in Soto il Monte, a small town in the Province of Bergamo, Italy. He was the fourth in a family of 14. The family worked as sharecroppers. Recalling his poor background he once remarked, “I didn’t know I was poor until someone told me that I was. I had a home with loving parents, food to eat, clothes to wear, a warm bed to sleep in, and a school to learn in. What more did I need. I had no idea of being poor.”

Ordained a priest in 1904 he served as seminary professor and secretary to his bishop (diocese of Bergamo) for about ten years. In 1921 he was called to Rome to work for the Society of the Propagation of the Faith. Consecrated titular archbishop four years later, he represented the Holy See for 29 years in various countries: Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece and France. He was made a Cardinal and Patriarch of Venice in 1953.

With Mary’s name on his lips, he died in his 82nd year, June 3, 1963. His cause of beatification was introduced shortly afterwards; and since he was an SFO, the cause is in the hands of the Franciscan Postulator General.

REFLECTION

The power of the world uses force in its own defense. The power of God uses and used love for the salvation of humankind. There is an incident from Blessed John’s life which so fully illustrates this new line of power and authority which God introduced to the world with the mystery of Bethlehem.

John was then the Patriarch of Venice. He learned that one of his priests was leading a rather irregular life and had been frequenting a place where no ecclesiastic should be seen. John could have suspended the priest from his ministry; he could have used all the force of his authority and crushed him with power. But what he did was to one day wait outside the place which the priest was accustomed to frequent. When the priest saw him, he grew pale, but John took him by the arm and, as if nothing was wrong, gently requested him to go with him to his residence. When they reached John's study he knelt down before the priest and asked him, "Please, Father, hear my confession!" And he did it with great humility and kindness.

When the priest had absolved him, John put his arm around his shoulder and said, "My son, I would like you to meditate on the marvelous gift that God has given you of forgiving men's sins, even those of your own Archbishop. May this encourage you to avoid sin as far as possible in your life out of gratitude to Christ."

We do not know what happened afterwards, nor do we need to know. But this whole incident speaks of peace, goodness and understanding, of salvation that does not humiliate, of authority that serves, of the greatest who makes himself the least in order to better reveal the image of Christ in the world.

ACTION

We are also called to be Breach Menders and peacemakers, bringers of **GOOD** News to those whose lives that we touch. Good Pope John is a glowing example of what Francis desired all of his followers to be. Lovers who are loyal to the Church and who call her to be the example of Christ in the world. We can't wait for others to lead us in the renewal of the Church, but to be leaders in bringing the love, compassion, forgiveness and healing Christ to the part of the world in which we live.

Such as a Cardinal speaking, during the Second Vatican Council, simply said that if, during twenty centuries of Christianity, the Church had preached as often about Christ words, "Woe to you rich!" as it had about the primacy of Peter, Communism surely would never have existed." This prompted John to say, "The Gospel has yet to be discovered." Let us seek to discover the truly radical Gospel preached by Jesus.

One last word of wisdom from Blessed John, "See everything, overlook a great deal, correct a little. Prudent is he who can keep silent that part of the truth which may be untimely, and by not speaking it, does not spoil the truth of what he said."

Prayer

Almighty God, whose will it is to heal all division and discord among those who call upon the name of your Son. We thank you for the good will shown in your servant John, and we pray that we may always be ready to hear our fellow Christians with humility and a willingness to learn, and may also speak the truth in love, to the healing of faction and the renewed witness of your people; though Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.