Lesson XVIII (1978-1979)

THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Prayer
Scripture: Psalm 71:17-19
Hymn: 460 "O God, Our Help in Ages Past"

The church and the papacy hit bottom morally and spiritually under Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia, 1492-1503) and his notorious son, Caesar Borgia. The next two popes before the Protestant Reformation did little or nothing to improve the morality and spirituality of the church and did much to further its secularization.

POPE JULIUS II (1503-1513): THE WARRIOR POPE

Alexander's successor, Pope Pius III, nephew of Pius III, nephew of Pius II, died within a month of his election, and was followed by Julian Rovore, Alexander's old rival, who took the name Julius II. In his early life he had been a Franciscan. He was made a cardinal in 1471 by his uncle, Pope Sixtus IV. He was loaded with benefices, including a number of bishoprics. For thirty years he played a leading role in papal affairs, being appointed to many important political missions. He was papal legate to the French king Louis IX (1280-1282). He took the lead in securing the papacy by bribery for Innocent VIII. When his personal enemy, Rodrigo Borgia, was elected Pope Alexander VI in 1492 he fled for his life to Charles VIII of France. Though later he was formally reconciled with the pope in 1496 he lived in hiding in northern Italy until the death of Alexander. Upon the death of Pius III, Julius secured the papacy by bribery and extensive promises that he did not keep. He promised to call a general council within two years, to make war against the Turks, not to make war to recover losses of papal territory under the Borgias, not to make war or select the site of a council without the consent of the cardinals.

The principal achievement of Julius II was the restoration and enlargement of the territory and temporal power of the papacy. In his armor he personally led his soldiers in his wars and was noted for his skill in placing his cannons. He drove Caesar Borgia from Italy in 1504. In 1506 he defeated and brought under his control both Perugia and Bologna with their territories. In 1509 with the League of Cambrai and French help he defeated Venice. In 1511 he formed the Holy League which included England, Spain, Venice and Switzerland for the purpose of driving the French out of Italy.

The French king, Louis XII called a council that met in Pisa in 1511 to depose Julius. Julius expelled the rebellious cardinals who attended the council. The council moved to Milan and in 1512 declared Julius deposed. Julius called the Fifth Lateran Council in 1512. The adherents of the French council were declared schismatics and the pope placed France under the interdict. Cajetan and Marcellino delivered orations praising Julius and expounding the doctrine of the two swords. The Emperor Maximilian joined Julius and the French were driven from Italy.

Julius was very careful in money matters and filled the papal treasury. With a great sale of indulgences he gathered money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's and laid the cornerstone.

Julius was a patron of Renaissance art, employing Michelangelo, Raphael and Bramante. The statue of Moses, the paintings in the Sistine Chapel and Raphael's frescoes in the Vatican are treasures of his reign. As a builder he was one of the most eminent of the popes.
One important ecclesiastical reform of Julius was his declaring null and void every papal election brought about by simony. He created the see of San Domingo and Concepcion de la Vega in Haiti and the see of San Juan in Puerto Rico.

Erasmus seathingly attacked his war-like character in his Praise of Folly and in his Julius Excluded.

POPE LEO X (1513-1521)

Giovanni de' Medici was the second son of Lorenzo the Magnificent, born in Florence, December 11, 1475. He enjoyed all the opportunities that family distinction and wealth offered in the Renaissance city. His tutors included Farasillo Picino, Angelo Poliziano and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. He received his tonsure at the age of seven and was presented with the abbey of Fonte Dolese by Louis XI of France. At eight he was nominated to the archbishopric of Aix but was never confirmed. A canonry in each of the cathedral churches of Tuscany was set apart for him. Pope Innocent VIII made him a cardinal when he was fourteen (1499). Before this he had received twenty-seven appointments, including the abbacy of Monte Cassino. He spent three years studying theology and canon law in Pisa before he was formally invested with the office of cardinal in 1492. His father, Lorenzo, sent him a very moving and wise letter on the occasion of his investiture as a cardinal. He took part in the election of Alexander VI.

He went into exile when his family was expelled from Florence in the reign of Savonarola (1506) and led an almost Bohemian life in Germany, Holland and France. He returned to Rome in 1500. He became head of the Medici family in 1503. He participated in the elections of Pius III and Julius II. His fortunes improved under Julius. He regained power in Florence through a bloodless revolution in 1512.

Upon the death of Julius he was chosen pope because of his peace-loving qualities in reaction against the warlike tendencies of Julius. He received holy orders on March 15, 1513; two days later he was consecrated bishop; on March 19 he was crowned pope. He took the name Leo X.

Leo X was the last of the Renaissance popes, the last of the popes of the Middle Ages, and the pope at the beginning of the Reformation. The spirit of his rule was expressed in his words at its beginning: "God has given us the papacy: let us enjoy it. I have found Rome a splendid city. I will make her more beautiful and St. Peter's will be the brightest jewel in her crown." As pope he was a Renaissance voluptuary, given to the pursuit of pleasure and a good time. He was easy-going and extravagant. Within two years he had squandered the fortune left by Julius II. For the rest of his papacy he was always in financial embarrassment, always borrowing large sums from the numerous banks that sprang up in Rome. He loved art, music, literature, the theatre and was the patron of many humanists. He was patron of Raphael, Michelangelo, Machiavelli and many others. He established the University of Rome. He reissued the Jubilee Indulgence for contributions toward the cost of rebuilding St. Peter's in 1517. He was most liberal in his creation and sale of offices both political and religious. He was fond of delegating his responsibilities to offices that were for sale. All services of the church were for sale. The Fifth Lateran Council continued during his reign (1512-1517). He condemned conciliarism and dimmed any prospects for reform.
In politics he pursued a cunning and shifting course, practising opportunism and stooping to duplicity with allies and enemies. Even as a child his father had described him as cunning. He entered a compact with King Louis of France that included the French king's marriage with Mary Tudor, younger sister of Henry VIII of England, and recognition of the French claims in Northern Italy, very soon after he had entered a treaty with Maximilian, Henry VIII and Ferdinand of Spain against the French and he rejoiced at the defeat of the French. At the time of the compact with the French king he was secretly plotting with Venice for the expulsion of the French from Italy. He was also faithless to his Spanish allies, negotiating with Venice to drive the Spanish from Italy. He made an alliance with Francis I of France that allowed the French king a large measure of control over the French church. The French king kissed his hand and feet.

At the death of the emperor Maximilian in 1519 Leo through his legate, Cajetan, agitated for the election of Frederick the Wise of Saxony, while secretly entering a move to elect Francis of France and promising archbishops the cardinalate if they would vote for Francis, and at the same time making a secret agreement with Charles V of Spain to back him.

Leo took good care of his family. He gave his brother, Julian, a powerful and lucrative church office and arranged marriage with the sister of the mother of Francis I. The brother's illegitimate son was made a cardinal. Lorenzo de' Medici, son of his older brother, was given the duchy of Urbino, and married to a young lady of the royal house of France. Leo gave them very expensive wedding presents. A nephew, Cibo, and a cousin, Julius, were made cardinals. Julius was the illegitimate son of an uncle. A papal decree removed the impediment of illegitimacy and Julius later became Pope Clement VII. Two other nephews, sons of his sisters, were made cardinals. Leo appointed thirty-one cardinals, including the seven-year-old son of Alfonso of Portugal (he did not enter the duties of his office until he was fourteen).

In 1517 some of the cardinals plotted with a physician to poison Leo but the plot was discovered. Two cardinals escaped but Cardinal Petrucci and the physician were thrown into the dungeon of San Angelo and later strangled.

Leo loved expensive clothes and rings. He was fond of playing cards and chess with his cardinals. He collected expensive musical instruments. In addition to artists and writers he surrounded himself with actors and buffoons—one monk could swallow a whole pigeon at one mouthful and 40 eggs at a sitting. He took great delight in lascivious and salacious plays and dances. He enjoyed all sorts of festivities and his guests included rich men of the most scandalous reputations. He turned the Vatican into a house of frivolity. Among his favorite activities were hunting and fishing. He led large hunting parties with sixty to seventy hounds. When it was pointed out to him that canon law forbade the clergy to engage in the chase he replied that he was canon law. At the appeal of the king of Portugal he forbade the chase to the Portuguese clergy.

He was not accused of gross personal immorality as so many of the Renaissance popes had been. He carefully followed the rubrics of his religion, fasting three times a week, abstaining from meat on Wednesday and Friday, daily reading his Breviary and regularly attending mass. He regularly sought absolution from his private confessor.
Leo made the Vatican the most luxurious court in Europe. We had little understanding of the beginning of the Protestant revolt—a wild boar was loose in the vineyard.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE CLOSE OF THE MIDDLE AGES:

At the end of the Middle Ages there were fewer Christians and they held less territory than at the beginning of the Middle Ages. Many people were scandalized at conditions in the church.

People were cynical and desperate. Most were gloomy about the future.

Europe was divided into hostile, warring nations.

Enrollment in the universities was dwindling.

The crusades had failed. Calls for new crusades went unheeded and the Turks were at the gates of Vienna.

The empire was weak and the prestige of the church was low. The old institutions were decaying.

There were widespread suggestions that the end of the world must be near.

THE NUREMBERG CHRONICLE OF JULY 12, 1493.