

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York

TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING by S. Casarotto, CS 8/31/08

Meeting a future Pope

In the summer of 1972, I was vacationing in Italy when I was told that Card. Albino Luciani was going to give a spiritual retreat in my hometown of Vicenza. I could not miss it. There were about 300 people - clergy, religious and lay people. During the breaks, we had the opportunity to talk and exchange experiences. In one of these breaks, I happened to converse with Card. Luciani. When I told him that I was working in Toronto, he asked many questions about my work and the spiritual conditions of the Italians in Canada. Card. Luciani wanted to hear and he wanted people to know that he was listening. He also had a great sense of humor and loved to quote Mark Twain and famous characters of history. Luciani had the unique ability of explaining the deepest truths with simplicity through practical examples. In April 1962, Luciani, then Bishop of Vittorio Veneto, wrote some notes about Vatican II which was about to begin. This is how he began:

“Not all the spectators at a soccer match understand and enjoy it in the same way. One person may know the rules of the game, the precise task of the goalkeeper, wings and backs, the center forward, the tricks and moves. That person appreciates the successful plays, techniques and courage of the tactics and kicks, and will be intelligently enthusiastic.

“On the other hand, someone who does not about it will not enjoy the game much or will get the wrong end of the stick. The Ecumenical Council which is about to begin is a sort of special game. The players will be more than 2,000 Bishops, the “umpire” in a certain sense, will be the Pope; the whole world will be the stadium; and all of us - via radio and television - will be among the spectators.

“If we want to understand and enjoy the event, it is necessary to learn what it is and what its objectives are. The Council is not a Parliament. The residential Bishops represent their Dioceses at the Council, yet they do not receive their authority from their Diocese but from God and are accountable to Him alone.

“At the Council there will be discussion, disagreements, free speech and final vote. At the Ecumenical Council, as St. Augustine would say, “non vincit nisi veritas”, truth only wins if the Pope upholds it.

“The features of the Catholic Church have been established by the Lord once and for all and can not be tempered with. However, it is possible to modify her superstructures: what was not introduced by Christ but by Popes, Councils or the faithful themselves yesterday, can be removed or altered today or in the future... One could say ‘The Church which emerges from the Council is the same Church as in the past, but has been renewed.’ The soul of the Church, the actor who plays the lead, is the Holy Spirit.

“It so happened in a heated debate at the Council of Trent that one Bishop grabbed another by the beard! And at the First Vatican Council, Bishop Strossmayer, eloquent and extremely forceful, incessantly demanded the floor and having got it, dominated it so long and so vehemently that he provoked protests from the Assembly. This did happen and could still happen, for as Pius IX good-naturedly said that ‘Every Council had three periods: in the first, the devil does his best; in the second, men create confusion, and in the third, the Holy Spirit puts everything right’.”