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Audience with pilgrims from Concesio and Sotto il Monte, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the death of John XXIII and the election of Paul VI

This morning, in the Vatican Basilica, the Holy Father Francis received in audience a group of pilgrims from Concesio and Sotto il Monte, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the death of John XXIII and the election of Paul VI.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, welcome!

It is good to meet you, who represent the communities of origin of two Pope saints, of whom the People of God are very fond: John XXIII and Paul VI. And it is significant that this is happening on the occasion of three important anniversaries for all the Church: the 60th anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in terris*, of the birth to heaven of Pope John, and the election of Pope Montini.

We are here together, then, to give thanks to the Lord because your communities chose two Pastor saints who were able to guide the Church in times of great enthusiasm, but equally of major questions and challenges. They experienced as protagonists the wave of new vitality that accompanied Vatican Council II and had to face grave dangers such as terrorism and the "Cold War". And faced with all this, history shows us that they were "shepherds after God's heart" (cf. *Jer* 3:15), who knew how to seek the lost sheep, lead back the stray, bind the wounded, strengthen the sick, care for the fat and the strong, and graze them with justice and mercy (cf. *Ez* 34:16).

Let us give thanks to the Lord first of all for having given them to us. For having given to your communities as sons and brothers, raised among your streets, where they left the traces of their journey of holiness, to the point

that even today the places of their presence are still a destination for pilgrimages for many men and women who come from Italy and abroad. They find comfort and support from you, and at the same time they make your land more alive and richer in faith.

But let us also give thanks to the Lord because he has made you, their fellow citizens, co-operators in this gift. Indeed, they were able to be great pastors first of all because on their path they met good companions, witnesses of the Gospel who helped them to grow in the faith, to the point of kindling in them the light of the calling. First of all, their families, different in background and context, but united by the same solid Christian piety, lived out on the one hand in hard work in the fields and on the other in serious cultural and social commitment.

Brothers and sisters, let me tell you something: God does not make saints in a workshop, no, he builds them in large building sites, where the work of all, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, contributes to digging deep, to laying a solid foundation and to building it, taking every care so that it grows in an orderly and perfect manner, with Christ as the cornerstone (cf. *Eph 2:21-22*). This is the air that Angelo and Giovanni Battista breathed in Sotto il Monte and in Concesio from their childhood, with all the good that came from it: what they gave and received!

Let us give thanks to the Lord that he gave them, in your towns, a land that is fertile and rich in holiness in which to set down their roots and grow, and because he made you too, as he did your parents, your grandparents, and the many who lived, loved, worked, sowed and harvested, rejoiced and cried in your towns and in your countryside before you, a good and generous soil in which small seeds of goodness can germinate and grow for the future. The words of Saint Paul to his disciple and companion in the apostolate, Timothy, come to mind: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lo'is and your mother Eunice, and now, I am sure, dwells in you" (*2 Tm 1:5*). Saint Timothy too was a great pastor, and he too learned in the school of life of his grandmother and his mother, in a family and in a community.

Always cherish your roots. I want to repeat this: always cherish your roots, not so much to turn them into a badge of honour or a bulwark to be defended, but rather as a wealth to be shared. The earth is worked together, worked for all and worked in peace; with war, selfishness and division you only succeed in devastating it, as we are unfortunately seeing in so many parts of the world and in different ways. To love your roots is therefore for you to love the Gospel of Jesus and to love as Jesus loved in the Gospel! This is what your history as a land and as a Church teaches you. And from your roots comes the sap to move forward, to grow, and also to give your children and grandchildren a history and a meaning in life. Love your roots, do not detach the tree from its roots: it will not bear fruit. Always try to progress in harmony with your roots, in tune with your roots.

In the pilgrimage you are making, you are also commemorating the anniversary of the Encyclical *Pacem in terris*. It seems appropriate to recall in this context what Saint John XXIII says in it about the value of a peace founded on justice, love, truth, freedom, founded on respect for the dignity of persons and peoples (cf. nos. 18-19). These, too, are values that he certainly learnt and came to know first of all in the Bergamo countryside; and the same applies to Saint Paul VI in the lands of Brescia.

Your two provincial capitals, Bergamo and Brescia, together, have been chosen to be the "Italian Capital of Culture" for 2023. This is one more sign that takes us in the same direction. True culture is in fact made together, in dialogue and common research, and - as Saint Paul VI taught us - aims to lead through "mutual cooperation among men, deeper knowledge and more widespread charity, a way of life marked by true brotherhood, a human society based on mutual harmony" (Encyclical *Populorum progressio*, 85). Culture is a lover of truth and good, for man, for society and for creation. May you continue to cultivate it, first of all in your homes and in your parishes, to carry on the mission entrusted to us by the two holy Popes born to your lands.

Thank you, thank you very much for coming! May Our Lady accompany you and keep you in faith, in hope and in charity! I bless you from my heart. Do not forget your roots! And, please, do not forget to pray for me. Thank you.

