

First Papal Audience

'Honor Your Father and Mother'

By PAMELA MENDELS
Vatican City (RNS) — The new Pope who addressed his first general audience (Sept. 6) abandoned the usual pontifical "we," admitted he had friends who did not believe in God, quoted an irreverent passage on marriage by the French writer Montaigne, and called on a little Maltese altar boy to help him illustrate a point about helping the elderly.

Pope John Paul, who, until he was elected Pope on Aug. 26, was virtually unknown as Patriarch of Venice, thus greeted 15,000 people who came to see him at the traditional papal weekly audience.

The audience was held in the Vatican's modern Nervi Hall which has a seating capacity of about 10,000.

The Pope asked his listeners to remember and obey the Commandments. "Honor your father and mother, don't kill, don't get angry, be gentle, don't tell lies, don't rob," he said. "If we were able to observe these Commandments, both we and the world would be better."

Pope Paul then called on a young altar boy from Malta to help him explain how one should "respect, love, and obey" one's parents.

"Now, what is your name?" he asked the boy. "James? Listen. Have you ever been sick? No? Really, Never? Not even a fever? No? Oh, well you're very fortunate."

"But, if a child is sick, who is it who brings him a little hot broth and medicine? Is it not mamma? Then, when you grow up and your mother is old, when your poor mother is sick in bed, who is it that will bring her a little milk and some medicine?"

James answered "my brothers and I," to which the Pope responded "great." "He and his brothers," the Pope told the audience. "I like that."

The pontiff went on to explain, however, that when he was Archbishop of Venice, he had known of cases of old

parents, who had virtually been abandoned by their children. "Heat and food alone don't suffice," he said. "There is also the heart. One must remember the hearts of our old people."

The Pope asked that kindness be shown to all, "to children, to the sick, even to sinners." He explained that

"as a bishop, I was very close even to those who did not believe in God, those who often combat not God, but the mistaken idea they have of God. How much mercy one needs to have," he said.

Finally, Pope John Paul turned to a group of newlyweds at his audience. Their presence, he said,

reminded him of an incident where he was reproved for quoting Montaigne, a well-known 16th Century essayist.

"Once in an article," he said, "I allowed myself some fun, by quoting Montaigne, a French writer, who once said: 'Matrimony is like a prison: those who are outside, do everything to enter it, while

those who are within, do everything to leave it.'

"Several days later, I received a letter from an old supervisor of my studies, who reproved me like this: 'Your excellency' he said, 'had done wrong to quote Montaigne. I and my wife have been together for 60 years and every day is like the first.' He

then quoted another French writer, in French, but I will tell you what he said in Italian: "I love you more every day -- today more than yesterday, but much less than tomorrow."

The Pope told the newlyweds he hoped that the second quotation would also apply to them.

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