



Paul VI, first Pope since St. Peter to visit the Holy Land, canonized in Rome

01.11.2018 | Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem

ROME – On Sunday October 14 in St. Peter’s in the Vatican, Pope Paul VI was proclaimed a saint along with Archbishop Oscar Romero and five other blessed. The Pope was the first pontiff to come to the Holy Land to visit the places where Christ lived and worked.

The proclamation was pronounced by Pope Francis with the solemn formula that approves the canonization. Giovanni Battista Montini, former Archbishop of Milan, later appointed cardinal, was elected to the throne of Peter by the conclave of 1963.

He was a Pope particularly dear to the Holy Land because of the epochal journey he made there, in January 1964. While the bishops in Rome were working on the Second Vatican Council, Pope Montini decided to go and visit the land of Jesus, making a journey of great religious, political and media impact, having been the first Pope to get on a plane.

That event of 1964 was disruptive to the point of becoming a real media event, which saw the televisions around the world tell of the return of the successor of the first of the apostles, after twenty centuries of history, to the place where Peter, bearer of the Christian message, had left. It was a special journey, a return to the Church in the cradle of Christianity.

The echo of that event is still perceivable today. The vicar of Christ had the humility to leave for the Holy Land like any other pilgrim; he returned, with the humility of a pilgrim, to the land where the crusades were fought and great conflicts were waged. The symbolic significance of that pilgrimage is also perceived in the attitude that the Bishop of Rome entered Jerusalem, mingling with a majority Muslim population against whom the idea of a crusade had been imagined in the past. It was therefore also a peaceful renunciation of the idea of conflict between the faiths and in the very attitude of the Roman Catholic Church.

In addition to this intent of peace-making, that visit also represented an opportunity for a work of ecumenism that at the time would be called “pioneering”, given the opening of the Pope to the then Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople.

The stages of that pilgrimage did not see Paul VI begin in Bethlehem, where Christ was born, neither in Nazareth, where He lived, nor from the cenacle, where He established the Eucharist, but from Calvary, where Christ died. A journey thus marked by the footsteps of penance, prayer and humility. And of renewal. A renewal that at the time was transforming the Church thanks to the work that the Holy Spirit certainly performed also through his servant Paul VI, proclaimed a saint last Sunday.

From St. Paul VI onwards – and this is one of its great merits – the Church is no longer closed within the Vatican walls but is a pilgrim in the world; she does not wait for men to come to her, but it is she who, guided by the Spirit, goes to meet men beyond every boundary.

Filippo De Grazia

Source: [Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem](#).