



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 25 October 1978

When the Holy Father John Paul I spoke to participants in the General Audience on Wednesday 27 September, no one could imagine that it was for the last time. His death—after thirty-three days of pontificate—surprised the whole world and filled it with a deep sense of loss. He who brought forth such great joy in the Church and inspired such hope in men's hearts, consummated and terminated his mission, in such a short time. In his death the words so often repeated in the Gospel came true: "... be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Mt 24:44). John Paul I always kept watch. The Lord's call did not take him by surprise. He followed it with the same trembling joy with which he had accepted the election to St Peter's throne on 26 August.

Today John Paul II presents himself to you, for the first time. Four weeks after that General Audience, he wishes to greet you and speak to you. He wishes to carry on with the subjects already started by John Paul I. We remember that he spoke of the three theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. He ended with charity. As St Paul teaches (1 Cor 13: 13), charity—which constituted his last teaching—is the greatest virtue here on earth; it is the one that crosses the threshold of life and death. For when the time of faith and hope ends, love continues. John Paul I has already passed through the time of faith, hope and charity, charity which has been expressed so magnificently on this earth, and the fullness of which is revealed only in eternity.

Today we must speak of another virtue, since I have learned from the notes of the late Pontiff that it was his intention to speak not only of the three theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, but also of the four so-called cardinal virtues. John Paul I wished to speak of the "seven lamps" of the Christian life, as Pope John XXIII called them. Well, today I wish to continue this plan, which the late Pope had prepared, and to speak briefly of the virtue of prudence. The ancients spoke a great

deal of this virtue. We owe them, for this reason, deep gratitude and thanks. In a certain dimension, they taught us that the value of man must be measured with the yardstick of the moral good which he accomplishes in his life. It is just this that ensures the virtue of prudence first place. The prudent man, who strives for everything that is really good, endeavours to measure every thing, every situation and his whole activity according to the yardstick of moral good. So a prudent man is not one who—as is often meant—is able to wangle things in life and draw the greatest profit from it; but one who is able to construct his whole life according to the voice of upright conscience and according to the requirements of sound morality.

So prudence is the key for the accomplishment of the fundamental task that each of us has received from God. This task is the perfection of man himself. God has given our humanity to each of us. We must meet this task by planning it accordingly.

But the Christian has the right and the duty to look at the virtue of prudence also in another perspective. It is, as it were, the image and likeness of the Providence of God himself in the dimensions of concrete man. For man—as we know from the book of Genesis—was created in the image and likeness of God. And God carries out his plan in the history of creation, and above all in the history of mankind. The purpose of this plan is—as St Thomas teaches—the ultimate good of the universe. The same plan in the history of mankind becomes simply the plan of salvation, the plan that embraces us all. At the central point of its realization is Jesus Christ, in whom was expressed the eternal love and solicitude of God himself, the Father, for the salvation of man. This is at the same time the full expression of Divine Providence.

Well, man who is the image of God, must—as St Thomas again teaches—in some way be providence: but within the proportions of his life. He can take part in this great march of all creatures towards the purpose, which is the good of creation. He must—expressing ourselves even more in the language of faith—take part in the divine plan of salvation. He must march towards salvation, and help others to save themselves. By helping others, he saves himself.

I pray in order that, in this light, those who are listening to me will think now of their own lives. Am I prudent? Do I live consistently and responsibly? Does the programme I am realizing serve the real good? Does it serve the salvation that Christ and the Church want for us? If a boy or girl student, a son or a daughter, is listening to me today, let such a person look in this light at the homework, reading, interests, pastimes, the circle of friends, boys and girls. If a father or a mother of a family is listening to me, let such a person think a little of the conjugal and parental commitments. If a minister or statesman is listening to me, let him look at the range of his duties and responsibilities. Is he pursuing the real good of society, of the nation, of mankind? Or only particular and partial interests? If a journalist or publicist is listening to me, one who exercises an influence on public opinion, let such a person reflect on the value and purpose of this influence.

I, too, who am speaking to you, I the Pope, what must I do to act prudently? There come into my

mind the letters to St Bernard' of Albino Luciani, then Patriarch of Venice. In his answer to Cardinal Luciani, the Abbot of Chiaravalle—a Doctor of the Church—recalls emphatically that he who governs must be "prudent". What, then, must the new Pope do in order to operate prudently? Certainly he must do a great deal in this direction. He must always learn and always meditate on these problems. But in addition to this, what can he do? He must pray and endeavour to have that gift of the Holy Spirit which is called the gift of counsel. And let all those who wish the new Pope to be a prudent Pastor of the Church, implore for him the gift of counsel. And for themselves, let them also ask for this gift through the special intercession of the Mother of Good Counsel. For it ought to be very greatly desired that all men will behave prudently and that those who wield power will act with true prudence. So may the Church—prudently strengthening herself with the gifts of the Holy Spirit and, in particular, with the gift of counsel—take part effectively in this great march towards the good of all, and so may she show to everyone the way to eternal salvation.

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