

Two Popes, Two Saints in a Day

Maria Rita Latto (April 21, 2014)



Rome is getting ready to welcome an unprecedented stream of pilgrims from all over the world, all gathering for an extraordinary occasion on April 27th: the canonization of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II.

Two popes, two saints who lived in the 1900s, a century marked by both terrible events, like the two world wars, and vast progress made by technology and communications.

Two lives started in two different Countries, Italy and Poland, raised by two modest families which will influence their attitude towards the needy.



They both easily find their way in people's heart thanks to their ability to communicate, to reach out.

John Paul II still today is remembered as the 'globetrotter', for his countless trips to reach the devotees all over the world. But also John XXIII, although the means of transport weren't as well developed during his Pontiff, travelled extensively before becoming Pope. In fact, as president of 'Propaganda Fide', Pope John XXIII travels across Italy and then, as Apostolic Delegate of the Holy See, he travels to Romania, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Turkey, Greece, as well as to the Holy Land, Egypt and France. In a way, Pope John XXIII leads the way to Pope Wojtyla's travel, introducing a new Church, more dynamic and willing to meet the faithful, visiting the sick and the incarcerated, with pilgrimages to Assisi and Loreto, not to mention the opening towards the Christians from different denominations. Papa Roncalli takes the Church towards the periphery, and at the same time he draws the peripheries to Rome with cardinals and bishops gathering from all over the world for the Second Vatican Council.

Even though they were Pontiffs at different historical times, one in the Sixties, the other at the end of that same century, they were both attentive to the inter-religious dialogue, wanting a universal Church to the point they managed to make a breach into the Oriental European States still within the 'Iron Curtain'.

The presence of both is crucial in the making of history:

Pope John XXIII helps prevent a nuclear war, during the Cuban crisis in 1962, while John Paul II contributes to create the premises for the fall of the Berlin's Wall.

Two exceptionally popular Pontiffs, loved for their humanity, also remembered for their words symbol of an apostolate close to the humble: "Give your children a caress" from John XXIII and "Correct me if I'm wrong", John Paul II. The two Popes briefly met during the Second Vatican Council that Wojtyla joined as Bishop of Cracow; then, in 1981, the Polish Pope visited the John XXIII birthplace at 'Sotto il Monte' and, in 2000, beatified him.

The canonization of April 27th sees them together again to share the exceptionality of this event: in fact John Paul II will be declared Saint only 9 years after his death, while John XXIII will receive the same status thanks to Pope Francis' dispensation which allows to canonize a Pontiff even without the two miracles required by the Church.

The Mass, officiated by Pope Francis, will start at 10 am in St Peter's Square, soon after the recital of the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, with readings of texts of the two Popes. About a thousand concelebrants, between cardinals and bishops, at least 700 priests who will be administering the Holy Communion, hundreds of deacons along the Road of the Conciliation.

Many initiatives are planned also for the days prior to the event: all churches in the Rome city centre will remain open on the night of April 26th, "A white night of Prayer", waiting for the next day's ceremony. In eleven churches the Liturgy Animation will be held in 11 languages. In addition, a digital platform will allow the pilgrims to access news and reflections about the teachings of the two Popes. The official website, www.2papisanti.org [2] will be offering images and bibliographic documents in five languages. The Vatican has also set up a free App, both in Android and IOS format (in Italian, English, Spanish and Polish), which has been named 'Santo Subito', Saint Now, with logistic info and main news regarding the canonization; it will also allow the download of the material needed for the various liturgical events. On Tuesday April 22nd there will also be a meeting for the youth in San Giovanni in Laterano.

Preparations are in full swing and the City of Rome is getting ready for the joyful event in every way, even by succumbing to the 'Happy' mania, following which thousands of people around the world took to the streets singing and dancing on the notes of Pharrell Williams famous song.

So, after the politicians and the factory workers, here is "Happy", the latest version just released for the canonization, with nuns, priests, catechists and young people, all dancing in the streets of the Capital and in their parishes holding the pictures of the two Popes.



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