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John XXIII and John Paul II: two holy Popes, two Marian saints

Some words from the Prelate of Opus Dei, Bishop Javier Echevarría, on the canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II, "two priests with great hearts, with a burning love for God and for all men and women."

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The canonization of John XXIII and John Paul II is a great event for the

Church and a sign of hope for the world, because where sanctity flourishes the crises in this world don't have the final word.

Sanctity provides a solid foundation on which to build the future. In our faith, and in a special way in the saints, we find an answer to the deepest problems of mankind and society, often the result of being distant from God.

We should give thanks to God on seeing that, during recent decades (when so much has been said about the “crises” in economics, culture, politics, society and religion), the Church has been guided by holy people, by saints. Two of the three Roman Pontiffs from these years (John XXIII and John Paul II) will be canonized this Sunday, and the beatification process for the third recent Pope (Paul VI) is now well advanced.

John XXIII is, above all, the Pope who convoked the Second Vatican Council. As Peter's successor he guided the Church, with a firm and fatherly hand, towards this extraordinary experience of faith and personal and collective renewal. As *Guadium et Spes* emphasized, the Council strove to speak to the hearts of men and women in today's world. Pope Roncalli helped place the vocation to holiness at the very core of Christian life. We can go to his intercession today to beseech God that all men and women may take deeply to heart this truth proclaimed by Vatican II: that sanctity is attainable by all Christians, and is not a goal for a few select people.

For mankind as a whole, John XXIII is also the Pope of peace, since during a very tense historical moment he had no hesitation, following the example of his predecessors, to do everything possible to prevent war, using all of

his moral and religious authority to make clear the prerequisites for peace and for the safeguarding of the dignity of the human person.

John Paul II was a priest in love with God and mankind, created in the image of God in Christ. Spurred by charity, he convoked the whole Church to the “new evangelization,” while stressing at the same time the role that corresponds to the laity in this task of making God present in the life of people and nations. During the years of his pontificate we have been given new light to grasp more deeply God’s goodness and mercy. His words, his gestures, his writings, his personal self-giving (both in health and in sickness) have been instruments used by the Holy Spirit to draw many people to the sources of grace, and to encourage thousands of young people to say “yes” to Christ’s call to the priesthood, to

religious life, to matrimony and to lay apostolic celibacy.

The Polish Pope led us from the second into the third millennium, leaving behind him a rich legacy on the dignity of the human person, the value of human life and the family, service to the poor and needy, the rights of workers, human love and the dignity of women, and about so many other aspects crucial for fostering a life of human dignity.

His writings and words provide us with a body of teachings with enormous potential for the future. I personally am convinced that his social and human message (stemming from his deep spiritual response to God) will become more and more important with the passage of the years.

The canonization of these two great shepherds takes place a few days before we begin May, the month of

Mary. This is a feature that unites the two new saints: their deep and tender love for our Lady. John XXIII frequently pointed to our Lady's "universal motherhood." Mary is "the common Mother of all men and women, brothers and sisters in Christ, the firstborn Son" (12 October 1961). In John Paul II, the awareness of the closeness and intercession of our Mother burned strongly in his own spiritual and human journey, and it drew others to discover the "Marian dimension" in the life of all Christ's disciples. Filiation to our Lady, he said, is "a gift which Christ himself makes personally to every individual" (see *Redemptoris Mater*, no. 45).

Our Lady holds an important place in the spiritual life of each of the faithful, but also in the building up of the Church as a whole. Therefore, with the upcoming canonization on Sunday, I would like to quote these

words from Saint Josemaria Escriva: “It is difficult to have devotion to our Lady and not feel closer to the other members of the Mystical Body and more united to its visible head, the Pope. That’s why I like to repeat: *All with Peter to Jesus through Mary!*” (*Christ is Passing By*, no. 139). It gives me great joy that it has been Pope Francis, also a deeply Marian Pope, who has decided to go ahead with these two canonizations. All three of them have shown us that charity is not a merely human virtue, but that it means bringing Christ to other men and women, which is what Mary did in the service of all mankind.

Soon we will grow accustomed to referring to these two shepherds as Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II. By canonizing them, Pope Francis, the Vicar of Christ, is helping us to see that, in God’s eyes, Angelo Roncalli and Karol Wojtyla are,

above all, two holy persons, a fundamental goal for the life of each man and women. Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul II were two priests with great hearts, with a burning love for God and all men and women. Two great saints, united by a tender love for Mary, Mother of God and our Mother.

+Javier Echevarría

Prelate of Opus Dei

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