

## **Excerpts from the Journal of a Soul**

### **February 1900, as an eighteen-year-old seminarian in Bergamo, Italy.**

Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? I am nothing. Everything I possess, my being, life, understanding, will and memory--all were given me by God, so all belong to him. Twenty short years ago, all that I see around me was already here. Everything was proceeding in its appointed way under the watchful eyes of Divine Providence. And I? I was not here. Everything was being done without me, nobody was thinking of me, nobody could imagine me, even in dreams, because I did not exist. And you, O God, with a wonderful gesture of love, you who are from the beginning and before all time, you drew me forth from my nothingness, you gave me being, life, a soul, in fact all the faculties of my body and spirit; you opened my eyes to this light which sheds its radiance around me, you created me. So you are my Master and I am your creature. I am nothing without you, and through you I am all that I am. I can do nothing without you; indeed, if at every moment you did not support me I should slip back whence I came, into nothingness.

### **April 1903, on retreat in Rome preparing for the order of subdeacon:**

I feel that Jesus is drawing nearer and nearer to me. During these days he has allowed me to plunge into the depths and be submerged in the realization of my wretchedness and pride, to show me my urgent need of him. When I am about to sink, Jesus my Saviour comes smiling towards me, walking on the waters. I would say to him with Peter: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord," but I am prevented by his tender Heart, and his kind voice saying:  
"Do not be afraid."

### **August 10, 1914, after ten years as a priest:**

My dominant thought, in my joy of having accomplished ten years as a priest, is this: I do not belong to myself, or to others; I belong to my Lord, for life and death. The dignity of the priesthood, the ten years full of graces which he has heaped upon me, such a poor, humble creature--all this convinces me that I must crush the self and devote all my energies to nothing else but work for the kingdom of Jesus in the minds and hearts of men.

### **September 1933, on retreat in Sofia, Bulgaria, where he is serving as papal representative:**

My prolonged mission as papal representative of this country often causes me acute and intimate suffering, but I try not to show this. I bear and will bear everything willingly, even joyfully, for the love of Jesus, in order to resemble him as closely as I can and to do his holy will in everything, and for the triumph of his grace amid these people, so simple and good but, alas, so very unfortunate! All in the service of Holy Church and the Holy Father and for my own sanctification. "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."

**November 1939, on retreat in Istanbul, Turkey, where he is serving as  
papal representative:**

Every evening from the window of my room, I see an assemblage of boats on the Bosphorus; they come round from the Golden Horn in tens and hundreds; they gather at a given rendezvous and then they light up, some more brilliantly than others, offering a most impressive spectacle of colours and lights. I thought it was a festival on the sea, but it is the organized fleet fishing for bonito, large fish which are said to come from far away in the Black Sea.

These lights glow all night and one can hear the cheerful voices of the fishermen. I find the sight very moving. The other night, towards one o'clock, it was pouring with rain but the fishermen were still there, undeterred from their heavy toil. Oh how ashamed we should feel, we priests, "fishers of men," before such an example! To pass from the illustration to the lesson illustrated, what a vision of work, zeal and labour for the souls of men to set before our eyes! Very little is left in this land of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Debris and seeds. But innumerable souls to be won for Christ. We must do as the fishermen of the Bosphorus do, work night and day with our torches lit, each in his own little boat, at the orders of our spiritual leaders: that is our grave and solemn duty.

**June 1957, as Patriarch of Venice:**

"Give me more light as evening falls." O Lord, we are now in the evening of our life. I am in my seventy-sixth year. Life is a great gift from our heavenly Father. Three-quarters of my contemporaries have passed over to the far shore. So I too must always be ready for the great moment. The thought of death does not alarm me. Old age, likewise a great gift of the Lord's, must be for me a source of tranquil inner joy, and a reason for trusting day by day in the Lord himself, to whom I am now turned as a child turns to his father's open arms.

**November 1959, on retreat as Pope John XXIII:**

Since the Lord chose me, unworthy as I am, for this great service, I feel I have no longer any special ties in this life, no family, no earthly country or nation, nor any particular preferences with regard to studies or projects, even good ones. Now, more than ever, I see myself only as the humble and unworthy "servant of God and servant of the servants of God." The whole world is my family. This sense of belonging to everyone must give character and vigour to my mind, my heart and my actions.

**September 1962, on retreat in preparation for the opening of the  
Second Vatican Council:**

After three years of preparation, certainly laborious but also joyful and serene, we are now on the slopes of the sacred mountain. May the Lord give us strength to bring everything to a successful conclusion!