



0. Diplomat and Peacemaker - Story Preface

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When Don Angelo arrived at the Vatican, he was promoted and given the task as a diplomat - someone who could soothe frayed nerves and oversee Missions in many different countries. In France, for example, there were two separate Mission societies whose members would not even speak to each other!

In his kind, straightforward way, Don Angelo called the two sides together and listened carefully to both sides. He then gently showed them all that they had in common and by working together they could solve problems they both had. His success in France drew the attention of the new pope - Pope Pius XI - who promoted him to archbishop.

His parents came to Rome to for the ceremony and then they all went back to their village to celebrate with the whole town. Nothing so important as this had ever happened before to anyone from the village. The new Archbishop bought a home in Sotto il Monte where he would come for vacations, and where two of his sisters would live.

The Pope then asked Archbishop Roncalli to go to Bulgaria to address a very serious problem there. Bulgaria was a country full of danger and unrest. Two weeks before he arrived, the prime minister had been murdered by terrorists. If that wasn't bad enough, a bomb was planted at the funeral and 150 people were killed. As a result, the government restricted the freedom of the people and made many arrests. Everyone in Bulgaria was living in fear.

There were very few Catholics in Bulgaria - less than 1% of the population, with 85% of the people being Greek Orthodox. The small group of Catholics were discriminated against; for example, Catholic school diplomas were not recognized as valid, so Catholics had trouble getting jobs.

Archbishop Roncalli lived in a small residence in Bulgaria, without a secretary or staff. Yet, he immediately went to work. First, he visited as many members of the Catholic flock as possible. There were few good roads, so he had to travel on horseback. The farmers and shopkeepers in the rural towns had never seen any clergy higher than their local priest and were surprised to see the Archbishop arriving on horseback with his usual good humor.

He found out that the Greek Orthodox population had much in common with the Catholic population. He went to the monks at a large Orthodox monastery, knocked on their door, and asked if he could see some of their precious icons and paintings. He knelt and prayed in their chapel and then thanked them warmly for their hospitality. He then visited the Bulgarian government officials to get the restrictions on Catholic diplomas lifted so Catholics could qualify for better jobs. His reputation quickly spread throughout the country and when it was time for him to leave in 1934, there were many tears shed by Catholics, Orthodox, and government alike. In his farewell address he said,

"Any Bulgarian, Orthodox or Catholic, whoever arrives at my door, wherever I may be, has only to knock. It will be enough to say you are a brother from Bulgaria and two arms will embrace you and will prepare you a feast."

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Diplomat-and-Peacemaker-Pope-John-XXIII-The-Man-Who-Loved-All-People>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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