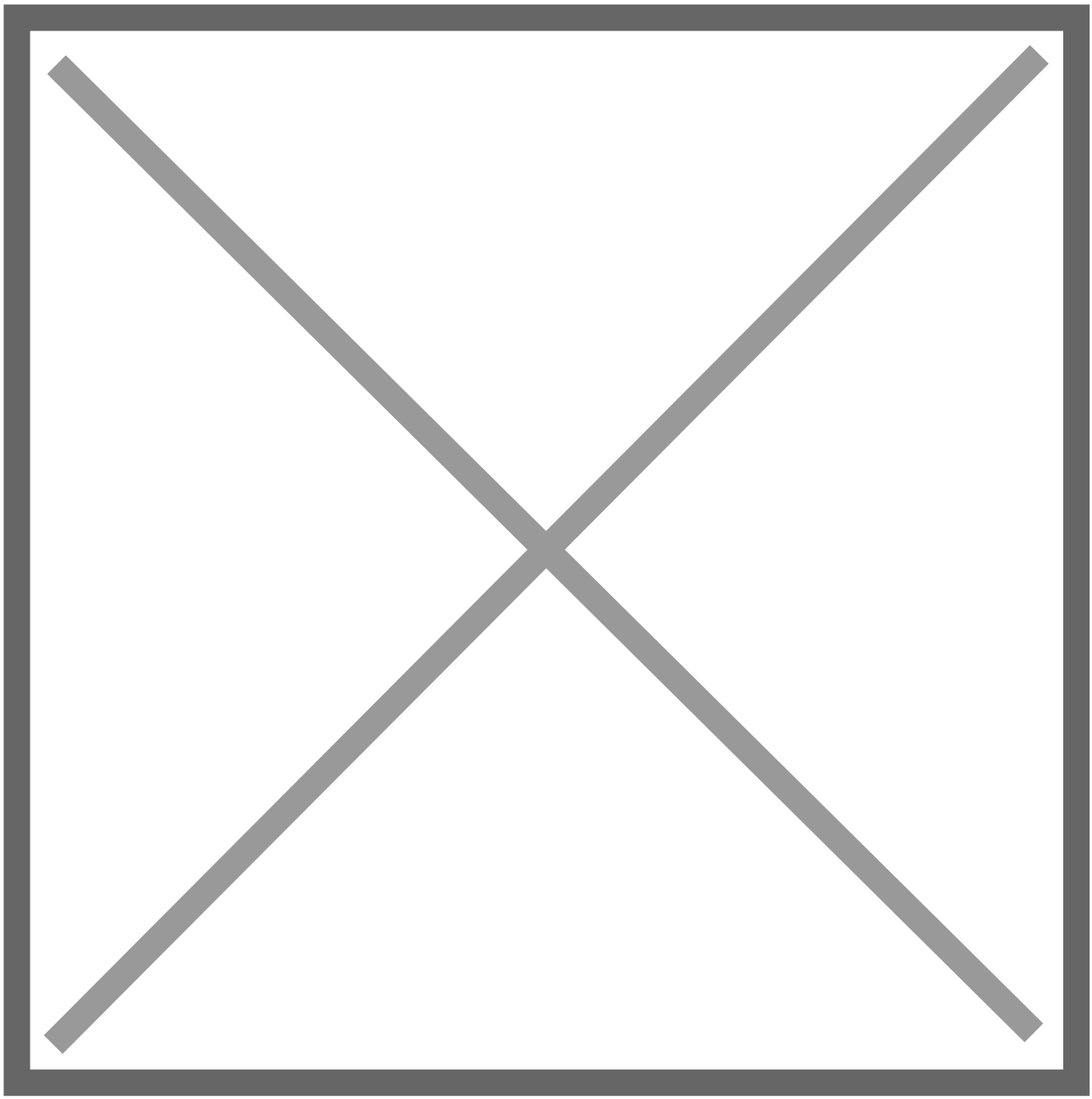
Vatican



Pope Francis leads the beatification of Pope John Paul I in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sept. 4, 2022. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)

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VATICAN CITY — Beatifying Blessed John Paul I, Pope Francis praised the late pope for showing the world God's goodness and for living the Gospel without compromise.

"Our new blessed lived that way: in the joy of the Gospel, without compromises, loving to the very end," the pope said.

"He embodied the poverty of the disciple, which is not only detachment from material goods, but also victory over the temptation to put oneself at the center, to seek one's own glory" as he followed the example of Jesus and was "a meek and humble pastor," he said.

The pope spoke during a homily in St. Peter's Square at a Sept. 4 Mass attended by an estimated 25,000 people under dark skies and rain, with an occasional roll of thunder and clap of lightning.

"With a smile, Pope John Paul managed to communicate the goodness of the Lord. How beautiful is a church with a happy, serene and smiling face, a church that never closes doors, never hardens hearts, never complains or harbors resentment, does not grow angry or impatient, does not look dour or suffer nostalgia for the past," the pope said.

"Let us pray to him, our father and our brother, and ask him to obtain for us 'the smile of the soul'" that is "transparent, that does not deceive," Pope Francis said. "Let us pray, in his own words, 'Lord take me as I am, with my defects, with my shortcomings, but make me become what you want me to be.'"

During the beatification ceremony, which took place at the beginning of the Mass, an image of the new blessed was unveiled on a huge tapestry affixed to the facade of the basilica. The image was a reproduction of an oil painting, "The Smiling Pope," created by Zhang Yan, a Chinese artist whose work combines Eastern and Western painting techniques.

The relic, carried by Lina Petri, the niece of the late pope, was a piece of paper, yellowed with age, upon which the pope had written an outline for a spiritual reflection on the three theological virtues — faith, hope and charity — the themes of three of his only four audience talks.

The materials for the reliquary, a sculpted wooden cross on top of a smooth stone, were taken from where Blessed John Paul was born and grew up in northern Italy.

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In his homily, Pope Francis connected the day's Gospel reading to the humble and Christ-centered way Blessed John Paul lived his life and to how Christians today are called to live their lives.

The pope said Jesus attracted large crowds with his teachings, but he did not exploit this popularity the way some teachers or leaders do when they see people look to them as a source of hope for the future.

"The same thing happens today, especially at times of personal or societal crisis, when we are especially prey to feelings of anger or we fear things that threaten our future. We become more susceptible and thus, on this wave of emotion, we look to those, who with skill and cunning, take advantage of the situation, profiting from society's fears and promising to be the 'savior' who can solve all its problems, whereas in reality they are looking for wider approval and for greater power," Pope Francis said.

God, he said, "does not exploit our needs or use our vulnerability for his own aggrandizement. He does not want to seduce us with deceptive promises or to distribute cheap favors; he is not interested in huge crowds. He is not obsessed with numbers; he does not seek approval; he does not idolize personal success."

Christians should examine the reasons they follow the Lord, he said, and make sure they are not seeking: the satisfaction of their own needs; personal prestige; social status or control; power and privilege; recognition and so on.

Christians are called to love, "to be purified of our distorted ideas of God and of our self-absorption, and to love God and others, in the church and society, including those who do not think the way we do, to love even our enemies," he said.

Christians must "love even at the cost of sacrifice, silence, misunderstanding, solitude, resistance and persecution," he said. Because, as Blessed John Paul said, "if you want to kiss Jesus crucified, 'you cannot help bending over the cross and letting yourself be pricked by a few thorns of the crown on the Lord's head.'"

Among the family members and devotees who carried candles to place before the relic was Sister Margherita Marin, a member of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Child Mary, who assisted in the papal apartments and was one of sisters who found the deceased pope Sept. 28, 1978.

Candela Giarda, the young Argentine woman whose miracle cleared the path for Blessed John Paul's beatification, was unable to come to Rome because of a fractured foot from playing sports. She was 11 years old when she developed a severe case of acute encephalitis, experienced uncontrollable and life-threatening brain seizures, and eventually entered septic shock.

After doctors told family members her death was "imminent," Father Juan José Dabusti, who attended the beatification ceremony, encouraged the family, nurses and others to pray to the late pope for his intercession. In 2011, a panel of experts studying the cause determined there was no scientific explanation for her complete recovery and that it could be attributed to the late pope's intercession.

Blessed John Paul, an Italian who was born Albino Luciani, served only 33 days as pontiff; he died just three weeks shy of his 66th birthday, shocking the world and a church that had just mourned the death of St. Paul VI.

Although his was one of the shortest papacies in history, Blessed John Paul left a lasting impression on the church that fondly remembers him as "the smiling pope."

In his Angelus address after the Mass, Pope Francis asked everyone to pray to Our Lady, "that she may obtain the gift of peace throughout the world, especially in the

martyred Ukraine."

"May she, the first and perfect disciple of the Lord, help us to follow the example and holiness of life of John Paul I," he said.