

Section 4 - The Pontificate

The manifesto of John Paul I

The radio message *“Urbi et Orbi”*, delivered in Latin, effectively closed the conclave and began the pontificate of John Paul I.

With his characteristic pastoral style, the newly elected pontiff clearly defined the programmatic points of his pontificate.

The message expressed a request to the entire Church, as the people of God, to collaborate with the Bishop of Rome in supporting the task of the universal Church in the world.

The Pope seems to say *“how only an authentic Christian life – ecclesial and personal – can make a response to the expectations of the contemporary world possible”* (*The Magisterium of John Paul I*, S. Falasca, F. Tudini, Ed. VIELLA, p. 44)

«The Church, in this common effort to take responsibility and respond to the pressing problems of the moment, is called to give the world that "supplement of soul" so often invoked, which alone can ensure salvation. This is what the world expects today: it knows well that the sublime perfection it has achieved with its research and techniques has reached a crest beyond which lies the vertigo of the abyss; the temptation to replace God with autonomous decisions that ignore moral laws leads modern man to the risk of reducing the earth to a desert, the individual to an automaton, fraternal coexistence to a planned collectivization, often introducing death where God instead desires life. [...] Our programme will be to continue his [Paul VI's programme - Editor's note], in the wake already marked by so much consensus from the great heart of John XXIII ». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 19)

The following are six expressions introduced by the Latin verb *“volumus”* (we want), intended to determine how Paul VI’s program was proposed to continue:

1. We want to continue the legacy of the Council in the footsteps of our immediate predecessors.
2. We want to keep intact the great discipline of the Church in the lives of priests and the faithful.
3. We want to indicate the priority of evangelization in the ecclesial mission.
4. We want to keep the ecumenical commitment alive.
5. We want to continue the dialogue with the contemporary world initiated by Paul VI.
6. We want to encourage peace initiatives.

«Our programme will be to continue his, in the wake already marked by so much consensus from the great heart of John XXIII»

Bishop of Rome

On September 7, Pope Luciani met with the priests of Rome; he urged them to create a place of silence and detachment from the noisy and pressing pace of daily life. This is all the more necessary for effective and convincing action in places fraught with so many problems and inhabited by an often suffering humanity, since **«feeling their priest habitually united with God is, today, the desire of many good people of faith»**. Remember how Gregory the Great hoped **“may the shepherd of souls converse with God without forgetting men and converse with men without forgetting God»**. (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 53)

On September 23, he took possession of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the original papal seat. In his speech, he commented on the celebration's readings. The first, taken from the 60th chapter of Isaiah, sings of the luminous harmony and prosperity of the Jerusalem that will be rebuilt by the Jewish people after their captivity in Babylon; that passage, Luciani states, **«can be attributed to Rome. It is known to all that the pope acquires authority over the entire Church by virtue of being bishop of Rome, that is, successor, in this city, to Peter. And especially by virtue of Peter, the Jerusalem of which Isaiah spoke can be considered a figure, a premonition of Rome. This is an honour for the bishop of Rome and for all of you. But it is also a responsibility»**. (Complete Works, vol. 9, p.72)

Even in the Lateran, his thoughts turned again to St. Gregory the Great, his "holy predecessor," whom he greatly admired. As he had done in the Angelus of September 3, he recalled the Regula pastoralis [Pastoral Care], the work that masterfully explains how the pastor should teach, **«proposing the word of the Lord faithfully both to God and to the listeners, with humility but with frankness that is not timid»**. (Complete Works, vol. 9, p.74)

Luciani was the man who, at the end of the meeting with the Roman clergy, could say, **«I spoke with resignation, and I apologize for that. However, I can assure you that since I became your bishop, I have loved you very much»**. (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 54)

And the man who warmly and envelopingly greeted those in San Giovanni in Laterano on that 23 September, recalling another of his "holy predecessors", both as patriarch of Venice and as pontiff:

«Let me add just one thing: it is God's law that one cannot do good to someone unless one first loves them. For this reason, Saint Pius X, upon entering Venice as patriarch, exclaimed in St Mark's: “What would become of me, Venetians, if I did not love you?” I say something similar to the Romans: I can assure you that I love you, that I desire only to enter into your service and place my meagre strength, the little I have and what I am, at the disposal of all». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p.76)

«I want to be the father, the friend, the brother who goes as pilgrim and missionary to find everyone, who comes to bring peace»

Poverty of the Church

"No man can remain inert"; Luciani had repeatedly referred to these words from Populorum progressio (3 and 23), which he also repeated in his last audience, which focused on charity: «The peoples of hunger today dramatically challenge the peoples of opulence. The Church is shocked by this cry of anguish and calls everyone to respond with love to their brothers and sisters». And resuming Paul VI again: «No one is entitled to reserve for his own exclusive use what exceeds his needs, when others lack the bare necessities». (Complete Works, vol. 9, pp. 81-82)

His very short pontificate did not allow Luciani to develop projects and interventions that would stem the tragedies of our dramatically unequal world, but he had always revealed profound anguish in the face of the powerful imbalances existing within individual societies and between peoples.

With one of his wonderful linguistic brushstrokes, in 1973 he described to the Venetians a world tragically divided into **«lazar peoples and epulone peoples»** (Complete Works, vol. 6, p. 157): those who have a great deal and those who resemble that Lazarus who waited every day for a morsel outside the house where abundant "epulae" were held, sumptuous banquets, of which not even a scrap was offered to him. Christians, Luciani often said, should be **«first in works of charity and justice»**. (Complete Works, vol. 6, p. 159)

They believe in the value of every life simply because it comes from a single Father, who makes us all brothers and sisters. They believe that God became flesh, a body: this implies respect, help, and care for one's own body and that of others, for every man "who lives in all flesh" (Genesis 9:15).

But to **«let a heart of flesh replace a heart of stone»**, you don't necessarily need to be a believer, because there are truths that are **«vertical, harsh, ascending, which demand of us a leap into infinity and mystery—what is called: believing»**. Others, however, **«are horizontal, such as: Love your neighbor. These are often accepted even by non-believers»**. (Complete Works, vol. 5, pp. 460 e 105)

During his few days in St. Peter's, his voice was raised several times, making it clear how important it was for him to promote a more dignified coexistence. Dignified in two senses: respectful of humanity and capable of concretely expressing its great capabilities, thanks to which, if it so chooses, it can be a builder of material growth and cultural elevation. Without the latter, there will always be subordination.

On 4 September 1978, he reminded the heads of the Special Missions of the tireless concern of his predecessors to contribute to the achievement of justice, development and peace.

«Nothing that is truly human is alien to us. Of course, we have no miraculous solutions to the world's great problems. However, we can bring something truly precious: a spirit that helps resolve these problems and places them in the essential dimension, that of universal charity and openness to transcendent values, that is, openness to God. We will try to carry out this service with simple, clear, and trusting language»

Evangelisation and dialogue with the modern world

Another priority of the Church, recalled in the "Urbi et Orbi" radio message of August 27, is evangelisation; Luciani emphasizes its importance, starting with Paul VI's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* [Evangelisation in the Modern World]. For Pope Luciani, in terms of evangelisation, it is necessary to help maintain the distinction between the religious and civil spheres, to ensure that political authorities maintain a spirit of collaboration and make every concrete contribution to social harmony and development, while respecting their mutual prerogatives.

He stated it clearly in the speech he gave to diplomats at the Holy See:

«We offer you our sincere collaboration, according to our own means. [...] We obviously have no temporal goods to exchange, no economic interests to discuss. Our possibilities for diplomatic intervention are limited and specific. They do not intervene in the purely temporal, technical, and political affairs that are the responsibility of your governments». [...] «It is a question of contributing, through the documents and commitments of the Apostolic See and our collaborators throughout the Church, to enlightening and forming the consciences of Christians first of all, but also of people of good will – and, through them, a broader public opinion – on the fundamental principles that guarantee a true civilization and a real brotherhood among peoples [...] ». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 32)

For Pope Luciani, evangelisation is the premise of authentic human advancement: ***«to know the new spiritual and internal vision of souls»*** and ***“the total reversal of intelligence, will, and “heart” [...] »*** (Complete Works, vol. 6, p. 19 & vol. 5, p. 435) preached by Christ is the prerequisite for every intervention aimed at human advancement, care for others, and their growth.

However, a mere political reading of the Gospel and of the saving role of Christ is never possible, as he recalled in a Venetian speech in 1973:

«Now, I see some ideas emerging that, although Christianly sound at first, gradually lose some of their validity as they progress and develop, blend with foreign ideologies, and end up contrary to the letter and spirit of the Gospel. It is a good and evangelical idea to give great importance to social problems. [...] The lesser good and the less religious can come second. When it is declared that solving these problems becomes the absolutely primary goal of religious activity (note: not political or social, but religious); when it is asserted that other problems such as avoiding sin, being friends with God through a holy life sustained by prayer and the sacraments, are, always on the religious level, secondary problems or do not have the urgency of the first ones». (Complete Works, vol. 6, p. 18)

«The rift between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time, as it was of other times. It is therefore necessary to make every effort towards a generous evangelisation of culture, more precisely of cultures»

“Ut unum sint” - “That they may be one”

The day before the Second Vatican Council's official closing, on December 7, 1965, an event of great historical significance opened up new perspectives in relations with the Orthodox: after 900 years of division, reconciliation took place between the Catholic Church and that of Constantinople. The excommunications they had hurled against each other were withdrawn: in St. Peter's and, concurrently, in the Phanar Cathedral in Istanbul, the Joint Declaration of Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras was read, in which they affirmed their determination to remove all obstacles "in order to be once again 'one' [...]" as Jesus had asked his disciples to be (John 17:21). Thirty years later, John Paul II would write an encyclical entitled precisely *Ut unum sint - That they may be one*.

The gesture that typifies this reconciliation is the meeting between Paul VI and Athenagoras in Jerusalem on January 5, 1964, during which they shared another historic embrace during the first pilgrimage of a Catholic pope to the Holy Land. The following day, at the beginning of his Epiphany homily, Luciani emphasized the significance of that embrace: ***«Yesterday [...] the Pope and Athenagoras embraced repeatedly and with great emotion, and recited the Lord's Prayer together. This hadn't happened in centuries; for centuries, a Patriarch of Constantinople had not met a Pope»***. (*Complete Works*, vol. 3, pp. 135-136)

Albino Luciani, who had Christian unity very much at heart, in his appeal for the 1959 Council hoped for ***«the return of our Eastern brothers, who have separated from us, to their common mother, the Catholic Church»***. (*Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 37)

In 1969, speaking about the Liturgical Reform of the Canon of the Holy Mass, he insisted on the importance of clearly remembering the Spirit also as a ***«gesture of respect towards the Orthodox brothers, who have always explicitly invoked [him] [...]»*** (*Complete Works*, vol. 4, p. 354) for the transformation of water and wine into the blood of Christ.

Speaking about the approach to "non-Catholic Christians", at the Eucharistic Congress of 1977 Luciani said: ***« [...] We have many points in common; let us highlight them," says the Pope. "Are there other points of divergence? If they are due to laws or customs introduced by the Church, with due prudence, let us be open to any appropriate changes. What one pope "makes into a Bull" another can "un-Bull." If, however, it concerns a matter regulated by Christ himself, let us meet with our separated brothers and sisters and study the various points of view together; it may be that the points diverge less than they initially seemed during the controversy»***. (*Complete Works*, vol. 8, p. 219)

Luciani clearly expressed his wishes and his position in the radio message he delivered “*Urbi et orbi*”:

«We wish to continue the ecumenical effort, which we consider the final legacy of our immediate predecessors, watching with unchanged faith, with unwavering hope and with

unwavering love for the realisation of Christ's great command: "Ut omnes unum sint [That all may be one]" (John 17:21) ».

«Faith in God, professed in common by the descendants of Abraham—Christians, Muslims, and Jews—when lived sincerely and carried into life, is the sure foundation of human dignity, brotherhood, and freedom, and a principle of correct moral conduct and social coexistence. And there is more: as a consequence of this faith in God, creator and transcendent, man stands at the pinnacle of creation»

In dialogue with other faiths: «We can be friends»

Luciani's respect for differences within the Church was equally sensitive toward the other religions he encountered. This openness, however, was always accompanied by great integrity and a firm belief in the Truth. In his letter to Giuseppe Gioachino Belli in Illustriissimi, Luciani peremptorily responds to the supporters of **«pluralism in faith»**, those who believe that **«no one has the whole Christian truth in their pocket»**.

«Listen, I'm disgusted by the thought that God sent his Son to tell us, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' only to have us all find ourselves in the same situation as those blind men, each holding a meagre particle of truth, different from the particle of the others. That we know the truths of faith only by analogy, yes; but blind to this extent, no; it seems to me unworthy both of God and of our reason! ». (Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 401)

Luciani strongly affirmed respect for other religious callings, but at the same time he reminded Catholics of the need to reinvigorate their faith in the truths of Christianity so as not to be led astray by other doctrines:

« [...] There are four thousand Muslims in Rome: they have the right to build a mosque. There's nothing to say: we must let them do it. If you want your children not to become Buddhists or Muslims, you must teach them catechism better, ensure that they are truly convinced of their Catholic religion, that they feel their religion is deeply rooted in their souls, so that they never renounce it again». (Complete Works vol. 9, p. 260)

In 1972, Luciani met Gheulla Cohen, an Israeli journalist and activist; this is how Abramo Alberto Piattelli, a rabbi from Venice, described that meeting:

«We met at the Patriarchate, in Luciani's office, between September and October 1972. I acted as interpreter, because Luciani didn't speak Hebrew, and I don't think he even spoke English, and at a certain point Cohen asked him if the Star of David and the Cross of Christ could somehow be signs of friendship. And he said, 'Yes, despite our theological differences, we can be friends». (G. CUBEDDU, Interview with Abramo Alberto Piattelli, in "30 giorni", n. 10, 1999)

And they parted with this hope. In the photo, you can clearly see that Cohen showed up to the meeting with a large Star of David around her neck, while Luciani wore his crucifix: each with their own identity, each open to friendship.

After his election as Pope, Luciani clearly expressed his thoughts and intentions in the context of interreligious dialogue:

«We wish to continue with patience and firmness in that serene and constructive dialogue, which the never sufficiently lamented Paul VI placed at the foundation and programme of his pastoral action, giving the main lines in the great encyclical Ecclesiam suam [His Church], for mutual understanding, from men to men, even with those who do not share our faith, always ready to give them testimony of the faith that is in us, and of the mission that Christ has entrusted to us, “ut credat mundus” [so that the world may believe] (John 17,21)».
(Complete Works vol. 9, p. 21)

«The Star of David and the Cross of Christ»

Peace for the «human family»

The respect Luciani expressed for Christians of all denominations, as well as for the faithful of all religions, is an integral part of his profound love for peace among humanity.

In 1973, on the tenth anniversary of Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in Terris* [Peace on Earth], Luciani emphasized the importance of that document, which condemned wars, reminding the world of the existence of a **«human family»** and forcefully affirming that conflicts of interest between states **«will always break out, but wars,” the Pope said, “will never be capable of resolving them».** (Complete Works, vol. 6, p. 96)

«Promoting reconciliation and brotherhood among peoples, inviting them to collaborate, encouraging all praiseworthy and good initiatives that can safeguard and increase peace in a troubled world, [...] to stem, within nations, the blind violence that only destroys and sows ruin and mourning» is one of the points touched upon by John Paul I in the 6 wishes that constitute his programmatic address.

A few days after having pronounced it, to the one hundred representatives of international missions received on 4 September 1978, Luciani said: **« [...] our heart is open to all peoples, all cultures, and all races. [...] We certainly do not have miraculous solutions to the world's great problems, but we can offer something very precious: a spirit that helps resolve these problems and places them in their essential dimension, that of openness to the values of universal charity... so that the humble Church, messenger of the Gospel to all the peoples of**

the earth, can help create a climate of justice, brotherhood, solidarity, and hope without which the world cannot live». (Complete Works, vol. 9, pp. 21 e 47)

For Luciani, peace is one of the pillars of Christianity, and it cannot be understood without considering its central role. For this reason, having become pope shortly after the Camp David talks, which took place from September 5 to 17, 1978, he demonstrated how close it was to his heart that American President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin reach an understanding. This understanding occurred and would lead to the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty the following year.

Peace is the good on which every other good depends, every opportunity for material and moral growth, and, upon taking office, the commitment that Luciani wished to make ***«in our tormented and magnificent time»***. is this:

«Finally, we wish to encourage all praiseworthy and good initiatives that can safeguard and increase peace in a troubled world: calling upon all the good, the just, the honest, and the upright of heart to collaborate, to stem, within nations, the blind violence that only destroys and sows ruin and mourning, and, in international life, to bring men to mutual understanding, to the conjunction of efforts that foster social progress, eradicate physical hunger and spiritual ignorance, and promote the elevation of peoples less endowed with the goods of fortune yet rich in energy and will». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 21)

«The disorder that reigns among human beings and among peoples continues to starkly contrast with the wonderful order of the universe, as if their relationships could only be regulated by force»

Humility: «Like a child before his mother»

At the first general audience on September 6, 1978, John Paul I, following the example set by his predecessor Paul VI, inaugurated Wednesday meetings open to all the faithful; he managed to hold four, which focused on the virtues.

In these audiences, the Pope once again highlighted his great communication skills, his colloquialism, and above all his simple language, so that the message of Christian salvation could reach everyone.

Pope Luciani's characteristically simple and clear approach to addressing others was a completely new development: he always offered profound content, and even when speaking off the cuff, his interventions were always carefully studied and prepared.

On that 6th September day, he called to his side one of the altar boys from Malta, teenagers who had been serving in St. Peter's for a month: a dialogue began that gave rise to a true catechesis on caring for others and the weakest.

The first audience focused on the humility that was part of the style and example that the Pope had adopted as his life choice in following the Gospel.

Pope Luciani reminds us:

« [...] I risk saying something absurd, but I'll say it: the Lord loves humility so much that, at times, He permits serious sins. Why? So that those who have committed these sins, after repenting, may remain humble. It doesn't make you want to think you're a half-angel when you know you've committed serious sins. The Lord has so often recommended: be humble. Even if you've done great things, say: 'We are useless servants.' Instead, the tendency in all of us is quite the opposite: to show off. Lowness, modesty: it's the Christian virtue that concerns us all». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 50)

Without humility, without feeling small in the face of otherness, of what is different from us, it is not possible to enter into a relationship with God, as he states again shortly after:

«Before God, the right position is that of Abraham, who said: 'I am but dust and ashes before you, O Lord!' We must feel small before God. When I say, 'Lord, I believe,' I am not ashamed of feeling like a child before my mother; I believe in the Lord, in what he has revealed to me». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 48)

The humility he speaks of, however, is not a submissive or discouraged attitude in the face of adversity, as he clarifies in his letter to King David in *Illustrissimi* “Requiescat alla Superbia” [“May all pride rest in peace”] and, taking St. Paul as an example, he says: ***«It is the culmination of Christian humility. It does not lead to cowardice but to courage, enterprising work, and abandonment to God! ».*** (Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 268)

Above all, humility is the flame that allows us to light the seven lamps of "sanctification," namely faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance, as he recalls in the second audience, quoting Pope John XXIII, whose practice leads to holiness and a blessed, that is, happy, life, provided one is willing to embrace it.

«I limit myself to recommending a virtue, so dear to the Lord: He said, "Learn from me who am meek and humble of heart"»

Faith: «Walking on the path of truth»

In the second general audience, held on September 13, 1978, faith, the first of the three theological virtues, was developed.

It is one of the most famous audiences, in which Pope Luciani begins with Trilussa, a Roman poet and writer, reciting one of his poems in Roman dialect with an unmistakable Venetian accent:

«Here in Rome, there was a poet, Trilussa, who also tried to talk about faith. In a certain poem of his, he said: "That blind old woman, whom I met / the evening I got lost in the woods, / said to me: if you don't know the way / I'll accompany you, I know it. / If you have the strength to come after me / every now and then I'll give you a call, / all the way down there, where there's a cypress tree, / all the way up there, where there's a cross. / I replied: Maybe... but I find it strange / that someone who can't see can lead me... / The blind woman, then, took my hand / and sighed: – Walk –. It was faith" ». (Complete Works vol. 9, p. 56)

Of those verses, Luciani said: ***«As poetry, it's beautiful. As theology, it's flawed, because when it comes to faith, the great director is God».*** (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 56)

He cited the conversion of St. Paul and that of St. Augustine as a reference:

«Look, we shouldn't say, 'Yes, but; yes, but later.' We should say, "Lord, yes! Now!" This is faith. Responding generously to the Lord. But who says this yes? He who is humble and trusts in God completely! ». (Complete Works vol. 9, pp. 56-57)

Towards God, says Luciani, we have the same relationship of unconditional trust that a child has towards his mother: we don't just believe what she says, but we simply believe in her!

For Luciani the Church is "Mater et magistra" [Mother and Teacher] in the transmission of the truths of faith:

«It's not our doctrine, it's Christ's: we must simply safeguard it and present it. I was present when Pope John opened the Council on October 11, 1962. At a certain point he said: "Let's hope that with the Council the Church will make a leap forward." We all hoped so; but: "Leap forward, on what path?" He said right away: on certain and immutable truths. Pope John never even dreamed that truths would advance, move forward, and then, little by little, change. The truths are those; we must walk the path of these truths, understanding them ever more, updating ourselves, and presenting them in a form suited to the new times. Pope Paul also had the same thought». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 58)

The Church must be loved like a mother, who must be loved even more when she is sick:

«The Church is also a mother. If she is the continuator of Christ [...] the Church must also be good; good to everyone; but what if, by chance, there were some bad people in the Church? We have a mother. If my mother were sick, if my mother were to become lame, I would love her even more. The same thing happens in the Church: if there are, and there are, defects and shortcomings, our affection for the Church must never wane». (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 58)

«It is not just a matter of believing in the things that God has revealed, but in Him, who deserves our faith, who loved us so much and did so much for our love»

Hope: «This is what amazes me»

The third general audience of 11 September 1978 was reserved by John Paul I to hope, the second of the “seven lamps of sanctification”, to use the expression with which Pope John XXIII defines the virtues.

To speak of hope, the Pope recalls Charles Péguy, whom in a letter to *Illustrissimi* he had called **«the singer of hope»**.

The theme of the imaginary letter to Péguy was precisely hope, so central to the thought of the French writer, from whom Luciani refers to this penetrating passage:

«The faith of men does not amaze me," says God, "it is not surprising: I shine so brightly in my creation that these poor people would have to be blind not to see me. The charity of men does not amaze me," says God, "it is not surprising: these poor creatures are so unhappy that, if they do not have hearts of stone, they cannot help but love one another. Hope, that is what amazes me! ». (Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 245)

«I speak to you today about this virtue, which is an obligation for every Christian», Luciani said, opening the audience.

Hope must be the hallmark of the Christian; with the redemption of humanity brought about by Christ, he can truly feel "immensely" loved by God, from whom he can ask for help in difficulties and guidance in action: **«And it is He, the God of mercy, who ignites trust in me; so I feel neither alone, nor useless, nor abandoned, but involved in a destiny of salvation, which will one day lead to Paradise».** (Complete Works, vol. 9, p. 62)

This is why Luciani, addressing Péguy, defines hope with Dante's words, **«a certain expectation / of future glory, which produces / divine grace and previous merit».** (Paradiso, 25, vv. 67-69)

In the audience, Luciani recalls that sometimes we too, as Psalm 44 does, when faced with pain, ask God: **«Why do you sleep, Lord? Why are you silent? Wake up, listen to me, Lord»;** he also recalls an Easter homily by St. Augustine on the Alleluia where he says more or less this: **«Down here, the Alleluia we sing is that of hungry love. This is what hope is for St. Augustine: hunger for the love of God».** (Complete Works vol. 9, pp. 62 e 63)

Finally, hope keeps the door open even to the sinner, as he reiterates in the general audience with a quote from St. Francis de Sales who speaks of "our dear imperfections":

«God detests shortcomings, because they are shortcomings. On the other hand, however, in a certain sense, He loves shortcomings because they give Him the opportunity to show His mercy and give us the opportunity to remain humble and to understand and sympathize with the shortcomings of others». (Complete Works vol. 9, p. 63)

«A certain expectation / of future glory, which produces / divine grace and previous merit»

Charity: «A beautiful journey»

The audience of September 27 was the last one that Pope Luciani presided over before his death the evening of the following day.

In it, he addresses the last of the theological virtues: charity.

With this address, the Pope partially implements the catechesis he had clearly stated in the second meeting as an evangelical journey on the beauty and relevance of the virtues for a holy Christian life.

Luciani begins by reciting the act of charity:

«My God, I love with all my heart above all things You, infinite good and our eternal happiness, and for Your sake I love my neighbour as myself and forgive the offences I have received. O Lord, may I love You ever more." It's a very well-known prayer inlaid with biblical phrases. My mother taught it to me. I recite it several times a day even now and try to explain it to you, word for word, as a parish catechist would. We are at Pope John's "third lamp of sanctification": charity». (Complete Works, vol.9, p. 79)

The difference between knowing and loving, as he learned from his philosophy teacher, is that knowing fixes an intellectual image of the object in your mind, while loving causes that image from within to move you toward, to take you to the object.

Loving God is a **«beautiful journey»**, says Luciani, a drive that moves you from deep within toward the object of your love. You love God *"above all else"*; there is no comparison between the love you feel for the world and the love you feel for God.

Love for God does not exclude love for people or other things in the world, but these can never be loved more, against or equal to God.

And *"for your sake I love my neighbour"*: here are the two loves that are **«twin brothers»** and **«inseparable»**.

These two loves go together, they are joined: love of God, love of neighbour. God wanted it this way. In the end, we will be judged on how we have balanced them.

«Jesus also established how to love our neighbour: not only with feelings, but with deeds. This is the way, he said. I will ask you: I was hungry in the person of my least brothers, did you give me food? Did you visit me when I was sick? (cf. Matthew 25,34ff.)». (Complete Works, vol.9, p. 81)

But today, **«among the hungry, it's no longer just one individual; it's entire populations»**. Faced with these immense tragedies, we should also commit ourselves to giving concrete expression to charity's other twin: justice.

«This means: to love God not a little, but a great deal; not to stop at the point you have reached, but with his help, to move forward with love»

Nostalgia for heaven

In Albino Luciani's writings, man is often described as "an angel with broken wings." Quoting the poet Lamartine, he defines him as **«a fallen god, longing for heaven»**. This powerful image describes the human condition: fragile beings, marked by the fall, yet retaining an innate aspiration toward goodness and beauty.

According to Luciani, this very "nostalgia for heaven" and the awareness of the gifts we have received are the impetus to overcome weaknesses. Those who have faith know that Christ does not expect extraordinary actions, but asks us to perform **«ordinary actions in a non-ordinary way»**, imbuing them with patience and love in the face of daily difficulties. This faith allows us to spread the wings of hope. Even if we are angels without wings, **«if we remember having them and if we believe we will have them again, we are transfigured by hope»**. We are called to rediscover the best part of ourselves, to reach that "new heaven" and that "new earth" where there will be only light and peace.

For Pope Luciani, the answer lies in "small-scale love," the only charity often possible. He acknowledges that he has never performed heroic deeds, but emphasises the thousand daily opportunities to love others "in a practical way": **«Helping as best you can, not taking offence, being understanding, remaining calm and smiling (as much as possible!) on these occasions, is loving others without rhetoric, but in a practical way. Christ practiced this charity extensively»**. (Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 347)

This is why Christians must be optimistic, despite everything, because merciful God loves us with an everlasting love: **«We know: he always has his eyes open to us, even when it seems like night. He is a father; even more so, he is a mother»**. (Complete Works, vol. 9, 55; vol. 5, p. 217)

God, in fact, builds a long love story with humanity, which manifested itself with the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son: through Him a luminous horizon for life is revealed to them, they can believe that their eyes will not close on this sky without seeing another.

Pope Luciani's brief pontificate remains an explicit foundation of the testimony of a simple yet deeply rooted faith; above all, it transcends every form of spirituality and morality in proposing a Christianity where love for God becomes concrete love for our brothers and sisters. In Luciani's simple yet highly imaginative words, we truly perceive the constant reference to places of hope and stories of the future. This is clearly evident in the clear and authoritative restatement of the Christian virtues loved, preached, and above all lived.

Luciani's final Angelus ends thus: **«Love will always be victorious, love can do anything. This is the right word: not violence can do anything, but love can do anything»**.

He emphasizes this in his notes: **«Let us ask the Lord for the grace that a new wave of love for our neighbour may pervade this poor world»**.

The handwritten pages of his diary end here: **«May I love you more and more»**. These are his last words. (S. FALASCA, *The Magisterium of the Two Pontiffs. John Paul I and Francis, Apostles of Mercy*, in "Avvenire", 9 gennaio 2016)

«Who will give me wings like a dove, that I may fly away and find rest?» (Ps 55:7) Who, if not God?»

Reflected light of God: why he is Blessed

On September 4, 2022, Albino Luciani was proclaimed blessed by Pope Francis. In his homily, the Pope recalled the crucial point of this beatification: "The new blessed lived in the joy of the Gospel, without compromise, loving to the end".

This is the reality of grace lived according to the example left by Christ: a blessed life, not through specific merits or positions held, but through simple and total adherence to Christ according to a choice of love and in the full exercise of those virtues, which Luciani himself always recalls for himself and for those entrusted to him, through which one is led to a blessed life.

«New bishops, when they enter a diocese, must prepare a coat of arms; I had to do the same. At the top of this coat of arms I had three stars placed. They can represent the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity, which are the center of all Christian life. I chose these three stars for myself and I also chose them for my future people. [...] I will try to always have this motto before my episcopate, in my episcopate: faith, hope, charity. If we put these three things into practice, we are all set: if we have faith, if we have hope, if we have charity. Try to do the same. We are all poor sinners». (Complete Works, vol. 2, p. 13)

The recognition of having lived the virtues in an uncommon way paves the way to canonization, opening the next steps in the centuries-old canonical process leading to beatification: the attestation of a miracle, that is, an event that by its nature is inexplicable, which occurred by invoking the person of John Paul I as an intercessor with God for the grace requested.

For Luciani it is about the miraculous healing of a young Argentine girl for whom the priest Father Juan José Dabusti, faced with the mother's desperation, suggests that they pray together to Pope Luciani: *«Looking at her in that condition, I was inspired to turn to John Paul I to ask for the healing of her little girl, and together with her, and some nurses present, I prayed to him»* (Avvenire, Albino Luciani beatified. "I, witness to the miracle", José Dabusti, 3 settembre 2022)

Thus, the method Luciani often invoked comes into play: **«As soon as your bishop was appointed, I thought the Lord was implementing an old system of His with me too: writing certain things not on bronze or marble, but even on dust. [...] If any good comes from this writing, it is clear from now on that it will all be thanks to the grace and mercy of the Lord».** (Complete Works, vol. 2, p. 11)

This reflection of God's light that presents itself to us through the Church and its witnesses reminds us how Pope Luciani witnessed to the Lord's goodness with his smile, living it first hand and witnessing to others, in a simple and humble way, like one who knows how to look with eyes full of wonder at the depths of time and the path of history, with that evangelical hope that, according to Charles Péguy, *"even God is amazed by!"*.

The saint is one who knows they are loved.
St Augustine

« The saint is one who knows they are loved » St Augustine