

29<sup>th</sup> Sun (A)

19<sup>th</sup> October 2014

‘Blessed Pope Paul VI’

Is 45: the Lord’s anointed, Cyrus Ps 95: “give the Lord glory and power”  
1Th 1: Good News “not only as words but as power and love and conviction”  
Mt 22: 15–21: “give to Caesar . . . and give to God”

Giovanni Battista Enrico Antonio Maria Montini! ...

It’s quite a name, isn’t it?! But he’s known to history, and to us as Catholics, better as Pope Paul VI (1963–1978). Today he will be beatified — named a ‘Blessed’ — by Pope Francis at a ceremony as part of the closing Mass of the recent Synod of Bishops. This is a stage in the sequence of investigations into the life of one whom the Church is considering calling a saint. A miracle has been attributed to the late Pope Paul, and his life is considered to have been an exemplary one. For me, in many ways I still have a deep affection for him: for me, as a boy, he *was* the Pope.

Pope Paul’s life was not by any means an easy one, and it was marked most of all by his being given offices in the Church that were very different to his own inclination. Pope Paul began his priestly life in the diocese of Brescia, northern Italy, and for a long while his intention was to be able to live and work in the diocese as an ordinary parish

priest among the people. However, this was never to be, despite his having personally asked for it several times. Instead, after ordination, he was sent to do extra studies in Rome; then asked to join the Vatican diplomatic service; and then moved to work in the Vatican’s ‘Secretariat of State’ — where he spent over 30yrs from the early 1920s to the early 1950s. In these roles, as an efficient and kindly priest, he excelled, and yet it was not the pastoral work he would have chosen. Obedience to what he had been charged with doing was in some ways a Cross he carried — faithfully and prayerfully, and with a humility that marked him out. The highlight of these years in the Vatican was his additional post as guide of Rome’s students as a Catholic chaplain. He accompanied them spiritually at a time when the fascist government of Mussolini’s Italy was fiercely opposed to the Church. Fr Montini’s 8yrs as chaplain there was the sort of pastoral work he loved, and he was bitterly disappointed when he was moved away from his role with student groups, perhaps because of direct pressure on the Church from Mussolini himself. In the war, he worked strenuously to organise as much charitable relief work as possible, and he

put into effect quietly and discreetly for Pope Pius XII the great work of saving hundreds of thousands of Rome's Jews from the Nazi occupiers.

In 1953 he was finally allowed back to the north of Italy, nearer his home territory, but it was to carry the huge burden of being the Archbishop of Milan — bishop of perhaps the largest diocese in the world: 1000 churches, 2500 priests! In his 8 years in Milan, he managed to make almost 700 visitations to parishes! Only made a Cardinal by Pope John XXIII in 1958, Archbishop Montini took his part in the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, but after just one of the four sessions Pope John had died, and he was elected his successor as Pope, taking the name Paul VI.

In many ways he was the first Pope of the modern era. He carried the Second Vatican Council to its conclusion — a work that was itself a great challenge, and when necessary he intervened with great clarity on a number of issues, including the strengthening of the texts of the Council on the Sacrament of Marriage. He was a Pope who would not let himself be constricted in the Vatican, and he travelled across the world: for example, to the Holy Land; to the Philippines (where he

survived an assassination attempt); and to address the United Nations. He made the first great gestures to promote Christian Unity, including meeting the Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras in 1964 in Jerusalem, an historic meeting, breaking a deadlock of over 500 yrs! And then, with great spiritual courage, and keen prophetic foresight, when he could have caved in to the clamouring demands of the modern world, he defended, explained, and upheld Catholic teaching on the right use of human sexuality; and in particular the wrongs that come about through the use of artificial means of contraception. His final great encyclical, *Humanae Vitae*, has given impetus to many in the Church — including the great Pope John Paul II — to teach of openness to life in marriage, to promote natural fertility care, and to defend wholesome, and holy, sexual relations.

When Pope Paul was in Nazareth in January 1964, he uttered one of his most beautiful addresses, taking as his theme the family — drawing inspiration from the Holy Family. As the Synod on the Family draws to its close in Rome today, let's take inspiration from Pope Paul's words from half a century ago ...

*The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus — the school of the Gospel. ... Here, in this school, one learns why it is necessary to have a spiritual rule of life, if one wishes to follow the teaching of the Gospel and become a disciple of Christ. How gladly I would become a child again, and go to school once more in this humble and sublime school of Nazareth: close to Mary, I wish I could make a fresh start at learning the true science of life and the higher wisdom of divine truths. ... May Nazareth teach us what family life is, its communion of love, its austere and simple beauty, and its sacred and inviolable character. Let us learn from Nazareth that the formation received at home is gentle and irreplaceable. Let us learn the prime importance of the role of the family in the social order.*

Pope Paul VI, 5<sup>th</sup> January 1964, Nazareth

Blessed Pope Paul VI — pray for us!