Lesson XIII (1978-1979)

THE RENAISSANCE # 3--THE RENAISSANCE POPES

Prayer
Scriptures: Philippians 2:19-24; I Peter 5:1-6
Hymn: #38 "My Soul, Be on Thy Guard"

The Renaissance brought a great change over the ideals and ambitions of the papacy. The popes were very much men of their own times--Renaissance princes. They were builders who adorned Rome and made it one of the most splendid of Renaissance cities. They were leading patrons of art and letters. They vied with the leading princes and men of wealth for the services of writers, scholars, artists and architects. They plunged into the game of Italian politics. Italy had gradually consolidated into five large states: Venice, Milan, Florence, Naples (or the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies), and the States of the Church. Smaller territories outside these states were objects of contention. The politics of Italy were a giant struggle, matching state against state, ceaseless efforts to extend possessions, and attempts at advantageous balances of power. The struggles were filled with intrigue, murder, duplicity. The papacy became secularized as in no other period save possibly the Pomo of the tenth century. Powerful struggles went on within the States of the Church between noble houses such as the Colonna and the Orsini.

MARTIN V (1417-1431)

The pope chosen at the Council of Constance to replace the three popes of the Great Schism belonged to the Colonna.

The goal of his papacy was to restore papal authority in Rome. He denied the authority of a reforming council.

He was very conservative and showed no interest in the revival of classical studies.

EUGENE IV (1431-1447)

Unable to maintain authority in Rome, he spent much of his pontificate in Florence, the Renaissance city.

He called the reforming council at Basel only under pressure and then tried to dissolve it.

He outmaneuvered the reformers at Basel by meeting the representatives of the Eastern Church at Ferrara and Florence. The unity announced at Florence was a great victory for Eugene. Eugene IV made Archbishop Bessarion of Nicaea a cardinal when his own church rejected him because of the unity agreement.

He showed very little interest in the revival of classical studies.

NICHOLAS V (1447-1455)

The humanist pope--for the first time the Renaissance found a mighty patron in the head of the church. During its first century, the Renaissance had proceeded without patronage of the church.

Nicholas V made Rome the center of the Renaissance.

Thomas Parentucelli (the future Nicholas V) was born in an obscure family of Sarsina in 1398. Too poor to continue his education, he became a tutor to the sons of Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Pallia Strozzi, members of the Florentine patriciate. He joined the humanist circles of Florence; he studied at the University of Bologna. He
became a priest. As a young priest he helped Cosimo de' Medici select and arrange a collection of books for the library of the Convent of San Marco in Florence. He served the bishop of Bologna. He became bishop. In 1444 he became archbishop. In 1446 he was papal legate to Germany. His popularity led to his elevation to the papacy. Humanists rejoiced at this elevation and looked to him for patronage.

As pope Nicholas V was dedicated to strengthening Roman authority and to making Rome again the proud capital of the world. The Jubilee of 1450 brought many pilgrims to Rome and filled the papal coffers with money. Some 40,000 pilgrims went from church to church each day venerating the relics. The heads of Peter and Paul were shown on Saturdays. The handkerchief of St. Veronica with the face of Jesus was displayed on Sunday. In one procession the mule of Cardinal Peter Barbas was crushed to death by the crowd and 200 people were crushed to death or forced into the river at a narrow bridge and drowned. Nicholas widened the bridge. He used the money from the Jubilee to improve and beautify Rome: he repaired the aqueduct Aqua Vergine; built the Trevi fountain; repaired bridges and churches; repaired and built government buildings; streets were straightened and widened and filth and rubbish were carried away. A new St. Peter's was planned with broad avenues leading to it. He planned similar projects for provincial cities of the States of the Church.

Nicholas brought artists to Rome—largely Tuscan who brought the ideas of Florence to Rome. Leon Battista Alberti was employed as architect. Fra Angelico decorated the walls of the Vatican chapel of St. Lawrence with scenes from the lives of St. Lawrence and St. Stephen.

Nicholas gathered some of the greatest scholars of the day: Gianozzo Manetti (1406-1455) became papal secretary. He had been a friend of Cosimo de' Medici and was a humanist of the Quattrocento in Florence. A man of wide learning, interested in the church fathers and the great moral works of antiquity such as Aristotle's Ethics. He knew Hebrew as no other Italian of his day. Nicholas gave the best papal posts to humanist scholars rather than to monks and priests. His humanists translated the Greek classics into Latin. Knowledge of Greek remained a rare accomplishment despite the efforts of Chrysoloras. Poggio, pupil of Chrysoloras, came to blows with the arrogant Greek, George of Trebizond (1396-1486), who twitted him for his defective knowledge of Greek. Poggio was a bitter critic of Lorenzo Valla.

Lorenzo Valla (d. 1457) had received his humanist education from Aurispa and Leonardo Bruni and had been papal secretary under Martin V. He abandoned Christian teaching and ethics and turned to the ancient philosophers. He became a professor of rhetoric at the University of Pavia, publishing a book On Pleasure (1431) in which three persons presented the ethical viewpoints of Christians, Stoics, and Epicureans. Valla taught that all natural desires should be fully gratified, that marriage should be abolished. Epicurean pleasure was the goal of life. Valla became secretary to King Alphonso I of Naples (1435-1458) and in 1440 published a treatise On the Donation of Constantine. Nicholas of Cusa and Reginald Pecock had demonstrated its unhistorical character but Valla's work was a political pamphlet to show that papal suzerainty over Naples was without foundation in law or history. Valla bitterly attacked monks and friars. Nicholas V eagerly welcomed Valla to Rome to make translations of Homer, Herodotus and Thucydides.

Nicholas founded the Vatican Library. He searched for new books and his goal was to have the largest collection in the world. He attempted a complete collection of neglected Latin and Greek works rather than collecting theology and canon law. He bought all the
manuscripts he could find and commissioned scribes to copy rare manuscripts. Vespasiano da Bisticci, noted bibliophile, was invited to Rome to build the collection. It numbered over 1000 volumes when Nicholas died. His successors allowed the books to be scattered and Sixtus IV had to reestablish the Vatican Library.

Nicholas tried and failed in arousing the kings of his day to conduct a great crusade against Mohammed II and his Turks. Constantinople fell on May 29, 1453. The pope moved the emperor to call the Congress of Basilion, April, 1454, but only the Duke of the Netherlands, Duke Philip of Burgundy came. The kings of England, France, Spain and Poland were busy with their own wars.

Frederick III, the last German Emperor to be crowned in Rome, kissed the feet of Pope Nicholas.

CALIXTUS III (1455-1458)

The Spaniard, Alfonso Borgia, was made a cardinal by Eugene IV and became Pope Calixtus III when he was 77 years old. He began his pontificate by vowing to the Holy Trinity to war against and punish the Turks. He sold papal jewels and even ripped gold and silver clasps from books in the Vatican Library to get money to finance an army and navy for the crusade. He had all the bells of Rome rung at a given hour to call the people to pray for a holy war. The effort came to nothing.

Calixtus III as an old conservative did not care for the new learning and withdrew papal support. The humanists left Rome and Nicholas' library was scattered.

The papacy of Calixtus was characterized by an unabashed nepotism that had never been equalled. His relatives and fellow-countrymen flocked to Rome demanding offices. Juan of Milan, son of Catherine Borgia, sister of Calixtus, and Rodrigo Borgia, son of another sister, Isabella, were made cardinals while in their twenties. Pedro Luis, another son of Isabella, was made governor of St. Angelo and duke of Spoletto and was given other choice papal fiefs and was groomed to be king of Naples at the death of Alfonso instead of an illegitimate son. The little son of the King of Portugal was made a cardinal while still a child. Rodrigo was promoted over the heads of other cardinals and made vice-chancellor, the most lucrative position the pope had to give. When Calixtus died the displeasure of the Romans against the Spanish was so great the Spanish had to flee leaving the Romans to despoil their homes and possessions.

PIUS II (1458-1464)

Pius II was the leading figure of his age. He lacked high enthusiasm and lofty aims. With diplomatic shrewdness he constantly pursued his own interests. He ruled by expediency rather than by principle. If he found himself on the losing side he promptly changed.

He was born Aeneas Sylvius de' Piccolomini in 1405 at Corsignano, a village near Siena. His family was poor but noble, having been banished from Siena. He was one of 16 children but received a good education. He studied Greek under Filelfo in Florence. He became a humanistic writer of decidedhly unclerical tone. He led a dissolute life in youth and early manhood. He wrote a novel, Lucretia and Euryalus, that was as salacious as Boccaccio. Cardinal Capranica took him to the Council of Basel as his secretary. The Bishop of Novaro took him to Rome as his secretary. When the bishop was imprisoned for participating in a conspiracy against Pope Eugene IV, the secretary fled. He became the secretary of Cardinal Albergati with whom he travelled to France. He visited Scotland where he had a son. In England he had another son by an English woman. In a letter to his father he boasted of how he had
seded her. His love affairs were many. His letters were filled with
prurient details and boasting of his devotion to Venus and his
encouraging other young men in self-indulgence.

He returned to Basel where he became a leading figure in the
council, championing the infallibility and superior authority of the
council over the papacy. He became chairman of the committee on the
faith. He became a supporter of the anti-pope, Felix V, and became
his secretary. When the popularity of the anti-pope waned he transferred
to the court of Frederick III and became the poet-laureate of his
court. On an embassy to Rome in 1445 he excused himself to Pope Eugene,
was reconciled to him, and became papal secretary. He persuaded
Frederick III to join Pope Eugene. He became a subdeacon in 1446.

When he became a priest he turned against his former manner of life
and became a very pious man. He even tried to recall the books he
had written. His health had been ruined by his self-indulgence.

Aeneas took the name Pius II when he was chosen pope. He had
risen to the papacy by his tact and his knowledge of men and European
affairs. The pope summoned a council of the princes to meet in Mantua
in 1460 to plan the crusade he had promised when elected. Pius knew
he was in a difficult position as Italian prince and head of Christendom.
As feudal overlord of Naples he had to face the rival claims of the
French Angevins and the Spanish Aragonese to Naples. He could expect
the French to call for a council if he decided against them. He also
feared the Germans might call a council. Pius in his earlier years had
been a strong advocate of conciliar views. As pope he was dedicated
to strengthening the power of the pope and determined to block any
appeals to a council. In January, 1460, he issued his famous bull,
Execrabilis, condemning anyone who would appeal to a reforming council.

On his way to Mantua Pius visited his birthplace, Corsignana, changed
its name to Pienza (City of Pius), raised it to a bishopric, and
ordered the construction of a palace and a cathedral. He gave Siena
the pope's Golden Rose, raised it to a metropolitan see, and presented
it with one of the arms of John the Baptist. Florence welcomed him
with theatrical plays, contests of wild beasts, races of lions and
horses, and dances.

The congress did not open until September because of the slow
arrival of the princes. Envoys from the East poured out laments. Pius
delivered a three hour oration calling on the people to lay down their
lives in a holy war. Cardinal Bessarion gave a three hour oration.
They failed to arouse enough enthusiasm for a crusade. A German
lawyer, Gregor of Heimburg, refused to take off his hat in the presence
of the pope and spoke against a crusade. He was excommunicated.

On his way home Pius stopped at Siena and canonized Catherine of
Siena. He gave a strong rebuke to Rodrigo Dorgia for his licentious
banquets to which he invited married women without their husbands.

In 1463 Pius sent a letter to the rector and scholars of the
University of Cologne declaring that the papacy was of divine origin—
Christ had given the church a monarchical form of government. General
councils had to be subject to the pope. He called on all to reject
Aeneas and to follow Pius.

Pius was a disappointment to the humanists. He did not surround
himself with writers and artists. He collected books and his favorite
pastime was reading but he did little to encourage learning. His
Commentaries extended from his birth to his death—a valuable record
of his times.

When Thomas Palaeologus brought the head of Andred to Rome, Pius
with a great throng welcomed him, fell prostrate before the skull, gave
Thomas the Golden Rose and a pension, and buried the skull in St. Peter's.
He urged Mohammed II to turn Christian promising him he would be
as renowned as Charlemagne.

At his deathbed there was an argument whether to give him extreme
unction since he had received it at Basel in the plague. He died begging
for an expedition against the Turks.