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Newly canonized popes were voices for the voiceless

by Tony Magliano

Making a Difference

Papal canonizations

Sts. John XXIII and John Paul II prophetically raised their voices on behalf of the suffering masses. They spoke truth to power and challenged all of us to advance the kingdom of God, a kingdom of love, justice and peace.

St. John XXIII, affectionately known as "Good Pope John," was expected to be a "caretaker pope" -- someone who wouldn't make any waves.

But he would have none of that.

In addition to his monumental decision to convene the Catholic church's 21st ecumenical council, the Second Vatican Council, in 1961, he penned the powerful and controversial encyclical *Mater et Magistra* ("Christianity and Social Progress").

There, St. John XXIII wrote that the economy "has become hard, cruel, and relentless in frightful measure" and that "even the public authority was becoming the tool of plutocracy."

To those who wrongly insist governments should leave the economy alone and let the free market correct itself, St. John XXIII wrote that "public authority should resume its duty of promoting the common good of all" and "there should be co-operation on a world scale for the economic welfare of all nations."

Then, in 1963, just months after the Cuban missile crisis ended, he authored an even more powerful and controversial encyclical: *Pacem in Terris* ("Peace on Earth").

Mindful of humanity's recent close brush with nuclear war and the devastation conventional wars cause,

he wrote, "justice, right reason, and the recognition of man's dignity cry out insistently for a cessation to the arms race. The stock-piles of armaments which have been built up in various countries must be reduced all round and simultaneously by the parties concerned. Nuclear weapons must be banned. A general agreement must be reached on a suitable disarmament program, with an effective system of mutual control."

If only the world would listen to this saint.

John Paul the Great, as many of us admiringly refer to St. John Paul II, was bigger than life.

He took the good news of the nonviolent Jesus to the far corners of Earth, boldly defending the vulnerable and poor.

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Early in his papacy, in 1979, I remember hearing in Washington, D.C. -- along with 700,000 others -- these challenging words: "We will stand up every time that human life is threatened. When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life."

But St. John Paul was equally committed to protecting born life, as well.

Again in 1979, in New York City, he proclaimed, "The poor of the United States and of the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You must never be content to leave them just the crumbs from the feast. You must take of your substance, and not just of your abundance, in order to help them. And you must treat them like guests at your family table."

Confronting the world's addiction to the violence of war, he said, "War is a defeat for humanity."

In his Jan. 1, 2005, World Day of Peace message, he wrote, "Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity. Violence destroys what it claims to defend: the dignity, the life, the freedom of human beings."

In his powerful encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* ("The Social Concerns of the Church"), St. John Paul beautifully summed up all of Catholic social teaching in one clear sentence: "We are all really responsible for all."

[Tony Magliano is an internationally syndicated social justice and peace columnist. He is available to speak at diocesan or parish gatherings about Catholic social teaching. His keynote address, "Advancing the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century," has been well received by diocesan gatherings from Salt Lake City to Baltimore. Tony can be reached at tmag@zoominternet.net.]

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