



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO VERCELLI AND TURIN (ITALY)
(MAY 23-24, 1998)

**MASS FOR THE BEATIFICATION
OF FATHER SECONDO POLLO**

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 23 May 1998

"To them he presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days" (Acts 1:3).

1. *Forty days!* The Solemnity of Christ's Ascension into heaven ends the 40-day period that began on the Sunday of the Resurrection. There is a significant liturgical parallel between the seasons of Lent and Easter, a unique spiritual convergence that opens up new horizons for Christian life: Lent leads to the Resurrection; the 40 days after Easter are a preparation for the Ascension.

Thematically linked with Israel's 40-year journey to the promised land, Lent highlights in the New Covenant the journey of believers towards the paschal mystery, the culmination and keystone of human history and the economy of salvation. The 40 days which precede the Ascension symbolize the Church's pilgrimage on earth towards the heavenly Jerusalem, which she will eventually enter with her Lord.

In the paschal events Jesus reveals *the fullness of immortal life*. On the cross, he overcomes death and through his sacrifice sheds new light on all human existence. This is emphasized in the liturgical texts for the Solemnity of the Ascension, and especially in the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews which we have just heard: "It is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes

judgement" (9:27). The risen Christ is transfigured in glory as the Eternal Priest of the New Covenant; he does not enter "into a sanctuary made with hands ... but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Heb 9:24).

This awareness grows in contemplation of the sacred mysteries and gives a new meaning to daily life, directing it constantly to the ultimate, eternal realities. Heaven is our definitive dwelling place and we are called to build it already on earth, as the Apostle Paul suggests: "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col 3:1-3).

2. Fr Secondo Pollo, whom I have the joy of raising to the glory of the altars this evening, did precisely this. He is one of the many witnesses to the presence and action of the risen Jesus in the history of the world.

Fr Secondo is the model of a courageous priest who in his short lifetime was able to reach the peak of holiness. On the eve of his priestly ordination, the new blessed already showed with clear determination his intention to accept without reservation the demanding programme of the Gospel in his own life. "Make me holy" became his ideal and daily commitment. Guided by this intention, he actively carried out his priestly ministry, diligently seeking and following God's will.

Providence summoned him to many demanding duties connected with the Church of Vercelli. Endowed with a fine pedagogical sense, he taught in the diocesan seminaries, where he was a lecturer and spiritual director. He first made himself a disciple and diligent servant of God's word through assiduous study of the sacred disciplines and the intense activity of preaching. He was a generous dispenser of divine mercy in administering the sacrament of forgiveness. He enthusiastically worked with young people as a chaplain to Catholic Action, even following them into the tempest of war as a chaplain in the Alpine regiment. It was precisely in the heroic exercise of charity that this young priest from Vercelli gave up his soul to God, leaving to military chaplains the world over an example of how to love and serve their brethren in the army, and to the *Alpini*, a model and protector in heaven.

The secrets of Fr Secondo's ascent to the peaks of holiness were two: continual rootedness in God through prayer, and the most tender devotion to our heavenly Mother, Mary. His remarkable pastoral charity, which appears as the highest and most distinctive synthesis of his priestly ministry, drew its strength from assiduous dialogue with God and his filial love for Our Lady. He lived entirely for his brothers and sisters, ending his earthly life on St Stephen's day, almost in imitation of that ardent witness, "full of the Holy Spirit", mentioned in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (cf. 7:55).

Let us give thanks to the Lord for the gift of this blessed and for all the saints and blessed who, in Christ the one Mediator of salvation, build a "bridge" between God and the world by reflecting and

radiating heaven's brightness upon humanity making its pilgrim way on earth.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, I am pleased to be with you on this festive day for the Archdiocese of St Eusebius and to celebrate this solemn Eucharist for you. I greet everyone present and, in particular, the Pastor of your Archdiocese, dear Archbishop Enrico Masseroni. With him I greet his predecessor, dear Archbishop Tarcisio Bertone. I greet the Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops and other prelates in attendance. I greet the priests, the men and women religious and the representatives of the ecclesial associations and movements. I extend a respectful greeting to the Government's representative and to the civil and military authorities, with special thanks to those who have generously helped with the organization of my Pastoral Visit. At this time I would also like to recall Archbishop Albino Mensa, who for many years was the zealous and appreciated Pastor of your Church, and was called to his eternal reward at the beginning of this year. I know how vividly you remember his apostolic service, imbued with love of the Eucharist. "I can truthfully say", he wrote in his "spiritual testament", "that as a sacrifice and a sacrament, the Eucharist has illumined and gradually transformed my life as a priest and a Bishop"! May the Lord welcome him into his kingdom of peace and grant him that just reward which he promises to his faithful servants.

4. Dear brothers in the priesthood, I would like to speak to you in a special way today, which we can consider your day, in a certain sense, because of the beatification of one of your confrères, Fr Pollo. Fr Secondo is a friend and example to each of you: a concrete example of that holiness which can be reached through the daily toil of the ministry, a model of docility to the Holy Spirit who enables even the *most ordinary actions* of your pastoral mission to be accomplished *in an extraordinary way*.

Fr Secondo Pollo is also a model for all Christians, especially to the faithful of your Archdiocese. He reminds everyone that holiness is communion with God, fidelity to the Gospel, love for our brothers and sisters. Holiness is the vocation of the entire People of God. Our blessed testifies that following Jesus is a demanding task, but also a source of thrilling joy, because through the Cross we are able to share the joy of the Resurrection. The life of Fr Secondo, sacrificed in the violence of war, today becomes a pressing appeal for peace, which must be a commitment shared by all peoples and all nations.

5. And how can we forget that this courageous priest, formed in the school of the Gospel, was a devoted son of Mary? He nourished his love for the Blessed Virgin at the source of the ageold Marian devotion which is the golden thread of Vercelli's Christian tradition. Proof of this are the great shrines of Oropa and Crea, which from beyond their confines look down on your community from above, almost as if to represent physically our Mother's watchful gaze upon her devoted children. Proof of this is given by the numerous Marian shrines and the many churches dedicated to the Blessed Virgin scattered throughout the Vercelli area.

The new blessed invites your ecclesial community to renew its trust in Mary, Queen of All Saints and Mother of the Church. May it be she who disposes each heart to listen docilely to the Holy Spirit, especially during this year dedicated to him. Indeed, he urges everyone to look forward to the approaching Great Jubilee with a desire for an authentic renewal of personal and community life.

6. Let us return to the Ascension. *"While he blessed them, [Jesus] parted from them, and was carried up into heaven"* (Lk 24:51).

The meeting of the risen Christ with his disciples ends with two actions, which Luke has left to the last lines of his Gospel, while he recounts what happened at the Ascension: the Lord's farewell blessing and the Apostles' attitude.

The blessing of the glorious Christ instils adoration and joy in his disciples. The mystery of the Ascension is thus permeated with the solemn tone of a dignified liturgy. The disciples recognize Jesus as the Lord who is victorious over death and, at the same time, they understand the deep meaning of his mission.

Their heart is filled with astonishment and praise: not, therefore, the sadness of a farewell, but joy at the certainty of a renewed presence. Jesus disappears from his disciples' physical sight to be present to the eyes of their hearts; he frees himself from the limits of space and time to become present to the people of every time and every place, and to offer everyone the gift of salvation.

Like the Apostles, like St Eusebius, like the host of blessed of this illustrious Church to which Fr Secondo Pollo is added today, we too are certain of his presence.

Yes, Christ is with us and within us; he is with us every day, until the end of the world.

Amen!