

# Pope Paul Stresses Devotion to Mass

By Robert Holton  
Religious News Service

Castelgandolfo — Pope Paul returned here Sept. 16 after a whirlwind, one-day trip to north-eastern Italy where he prayed at the Venice tomb of St. Mark the Evangelist and celebrated Mass at the 18th National Italian Eucharistic Congress in Udine.

The pontiff molded the pilgrimage into a personal crusade for an increase in Catholic attention and devotion to the Mass as the keystone of Church liturgy, and a parallel need for deeper recognition of the values in religious tradition and heritage.

The spiritual leader of the world's more than 630 million

Catholics seemed at times during his several speeches to be explaining his motives for issuing a decree on Sept. 14, which clearly closed the door to women playing a more important formal role in the Church.

"We would like to emphasize the importance of tradition and the heritage from centuries past," the Pope said during a speech to thousands massed in St. Mark's Square in Venice.

"Now, more than ever, it is essential that it be respected," the Pope said.

Two days before he made the journey, Pope Paul made public two decrees in which he revamped the lower orders in the Church's ministry and extended

the privileges of two of these offices to laymen — that of lector (reader) of Bible passages at Mass and that of acolyte, or server at Mass.

But he made clear in one decree that women were excluded from formal, active participation on the grounds that this would violate "venerable Church tradition."

The papal entourage included many of the top Vatican cardinals and other Church officials. More than 600 representatives of the international press were on hand.

Although it was not until very recently that the Pope finally agreed to make the trip, the cities of Venice and Udine seemed well prepared for their important visitor.

Venice, a canal-laced fairyland renowned over the centuries as a starting point for Marco Polo's many journeys, was decked out in its finest — ribbons, banners and even specially erected walkways and platforms to counteract a possible flooding of St. Mark's Square by the ever encroaching waters.

Udine, too, was festooned for its first modern-day visit from a reigning head of the Catholic Church.

During his brief stay at Udine, the pontiff confirmed 50 boys and girls and also gave Communion to several hundreds during a concelebrated High Mass at an altar erected outside the cathedral.

He told the prelates and others at the Eucharistic Congress that the local church plays a major role in the life of Catholicism. All the while, however, he laid heavy stress on the value of tradition and history, in apparent opposition to radical change.

He called for "unity in the Body of Christ . . . in the Eucharist," and repeatedly implored his listeners to reflect on

the rich heritage of their religion.

He stressed the need for a feeling of unity among Catholics and asked all members of the Church to find an intensification of that unity in the more frequent use of the Sacraments — particularly the Holy Eucharist.

The pontiff, who will observe his 75th birthday on Sept. 26, weathered the trip well — his voice as strong and his step as springy at the end as it was when he set out from an airport near his Summer residence early in the morning.

There was a touch of nostalgia, too, in the side trip to Venice, as the Pope himself observed, when he recalled his earlier visits to the city in his boyhood and, later, as an adult. He spoke of the gran-

deur of Venice and its abundance of architectural, cultural, religious and other riches, and drew loud applause from the crowds when he uttered the vow that "Venice must live."

His remark, made as he stood on a specially erected platform overlooking the Venice Cathedral Square, was obviously intended to spur on experts who in recent years have been seeking ways to keep the city from sinking into the water — which it has been doing at an alarming rate in the last 50 years.

Along his route the pontiff was greeted by huge crowds of spectators, not a surprising fact since he is the first reigning Pope in more than a century to visit either Venice or Udine.



## Upholds Tradition

As pigeons circle around him, Pope Paul VI addresses a crowd gathered in St. Mark's Square during his brief visit to Venice. During his talk the pontiff called for an increase in Catholic attention and devotion to the Mass as the keystone of Church liturgy, and a parallel need for deeper recognition of the values in religious tradition and heritage. (RNS)

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