



## Saint John XXIII

Feast day: October 11<sup>th</sup>

Today we celebrate Pope John XXIII, born on November 25, 1881 as Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli.

One of thirteen children, he was educated by a priest during his youth, and eventually joined the seminary at age 12. A scholarship from the Cerasoli Foundation in 1901 enabled him to go on to the Apollinaris in Rome where he studied under Umberto Benigni, the Church historian. He was ordained in 1904. He served in the military, once during his studies and, again during World War I as a chaplain. His dedication to serving those involved in the war was evident through his post-war efforts: he set up an office to locate prisoners of war as well as assisting the Church's post-war efforts in France, in part, by becoming the first permanent observer of the Holy See at UNESCO.

His pathway to The Papacy took him through Bergamo (where he was born), Paris, Turkey, Rome and Istanbul. He was elected pope in 1958 at 76 years-old. At the time, he was the first to take the name John after more than a century. While many believed he would be a transitional pope, his papacy launched a new era in the Church. He convened the Vatican II Council, which he announced January 25, 1959. It was intended to be a means of spiritual renewal for the church and as an occasion for Christians separated from Rome to join in the search for reunion. Yet, it brought about the second-largest reform of Catholicism since The Reformation.

The missionary encyclical *Ad Gentes* was published as a result of Vatican II. Titled "To All Nations," it outlines the need for the Church and its' people to embrace mission. An excerpt from the beginning of this document is: "The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature... For Jesus Christ was sent into the world as a real mediator between God and men. Since He is God, all divine fullness dwells bodily in Him (Gal. 2:9). ...Thus, it is plain that missionary activity wells up from the Church's inner nature and spreads abroad her saving Faith. It perfects her Catholic unity by this expansion. It is sustained by her apostolicity. It exercises the collegial spirit of her hierarchy. It bears witness to her sanctity while spreading and promoting it." – a clear call to rally all people together to care for one another.

We, as missionaries, are guided, by this document about why mission is important and how to follow Jesus' example. *Ad Gentes* states “[Jesus] is the new Adam, made head of a renewed humanity, and full of grace and of truth (John 1:14)” – a reminder about the centrality of mission and the missionary approach.

Pope John XXIII served as the Holy Father from 1958 until his death in 1963. He often referred to himself as “servant of the servants of God,” because he considered himself a peacemaker and encouraged the Church to reconcile all people, going beyond itself to include other Christian faiths as well as secular people. His legacy includes Vatican II (1962-1965), the establishment of the Pontifical Mission Societies, mission-focused parishes and programs, as well as all of us - lay, religious and ordained missionaries. He was canonized in April 2014.

St. Pope John XXIII, pray for us.

### **Questions for Reflection:**

Saint John XXIII saw a need for change in the Church and took action to bring about that change. What things in your sphere of influence do you see as lacking? What can you do to improve the Church around you?

You are probably not called to be the pope, but where is God calling you to serve? Whom is God leading you to within the realm of mission?

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415 Michigan Avenue, NE – Suite 102, Washington, DC 20017. 202-832-3112.



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