

Spiritual testament and my final dispositions

Venice, 29 June, 1954

On the point of presenting myself before the Lord, One and Three, who created me, redeemed me, chose me to be priest and Bishop and bestowed infinite graces upon me, I entrust my poor soul to his mercy. Humbly I beg his pardon for my sins and failings; I offer him what little good, even if imperfect and unworthy, I was able with his help to do for his glory and in the service of Holy Church and for the edification of my fellows, and I implore him finally to welcome me, like a kind and tender father, among his saints in the bliss of eternity.

I wish to profess once more my complete Christian and Catholic faith, belonging and submitting as I do to the holy, apostolic and Roman Church, and my perfect devotion and obedience to its august head, the supreme Pontiff; whom it was my great honour to represent for many years in the various regions of East and West, and who finally sent me here as Cardinal and Patriarch, and for whom I have always felt a sincere affection, apart from and above any dignity conferred upon me. The sense of my littleness and worthlessness has always kept me good company, making me humble and tranquil, and permitting me the joy of putting my best efforts into a continual exercise of obedience and love for souls and for the interests of the kingdom of Jesus, my Lord and my all. To him be all the glory: for me and for my own merits, only his mercy. 'God's mercy is my only merit. Lord, you know all things: you know that I love you!' This is enough for me.

I ask forgiveness from those whom I have unknowingly offended, and those whom I have not influenced for good. I feel that for my own part I have nothing to forgive anyone, because in all those who knew me and had dealings with me—even if they have offended or despised me or, no doubt justly, had little regard for me, or given me cause to suffer I recognize only brothers and benefactors, to whom I am grateful and for whom I pray and will pray always.

Born poor, but of humble and respected folk, I am particularly happy to die poor, having distributed, according to the various needs and circumstances of my simple and modest life in the service of the poor and of the holy Church which has nurtured me, whatever came into my hands and it was very little during the years of my priesthood and episcopate. Appearances of wealth have frequently disguised thorns of frustrating poverty which prevented me from giving to others as generously as I would have wished. I thank God for this grace of poverty to which I vowed fidelity in my youth, poverty of spirit, as a priest of the Sacred Heart, and material poverty, which has strengthened me in my resolve never to ask for anything—positions, money or favours—never, either for myself or for my relations and friends.

To my beloved family according to the flesh, from whom moreover I have never received any material wealth, I can leave only a great and special blessing, begging them to preserve that fear of God which made them always so dear and

beloved to me, and to be simple and modest without ever being ashamed of it: it is their true title of nobility. I have sometimes come to their aid, as a poor man to the poor, but without lifting them out of their respected and contented poverty. I pray and I will ever pray for their welfare, glad as I am to see in their new and vigorous shoots the constancy and faithfulness to the religious tradition of the parent stock which will always be their happiness. My most heartfelt wish is that not one of my relations and connections may be missing at the final joyful reunion.

About to leave, as I hope, on the heavenward path, I greet, thank and bless the infinite number of souls who made up, successively, my spiritual family in Bergamo, in Rome, in the East, in France, and in Venice, my fellow citizens, benefactors, colleagues, students, collaborators, friends and acquaintances, priests and lay folk, men and women of the Religious Orders, to all of whom, by the decree of Providence, I was the unworthy brother, father or shepherd.

The kindness shown my humble person by all those I met with along my way has made my life a peaceful one. Now, in the face of death, I remember all and everyone of those who have gone before me on the last stretch of the road, and those who will survive me and follow me. May they pray for me. I will do the same for them from purgatory or paradise where I hope to be received, not, I repeat, through my own merits but through the mercy of my Lord.

I remember them all and will pray for them all. But my Venetian children, the last the Lord has given me, for the final joy and consolation of my priestly life, shall here receive special mention as a sign of my admiration, gratitude and very special love. I embrace them all in the spirit, all, everyone, clergy and lay folk, without distinction, as without distinction I loved them all as belonging to the same family, the object of the same priestly love and care. `Holy Father, keep them in thy name, whom thou hast given me, and that they may be one, even as we are one' (John 17: II).

In the hour of farewell or, better, of leave-taking, I repeat once more that what matters most in this life is: our blessed Jesus Christ, his holy Church, his Gospel, and in the Gospel above all else the Our Father according to the mind and heart of Jesus, and the truth and goodness of his Gospel, goodness which must be meek and kind, hardworking and patient, unconquerable and victorious.

My children, my brothers, I take leave of you. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. In the name of Jesus our love; of Mary, his sweet Mother and ours; of St Joseph, my first and most beloved protector. In the name of St Peter, of St John the Baptist, and of St Mark; of St Lawrence Giustiniani and St Pius X. Amen.

CARD. ANG. GIUS. RONCALLI PATRIARCH.

(The text contains, in the Pope's handwriting, the following codicils):

These pages written by me are valid as proof of my final dispositions in case of my sudden death.

ANG. GIUS. CARD. RONCALLI. *Venice, 17 September, 1957.*

And they are valid also as my spiritual testament, to be added to the testamentary provisions here enclosed, under the date of 30 April, 1959.

JOANNES XXIII PP. *From Rome, 4 December, 1959*