

John XXIII 4 June

Bishop of Rome, Reformer, 1963 — Commemoration

John XXIII convened the second Vatican Council in 1962 and thereby launched Roman Catholics into the modern renewal of their Church. We specially remember him because of his ecumenical concerns. He himself once remarked to an Anglican priest: "Whenever I see a wall between Christians, I try to pull out a brick."

Born as Angelo Roncalli in 1885, he entered seminary at the age of ten. Ordained priest in 1904, he spent the next decade as secretary to the bishop of Bergamo, one of the most enlightened prelates of his time and place.

After the end of the first World War, Roncalli's career in the Church developed rapidly. In 1934 he was appointed Apostolic Delegate in Turkey and Greece. His predecessors in the post had confined their dealings with the Orthodox to official business; Roncalli went out of his way to develop cordial relations with the Oecumenical Patriarch himself.

During the second World War, Roncalli used his office as Apostolic Delegate to help Jews escape from German control, and towards the end of the war he arranged relief supplies for the starving Greeks. In 1944 he was appointed Papal Nuncio to the newly liberated France, and nine years later was made Patriarch of Venice.

Roncalli was elected Pope in 1958, and took the name John XXIII. At the age of seventy-three, he had been chosen as a "caretaker" Pope. But John quickly made it clear that he did not intend to doze in the Chair of Peter. He inaugurated a series of administrative reforms and established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. Then, on October 11, 1962, he opened the second Vatican Council.

At about this time John was told that he had an inoperable cancer. He replied: "Don't worry about me, because my bags are packed. I'm ready to go." Undeterred by his illness, he spent the last months of his life mediating between American and Soviet leaders in order to broaden the scope of their nuclear-disarmament talks. He died in early June, 1963.

See Readings, page 568.

Sentence

Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. *John 17.11*

Collect

Lord of all truth and peace,
you named your bishop John
the servant of the servants of God
and gave him wisdom to begin
the work of renewing your Church.
Grant that, after his example,
we may extend our hands to other Christians
to clasp them with the love of your Son,
and labour among the nations of the world
to kindle their desire for justice and peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Galatians 2.1-10 Psalm 122
Refrain Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
John 17.9b-11, 14-19

Prayer over the Gifts

Lord God, grant us to be so consecrated in your truth
that we who offer these gifts
may have a spirit like that of your servant John,
to tear down the walls of inherited fear
which separate Christian from Christian.
We ask this through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Preface of a Saint

Prayer after Communion

God of mercy,
quicken us by the power of this sacrament
to take up the staff of faith,
to go our pilgrim-way with hope
and to support one another in the self-same love
whereby you draw us to yourself.
This we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord.