

By Fr. Alain Marchadour, AA

(Fr. Alain Marchadour is an Assumptionist Scripture scholar who taught for many years at the Catholic University of Toulouse and served for 12 years as director of the Assumptionist shrine in Jerusalem, St. Peter-in-Gallicantu. He is the author of some ten books on the Bible, most notably a commentary on the Gospel of John, *L'évangile de Jean*.)

In October 1962 the Second Vatican Council had just begun. With other students of my generation, I was lucky enough to be there, a humble observer of an historic event in the life of the Church. I can still remember October 11, 1962 and that evening when John XXIII opened the Council.

From our house of studies nearby, located along the Tiber, facing Castel Sant-Angelo, I and my fellow Assumptionists in formation were well aware that we were a part of history in the making. That moonlit night we joined the throngs in Rome gathering in St. Peter's Square. There were half a million people there and together with young people from the Catholic Action Movement we sang songs and carried torches aflame. I can still recall good Pope John addressing us in affectionate terms, not what we were used to from pontiffs, "It seems that even the moon, look at it, was in hurry to get here this evening to gaze upon this sight. We have come to the end of a long day of peace, yes, of peace….It is a brother who is speaking to you, a brother who has become a father by the will of Our Lord. When you get back to your homes and see your little ones, give them a hug and say to them, "this is a hug from the Pope."



With the opening of the Second Vatican Council, Rome became more than ever the center of the Catholic Church. A new chapter in the history of the Church was being written before our dazzled eyes. As we went about our business, we would often bump into some of the 2,500 bishops who had come from every corner of the world, not to mention the non-Catholic observers and the thousands of journalists who were covering the event. We liked to go to St. Peter’s to watch as the bishops entered the meeting hall set up at the Vatican.



I was still too much a novice in my theological studies to understand adequately all the debates that were stirring the Church in the XXth century. But there in Rome I was able to put faces to so many of the names we had heard were behind these discussions, theologians or bishops. There were Fathers Congar, de Lubac, Ratzinger, and so many others. At the same time that I was personally engaged in a traditional course of theological studies, I was discovering a living theology taking place right in front of me.

