

Every generation seeks signs. The greatest sign of all is the resurrection of Jesus. Even though faith encourages us to believe, we all struggle at times to see Jesus through the eyes of faith. At those times, we need signs from those around us to reassure us.

October 11<sup>th</sup> is the Memorial of Saint John XXIII who's warm and caring heart served as a sign for others of the love of God. In 1958, as Christmas was approaching, Pope John recalled the family traditions from his childhood. His mother emphasized going to daily Mass and expressing love for God by offering works of mercy. These signs lived out in the faith life of the family helped Christmas to come alive for little John. As pope he wanted to continue that family tradition. "The day of Christmas I will go to the children in Bambino Gesu hospital. And December 26, I'm going to visit the prisoners of the Regina Coeli prison."<sup>i</sup>

At the children's hospital on Christmas day, everyone was excited to see the pope, especially the children. Pope John noticed one child who did not participate in the joy of the moment. While other children jumped out of their beds to meet the pope, one boy remained in bed. The pope crossed the room to stand at his bedside. When he sensed someone was close, the little boy stretched out his hand and asked, "Are you the pope?"

John XXIII replied, "Yes." The boy then confided, "I am happy, but I can't see you because I am blind." The pope called the child by his name, explaining "Carmine, we are all a little blind; we pray to the Lord to give us the sight of the heart to recognize ourselves as brothers."

The following day, on the Feast of Saint Stephen, the pope went to the Roman prison. He had prepared a speech but tossed it aside to speak from the heart. "Reflecting on how a member of his own family had been imprisoned when he was a child, the pontiff expressed that it had been a difficult and emotional situation, and that although he could keep the experience to himself, he shared it in order to put the prisoners ... at ease." Pope John told them, "Now you need to rebuild your lives and you need to do one thing: eliminate the word despair and prepare yourselves to spend your lives doing good because this is also the Father's house and you are also sons of God." One prisoner ran forward to throw himself at the feet of the pope. On his knees, the prisoner asked, "Holy Father, I am a delinquent, is there also hope for me?"

All things are possible for God especially when we ask him for mercy with a truly contrite heart. Pope John XXIII responded to the prisoner, "there is hope for all, there is also hope for you ... do not worry."

Christmas 1958 was a joyful one for the new pope as he shared his love of God and his faith with believers who needed a sign to look beyond the heartache of their own situation. "Joy to the World, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King; Let every heart prepare Him room." Let every heart be a sign to the world "the Lord has made known his salvation" (Ps 98:2a).

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<sup>i</sup> catholicnewsagency.com/news/29246/pope-john-xxiii-a-testimony-to-the-strength-of-goodness