

Rocca di Papa, October 20, 1977

**How the Pope sees the Pope**

No one can say who the Pope is better than the Pope himself.

During a general audience in 1964, Paul VI asked himself: "Who is the Pope? (...) (The Lord) himself wanted to define the nature of the person he was choosing as the first of his disciples (...): he would no longer be called Simon (...), his own name, but Peter, the name of his role. Here it is evident that Jesus was giving his chosen one a special virtue and a special office, both represented by the image of a rock, a stone, bedrock, meaning the virtue of firmness, of stability, of solidity, of immobility, something unyielding, both through time and in the misfortunes of life. This also means the role of action as the foundation, as the cornerstone, as the support, as Jesus himself said to Peter at the last supper, 'Strengthen your brothers' (Lk 22:32).

(...) The Lord's intentions are very clear, that this is what makes the papacy unique and marvelous (...), A miracle of equilibrium, of durability, of vitality that is explained by the presence of Christ in the person of Peter!"

When speaking of the Pope to 20,000 faithful in Bombay in 1964, Paul VI explained, "If you ask, who this pilgrim is? (...) We will answer, we are the servant and messenger of Jesus Christ, placed by divine providence at the head of his Church as the successor of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles. To be a messenger of Jesus and Head of the Church are in reality just one function, since the Church's reason for being is to proclaim and spread the teaching of Jesus and to continue his ministry on earth. This is our identity and our mission."

The question, "Do you love me more than these" (Jn 21:15) which Jesus asked Peter, was both a torment for and subject for continuous study by Paul VI. He said this again and again during public audiences and on other occasions.

During a general audience in 1965 he said: "...The secret of our personal consolation as well as our personal torment is contained in and expressed by one simple but tremendous syllable that is pronounced 'more', 'plus', 'pléon' (Jn 21:15), to which Jesus added, in a very unexpected but luminous way, the verb 'to love', (...)

To the primacy of authority, (...) Jesus wants a corresponding primacy of charity, the former a totally gratuitous power; the latter a virtue in which a great gift, a great grace and a great capacity to love must blend with the greatest effort, the greatest impetus of the human heart called to such heights of love."

And again, "You need to be in the Pope's shoes to understand how those few words, 'Do you love me more?' is like a knife cutting down to the joints, the nerves, down to the very marrow; (...) how do you know if you are loving MORE? (...) What comforts us in this anguish is the fact that we can love universally (...), it is saying: no one is a stranger to me, no one is excluded, even though they may be separated from me, or far away. Every person who is loved is present."

Now, there can no longer be doubts. The greatest heart in the world, the one that is most open, the widest, the heart most like the heart of Christ - is the Pope's heart.

This is the miracle brought about by the words of Jesus, "Do you love me more than these?" (Jn 21:5). This heart is worthy to feed the Church, because just as a mother carries her child in her womb, in the same way the Pope carries humankind in his heart.

And what better place is there, for us faithful to be, than in that heart?

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*From "Uomini al servizio di tutti", 1978*