

POPE JOHN XXIII

Pope John XXIII, born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, was born in Sotto il Monte, Italy, in the Diocese of Bergamo, on November 25, 1881. He was the fourth of fourteen children in a sharecropping family whose life was deeply rooted in faith, work, and parish life. His early formation in the Christian life was shaped in a very real way by his extended family, especially his great-uncle Zaverio, who also served as his godfather. Pope John XXIII would later recognize that it was within this family and parish environment, under the guidance of Fr. Francesco Rebuzzini, that his earliest and most lasting religious formation took root.

He entered the Bergamo seminary in 1892, where he began the lifelong practice of spiritual journaling, later collected in the *Journal of a Soul*. During these years he also developed a strong and enduring commitment to regular spiritual direction. In 1896 he was received into the Secular Franciscan Order and made his profession the following year, deepening his spiritual life in the Franciscan tradition of simplicity and humility. From 1901 to 1905 he studied at the Pontifical Roman Seminary and was ordained a priest on August 10, 1904. He was soon appointed secretary to Bishop Giacomo Maria Radini Tedeschi of Bergamo. In that role, he accompanied the bishop closely in pastoral work, diocesan initiatives, synodal efforts, social outreach, pilgrimages, and communications. He also taught in the seminary and became known as a gifted preacher and teacher in history, patristics, and apologetics.

These were years of deep pastoral formation, shaped also by his admiration for St. Charles Borromeo and St. Francis de Sales, and by his daily collaboration with Bishop Radini Tedeschi. After the bishop's death in 1914, he continued in seminary and pastoral ministry. During World War I, he served in the medical corps and later as a military chaplain, accompanying wounded soldiers with compassion and pastoral care.

After the war, he founded a "Student House" for the pastoral care of young people. In 1919 he became spiritual director of the seminary, and in 1921 he was called to Rome to serve the Holy See. Pope Benedict XV appointed him Italian president of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

In 1925, Pope Pius XI appointed him Apostolic Visitor to Bulgaria and named him bishop of the titular see of Areopolis. He chose as his episcopal motto *Oboedientia et Pax*—"Obedience and Peace"—which would remain a guiding principle throughout his life. He was ordained bishop on March 19, 1925 and began his long missionary-style service in Bulgaria, where he cared for Catholic communities and worked to build respectful relationships with other Christian traditions. In times of difficulty, misunderstanding, and isolation, he deepened his trust in God and his quiet spirit of perseverance.

In 1935 he was appointed Apostolic Delegate to Turkey and Greece. His ministry there was marked by deep respect for Orthodoxy and Islam, and a consistent commitment to dialogue and presence. During World War II, while in Greece, he assisted prisoners of war and helped many Jewish families by issuing transit visas through the Apostolic Delegation.

In 1944, Pope Pius XII appointed him Apostolic Nuncio to France. There he served during the final stages of the war and the beginning of reconstruction, assisting with reconciliation, the care of displaced persons, and the rebuilding of ecclesial structures. His style remained simple, prayerful, and pastoral, even in the complexity of diplomatic work.

In 1953 he was created Cardinal and appointed Patriarch of Venice. He embraced this role with great joy, seeing it as a return to direct pastoral care. As Patriarch, he was known for his accessibility, wisdom, and joyful presence among the people.

After the death of Pius XII, he was elected Pope on October 28, 1958, taking the name John XXIII. Though his pontificate was brief, it was deeply significant for the life of the Church. He was soon recognized by many as “the Good Pope,” a true image of the Good Shepherd—simple, approachable, and deeply attentive to the needs of the people. He visited the sick, the imprisoned, and parish communities, and extended a fatherly presence to the whole Church.

His encyclicals *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* reflected his deep concern for human dignity, social justice, and peace in the modern world. He also convoked the Roman Synod, initiated the revision of Canon Law, and most importantly, called the Second Vatican Council, opening a new chapter of renewal in the life of the Church.

Throughout his pontificate, he remained a man of prayer and deep trust in God’s providence. He combined renewal with humility, courage with gentleness, and vision with pastoral care. He died on June 3, 1963, peacefully entrusting himself to the Lord he had served so faithfully, with a final longing for the embrace of Christ.