



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday, 8 August 1979*

1. Today, too, like last week, I wish to dedicate our meeting *to the memory of the great Pope Paul VI*, whom the Heavenly Father called to Himself a year ago, on the solemnity of the Transfiguration of the Lord. Certainly, neither the preceding address nor today's will be able to exhaust the multiform riches of that pontificate and that personality. What we wish to emphasize today is the marvellous convergence of the day of Paul VI's death with the charism of his life. I tried to develop this thought last week, concentrating above all on the important fact of the *transformation of the Church*,—a transformation promoted by the Second Vatican Council's rereading of the signs of the times. John XXIII used to define this transformation: "*aggiornamento*." However, to that great process, which the "Pope of goodness" only started Pope Paul VI dedicated the whole of his difficult pontificate of fifteen years.

That "*aggiornamento*," that renewal or "transformation," was dictated by deep knowledge of the nature of the Church and love for her salvific mission. On the initiative of Pope John and, subsequently, under the guidance of Pope Paul, the Church adapted herself to the tasks inherent in her mission with regard to the man of our time, with regard to the human family, to which she was sent. The deepest *sense* of the "*aggiornamento*" is strictly evangelical: *it springs from the will to serve*, following Christ, from the will to serve God in men, to serve man. The service is identified with the mission, rediscovered in Christ's own mission of salvation.

2. The mission of serving man, in the style of the pontifical ministry of Paul VI always had a *concrete* and at the same time *universal* dimension. Every man is served, in fact, by serving the causes on which the right course of his life depends under determined conditions: historical, social, economic, political and cultural. Paul VI, in his mission in favour of the transformation of man's fate on earth, always put *in the first place* the great *cause of peace among nations*. To this cause he dedicated the utmost attention, the greatest solicitude and care. Just remember his

annual messages for the World Day of Peace, which enabled him to develop this great and central ethical theme of our time from different points of view.

"True peace"—he recalled, for example, on the [1971 Peace Day](#)— "must be based on justice, on the sense of inviolable human dignity, on recognition of the unforgettable and happy equality among men, and on the fundamental dogma of human brotherhood. That is, of the respect, the love, due to every man. because he is a man. There bursts forth the victorious word: because he is a brother. My brother, our brother" (The Face of Peace, n. 171).

"If you want peace, work for justice." This was the commitment that Paul VI proposed in the message of the following year. And he commented: "It is an invitation that does not ignore the difficulties of practising Justice, of defining it in the first place, and then pulling it into practice, and never without some sacrifice of one's own prestige and one's own interest. Greater magnanimity is perhaps needed to give in to the reasons of Justice and Peace than to struggle and impose one's own right, authentic or presumed, on one's adversary" (The Face of Peace, n. 228-230).

And again: "Let us make peace possible," he stressed in another Message, "by preaching friendship and practising love of our neighbour, justice and Christian forgiveness; let us open the doors to it where it has been driven out, with frank negotiations, aiming at sincere positive conclusions; let us not refuse some sacrifice which, without offending the dignity of the one who acts generously, makes peace more rapid, cordial and lasting" (The Face of Peace, n. 274).

3. The importance of the cause of peace in the life of mankind today must be measured also on the basis of the mortal threat that modern war may constitute, through the use of all those destructive means which lead to self-destruction. However, no one more than the apostle and Vicar of Christ himself who is the true Prince of Peace, must be aware that it is impossible to ensure peace for international life *by looking only to the means* that man can use. It is necessary rather to look to man, who uses those means. It is he himself who must want peace in a mature and responsible way, and model the life of humanity in all its dimensions on the basis of a consistent pursuit of peace. Peace is reached through justice, through a complete and universal justice: *opus iustitiae pax*.

John XXIII, in [Pacem in Terris](#) had stressed the four fundamental rights of the human person, which, for the sake of peace must be respected in social and international life: the right to truth, to freedom, to justice, to love. Paul VI, developing this thought organically, published *the Encyclical on the development of peoples*, in which he called this rightful development with the "*new name of peace*."

Let us all remember his words: "... if the new name for peace is development, who would not wish to labour for it with all his powers?" (Encyclical [Populorum Progressio](#), 87). And again: "To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions the

human and spiritual progress of all men, and therefore the common good of humanity. Peace cannot be limited to a mere absence of war, the result of an ever precarious balance of forces. No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men" (*Ibid.*, n. 76).

4. The Pope, whom Christ called to Himself on the solemnity of the Transfiguration, always continued to toil indefatigably for the sake of the work of transforming man, society and systems; a work which was to bear fruits so much desired by men, by nations, by the whole of humanity: the fruits *of justice and peace*. Looking with assiduous attention, and sometimes, perhaps, with concern, and above all with continual Christian hope, at the multiform development of events in the modern world, he always worked for that civilization which he described as the "civilization of love," according to the spirit of Christ's greatest commandment.

The Church puts herself in the service of this "civilization of love" by means of her mission, bound up with the proclamation and putting into practice of the Gospel. Particularly dear to Paul VI was *the evangelization* of the modern world, to which—on the request of the bishops gathered in Synod in 1974—he dedicated a magnificent Exhortation, "[Evangelii Nuntiandi](#)", a summary, as it were, of thought and apostolic indications, springing from the magisterium of the Council and from the continual experience of the Church.

"There is no doubt," he began, "that the effort to proclaim the Gospel to the people of today, who are buoyed up by hope but at the same time often oppressed by fear and distress, is a service rendered to the Christian community and also to the whole of humanity." (Apostolic Exhortation [Evangelii Nuntiandi](#), n. 1.)

And he explained: "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: "Now I am making the whole of creation new" (Rev. 21:5). But there is no new humanity if there are not first of all new persons renewed by Baptism and by lives according to the Gospel. The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change, and if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the Message she proclaims, both the person and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieux which are theirs" (*Ibid.* n. 18). A very noble and exalting commitment!

5. It is impossible, therefore, to remember the day of the great Pontiff's death without stopping to think again, at least for a moment, of the whole heritage of his great spirit.

On 6 August 1978, *the last rays of the feast of the Transfiguration* fell on the heart of the Pastor, who had served, with his whole life, the great *cause of the transformation of man*, in our difficult age, and of the renewal of the Church through this transformation.

These rays seemed to say "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful... enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21). And Paul VI no longer returned to his daily toil, but followed the Lord who called him from the mount of the Transfiguration.

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*To special Youth Group from England*

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One group among you is composed of young people from England who have come to Italy to work in collaboration with the Sisters of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Jesus taught not only by word but also by his actions in helping others. You have followed in his footsteps. He will surely reward you and fill you with his blessings.

*Message to the Sick*

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To you sick people present at this Audience, and to all those who are afflicted and suffering in body and in spirit, my fatherly and grateful thought!

The Pope, the common Father of all, knows that no one can be surprised if he looks at you, beloved sick people, with predilection and has special regard for you.

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