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Pope John XXIII died 50 years ago today

Thomas C. Fox | Jun. 3, 2013 NCR Today

Pope John XXIII died 50 years ago today.

The following is a statement released by the Vatican to commemorate the day.

On 3 June 1963, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, popularly referred to as 'the Good Pope', died after a five-year long pontificate that left its mark on the Church with historic reforms.

His might have seemed destined to be a transitional pontificate, but the Good Pope John, elected after three days in conclave, ?knew how to rejuvenate the Church and resume dialogue with the modern world in loving trust,? according to the words of John Paul II, who declared him a Blessed in September of 2000.

Although John XXIII was not able to see much of the fruit of the changes he had proposed, they profoundly transformed the Catholic Church of the time. He was a Pope who fought for peace in the world, as his 1963 encyclical ?Pacem in Terris? (Peace on Earth) demonstrated. He revolutionized the Church by convening the Second Vatican Council to modernize and develop the institution of the Church and reformed the Mass, which came to be celebrated ordinarily in the modern languages rather than in Latin.

The five years of his pontificate did not pass unnoticed and, even a half century later, as he said himself at the time, it continues to ?throw open the doors and windows of the Church to let in the fresh air?. It was a phrase that was recalled frequently during the recent election of Cardinal Bergoglio, whom the international press described as ?the new Roncalli?.

Early this evening, in St. Peter's Basilica, Pope Francis will receive 2,000 pilgrims from the Good Pope's native province: Bergamo, Italy. They will commemorate Blessed John XXIII, who earned the appreciation and love of the faithful thanks to his generous, caring, and simple nature.

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