



...THE FORCE OF THAT "M"

By Bro Mariano Di Vito OFM Cap

The news of John Paul II's beatification was an immense joy for us and we wanted at once to share it with you from the pages of this journal.

Now, after the celebration of this great event, it seems to me fitting to present to you a few thoughts on the person of this remarkable pontiff, who so profoundly left his mark and influence on the final decades of the last millennium.

The word that comes to mind, which sums up and that we can almost identify with his pontificate, and in a special way of his person, is 'force' or better 'fortitude.'

A quality this that has nothing to do with that 'muscular power' used to intimidate and to wield respect, but, on the contrary that gift of the Holy Spirit that enables us to live our lives with the confidence that the Lord is always at our side. It was not for nothing that John Paul II drew so much attention and such great admiration and affection as in his last years when, visible to everyone and never hidden from them, he heroically accepted an illness that progressively weakened him.

The fortitude of his faith, his unshakeable trust in man and in the force of the good, are definitely some of the more excellent treasures of the extraordinary inheritance left to us by this Pope who came from a "distant country" but who was nevertheless felt close by all.

During these times of ours with never-ending catastrophes of such

massive scale, from nuclear crises and natural disasters and with almost whole continents collapsing because of wars and political and social unrest, so that even the most optimistic are disheartened, it is all the more necessary to embrace again and make our own the vibrant summons with which he began his pontificate: "Don't be afraid!" No! We must not be afraid! It is when times are hard that Christians must allow themselves to be filled with the force of the Holy Spirit so as to be able to help and encourage their fellow companions.

From the beginning it was clear to everyone that John Paul II was a man who would not be held back by conventions and stereotypes and who knew, as a great communicator, how to convey with immediate clarity his message. So, when he had to choose a coat of arms and motto for his Petrine ministry in the universal Church, he requested without any hesitation, to the surprise of the experts on heraldry, that they include a large capital "M" and the words "Totus tuus" (Totally yours) in his very remarkable and original shield.

The Virgin Mary, Mother of the Lord, to whom Karol Wojtyła consecrated, as a young priest, his life and ministry, is the other important component that characterised his universal magisterium. He did not miss a single opportunity on his many pilgrimages to the Marian shrines

around the world, from the least known to the most famous, to exhort Christians to turn to her, the guiding star in the renewed evangelisation of the world, in the spreading of Christ's message to every corner of the world, to the furthest and most remote places as well as in the always more secularised Christian West.

We must praise and glorify the Holy Virgin with all our hearts.

However, and this is the Pope's great lesson, it is the Mother of God's faith, her fervent charity, her staying at the side of her Son as well as at the side of all her crucified sons, that the Christians of the third millennium must take as the real essence of her testimony and mission.

Every saint is different because they respond to the Lord as individuals with their own unique and unrepeatable selves. Nevertheless it is not difficult to find in the human and spiritual experience of Padre Pio and John Paul II obvious similarities and affinities. Their unshakeable faith and their intimate and loving attachment to the Mother of Jesus make them both exemplary leaders.

Padre Pio and John Paul II teach us not to be afraid and that our fears can become courage and commitment so that, like them, we can also do our part.

In this month that is dedicated in a special way to Our Lady, let us learn from her.

We will experience the extraordinary force of that "M." ■