

John Paul II: The Giant of the Age An Historic Visit to Rome

(First of two parts)

As soon as I heard that Pope John Paul II would celebrate the 25th anniversary of his election as Supreme Pontiff and Pastor of the Universal Church on Oct 16, I made plans to be in Rome for what I knew would be an historic event. It was made even more historic by the Pope's decision to beatify Mother Teresa of Calcutta and create thirty new cardinals during the same week. When I arrived in Rome on Oct. 15, I settled into the Casa Sanctae Marthae, a comfortable, modern residence inside the Vatican for bishops, archbishops and cardinals when they are in Rome. The Casa, which has exactly one hundred and twenty rooms, was built to house the 120 cardinals who will vote in the next conclave to select the 264th Successor of Peter and Bishop of Rome.

The Day of the Pope's Jubilee

Early the next morning I entered the majestic St. Peter's Basilica by the side entrance inside the Vatican and made my way to the excavations below the present Basilica and below the ruins of the basilica built by Emperor Constantine in the fourth century, down to what remains of narrow second century streets leading to the place where Simon Peter, who was crucified upside down nearby in Nero's circus, is believed to be buried. This is a site that brings one very close to one who was very close to Christ. There I prayed for the Church of Lake Charles and for so many others. Then I moved through the vast dimly lit Basilica under Michelangelo's heroic dome to the side altar under which the body of Blessed Pope John XXIII is displayed in a glass case. There I celebrated morning Eucharist giving thanks to God for the great renewal Pope John and his Second Vatican Council brought to the Church. After Mass I walked down the long ornate nave of the Basilica past the patrician and elegant monument to Pope Pius XII to the serenely beautiful sculpture of Mary holding the lifeless body of her son, Jesus. Alas!, due to vandalism, Michelangelo's Pieta is now behind a protective glass wall. Inlaid in the marble floor in front of this breathtaking work is the coat of arms of Pope Paul VI, who taught us "If you want peace, work for justice." Once outside the gigantic facade of St. Peter's the sun was beginning to rise and the lights were already on in the Papal Apartment across the square.

Later that morning bishops from around the world joined the crowd that filled the Paul VI Audience Hall. There the Holy Father signed and promulgated a major document on the life and ministry

of bishops in the Church. Introducing his Apostolic Exhortation, "Pastores Gregis" (Shepherds of the Flock), the Pope said bishops should strive to manifest genuine love for everyone and give their attention to each person since they are called to be father, teacher, friend, and brother to everyone following Christ's example. The ministry of bishops, he said, "is difficult and serious. Where will we find the strength to carry it out according to Christ's wishes? Only in Him." Polish pilgrims in the Audience Hall serenaded the Pontiff on his Silver Jubilee, which brought a twinkle to his eyes.

Back at Casa Sanctae Marthae for lunch I sat at table with bishops and cardinals from Africa, Europe, Asia and South America. The conversation turned to the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity of the faithful at the Audience Hall and of the bishops themselves. One South American Bishop observed, "In the past twenty-five years the axis of the Catholic Church has shifted from the northern hemisphere to the southern hemisphere. Europe has been the focal point of the Church since the Middle Ages. But now the new growth in the Church, the increase in vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and the enthusiasm for evangelization is not in Europe but in Latin America, Africa and Asia." An Austrian bishop agreed, noting that many churches in Europe would be all but empty were it not for the tourists. He observed that "the wealth, secularity and scientific or technological mentality of the Northern Hemisphere seem to breed an indifference to religion." A Nigerian Bishop asked, "Does this suggest that poorer, less sophisticated, agrarian peoples have a greater affinity for spirituality, religion, and Christianity itself than those who are 'better-off' living in the more developed countries?" The conversation shifted to the strong presence of Islam in North Africa, which prompted an Ethiopian Bishop to say that "life is difficult for the Church in heavily Islamic countries like Sudan." It was surprising to many at the table to hear that in Saudi Arabia the Church is virtually invisible. It is illegal to build churches there and priests and bishops travel there incognito. An Italian Bishop noted "The Church is repressed in Saudi Arabia and yet the followers of Islam have built a great mosque here in Rome without objection from the Vatican."

At dusk over 300,000 people

gathered in the Piazza San Pietro for the Holy Father's anniversary Mass. It was a beautiful clear evening as hundreds of bishops processed from the great Bronze Door of the Apostolic Palace and up the great stone walkway leading to the papal altar in front of the floodlit Basilica. Rows of splendid tulips were on each side of us. Once the bishops were seated the doors of the Basilica opened and the cardinals processed to their places followed by the Pope John Paul II. No longer able to walk long distances without discomfort, or to carry his pastoral staff, the Pope entered the sanctuary in a specially designed chair on wheels which can be raised and lowered as needed allowing the Pope to celebrate the entire Liturgy without ever rising from the chair. His Holiness' many infirmities were visible for all to see. Perhaps most frustrating for him was the fact that his powerful homilies prepared for these historic days had to be read by others. High above the famous Bernini colonnades were banks of television cameras from around the world. Apparently, some TV stations are so anxious to have a strategic location from which to cover the death of the Pope and the election of his successor, that they have been paying rent for these locations for the past several years!

Bishop Edward K. Braxton



On a crisp Sunday morning, Oct. 19, the mammoth Square in front of the Basilica of St. Peter was filled to the crushing point with an overflow of the faithful from around the world who came for the beatification of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. By one account there were 350,000 people in the Square, down the Via del Conciliatore, past the Fortress San Angelo (dramatic setting for the final scene of Puccini's "Tosca") to the banks of the Tiber River. When the Holy Father pronounced the words of beatification a large banner bearing Blessed Teresa's likeness was uncovered below the great balcony of the Basilica. The huge throng of people roared in approval as natives of Calcutta in traditional garb danced to authentic Indian music.

Mother Teresa: An Icon of the Good Samaritan

Described as "luminous messenger of God's love", Teresa's parents, Nikolla and Drane Bojaxhiu named her Gonxha Agnes Bojaxhiu when she was born on August 26, 1910 in Skopje, Albania. She

became a Sister of Loretto and taught at a Catholic girl's school. On Sept. 10, 1946 she felt a 'call within her call' which led her to establishing the Missionary Sisters of Charity. She gave up her traditional habit, put on an Indian Sari and took to the streets of Calcutta. As she put it, "By blood, I am Albanian. By citizenship, I am Indian. By faith, I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to the heart of Jesus." Some have noted that six years after her death the streets of Calcutta are still teeming with the desperately sick, the lonely and the dying. She was not beatified because she changed the world but because she did what she could to change the lives of suffering individuals. As John Paul said in his homily, "I am personally grateful to this courageous woman whom I have always felt beside me. Mother Teresa, an icon of the Good Samaritan, went everywhere to serve Christ in the poorest of the poor. Not even conflict and war could stand in her way."

As I participated in this extraordinary event my thoughts turned to those occasions when I was privileged to be in Mother Teresa's presence in Washington, DC, in Rome, and in Calcutta. I recalled her meditation, "Jesus, My patient".

Dearest Lord,
may I see you today and every day

in the person of your sick, and, whilst nursing them, minister unto you.

Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable,
may I still recognize you, and say:

"Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you."

Lord, give me this seeing faith, then my work will never be monotonous.

I will ever find joy in humoring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all poor sufferers.

O beloved sinner!
how doubly dear you are to me, when you personify Christ.

What a privilege is mine to be allowed to tend You.

I thank You for meeting You My patient-Jesus-

My lover-Jesus

My living Lord-Jesus.

All afternoon crowds gathered informally in the Piazza to pray, sing, dance, eat, tell Mother Teresa stories, to admire her flower trimmed likeness on the front of St. Peter's, to sing praises to the

beloved Bishop of Rome under his apartment window, and simply to be!

That afternoon I decided to miss the showing of a special film about Blessed Teresa's life so that I could make a visit to the Basilica Church San Pietro in Vincoli (St. Peter in Chains). Tradition says the chains prominently displayed there are the very chains that bound Peter when he was in prison. However, the primary reason people make their way to this church near the coliseum is because it contains Michelangelo's brilliant Carrara marble sculpture of Moses the Lawgiver. I usually visit this church and pray the rosary in front of the Blessed Sacrament and then allow myself plenty of time in the presence of this dramatic and powerful work that adorns the tomb of Pope Julius II, who had commissioned 39 more massive statues but died after only one was completed. Looking at the tortured stare in the eyes and the veins in the muscled arms, one can easily appreciate the story that says that on completing the work, Michelangelo struck the Moses on the knee with a hammer and said "Speak!"

On this special evening I happened upon a remarkable event. The Maronite Patriarch, His Eminence Mar Nasrallah Cardinal Boutros Sfier was celebrating the Divine Liturgy according the ancient Rite of the Antiochian Maronite Church. Sung entirely in Arabic and attended by many Lebanese Catholics living in Rome, the liturgy was an awe-inspiring incense filled reminder of the "catholicity" of the Catholic Church. The familiar "Latin Rite" which we celebrate in English in the United States is simply the largest and the most well known of the more than twenty liturgical rites in the one Catholic Church.

Later that evening there was a wonderful fire works display over the city of Rome in the Pope's honor. After the spectacle ended, in spite of the late hour, His Holiness came to his balcony once more to "thank everyone for everything" and to wishing us all a good night.

(To be continued in November 28 Catholic Calendar)



Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus said to his disciples, "In those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in the clouds' with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky." Learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. In the same way, when you see these things happening, know that he is near, at the gates. Amen, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Mark 13:24-32

A Republic not a Democracy

By Fr. Frank Pavone
National Director,
Priests for Life

"Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

That quote is not from an anarchist or a totalitarian leader. It is, perhaps surprisingly, from John Adams, the second President of the United States, and a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

Similar quotes can be found in the writings of other Founding Fathers of our nation, because although they had the opportunity to do so, they did not establish a democracy. What they established for America, instead, is a republic. And great is the difference between the two.

In a democracy, policies are made by a direct majority vote of the people. What the majority says, goes, and that is final and absolute. So, for example, if the majority were to say that murder is OK, it would be OK. There would not be a mechanism, in a pure democracy, to keep it from being OK, except that the majority changed its mind.

A republic, however, is based not on the rule of the majority, but on the rule of law. Representatives are elected, and they pass laws. They are accountable to the people, and in this sense ma-

majorities matter. But they are also accountable to a higher law, and there is the key difference. There are certain laws that the majority can never change. These laws flow from the fundamental rights of the human person and from God Himself.

The Founding Fathers recognized this and expected all future generations of Americans to recognize it as well. Alexander Hamilton, a signer of the Constitution, wrote, "[T]he law...dictated by God Himself is, of course, superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times. No human laws are of any validity if contrary to this" (The Papers

of Alexander Hamilton, Vol. I, p. 87).

James Wilson, another signer of the Constitution and a US Supreme Court Justice, wrote, "All [laws], however, may be arranged in two different classes, 1) Divine. 2) Human...Human law must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is Divine" (The Works of the Honorable James Wilson, Vol. I, pp. 103-105).

The Founders of our nation believed in Biblical law, and that was the standard for law and government in our country until the turn of this century. Now, instead, legal positivism has become the standard. It says that

there are no unchanging, superior laws. Rather, man-made law is the final law and can always change according to circumstances. That's the poisoned soil out of which Roe vs. Wade and other abortion decisions have grown.

It's time for a change. We need to re-discover our own history and impart it to our youth. The primary legal document of our nation, the Declaration of Independence, recognizes in its first sentence that "the laws of nature and of nature's God" are primary. We are not a democracy; we are a republic.

Bishop Chaput speaks on historic legislation

WASHINGTON -- President George W. Bush signed into law the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 on Nov. 5. The Chairman of the Committee for Pro-Life Activities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Charles Chaput, issued the following statement on this historic event:

"I want to express my deep gratitude, and that of all the U. S. Catholic bishops, to President George W. Bush for signing into law a ban on one of the most inhumane procedures ever inflicted on a human child-partial-birth abortion.

"For 30 years, abortion has been legal at any time during pregnancy, for any reason or none at all, and by any method one wanted to employ to kill an unborn child. President Bush's signing of the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act marks the first time in three decades that our nation has placed any restriction on an abortion procedure. This is a vital step in the right direction for our nation--and for the women who have suffered and the children who have died because of this uniquely inti-

mate form of violence. "We commend the President for his action, and we pledge our prayers and support to see that this brutal procedure remains prohibited by law and intolerable to the American people.

"We also thank the millions of our fellow-Catholics and other people of good will throughout the country who have worked for many years to see this achievement. Their hard work and their prayers are responsible in large measure for this day of celebration."

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