

Second Sunday of Easter Divine Mercy Sunday May 1, 2011 A

Beatification of Pope John Paul II

This Sunday, called the Second Sunday of Easter and Divine Mercy Sunday, John Paul II will be beatified on the feast that he created.

The following piece was written by Cardinal Stanislaw Dgiwiz (who some called ‘Gee-wiz), private secretary of John Paul since his days as Archbishop of Cracow.

The beatification of Pope John Paul II will be a very important event for the Church and the world, as it recalls the character and apostolic activities of the pope “from a distant country” who boldly preached Christ to the ends of the world. He reminded us that Jesus is the Redeemer of mankind and the hope for all people of good will, and he awakened in our hearts the apostolic desire to bring the Gospel—the Good News—to people of different races and cultures.

Normally, the process of beatification can begin five years after the death of a candidate. By decision of the Holy Father, Benedict XVI, the process of beatification of John Paul II began a month after his death. Pope Benedict made this decision after witnessing events that took place during John Paul II’s funeral, where participants cried spontaneously: “*Santo Subito!*” (“Sainthood now!”). The vast crowd that kept vigil over the tomb of the Holy Father in St. Peter’s Basilica was a great expression of respect and reverence for John Paul II and the belief in his holiness.

THE BEATIFICATION

Beatification is an act of law and liturgy through which the Church acknowledges that a candidate for sainthood enjoys the glory of heaven. In the first centuries of Christianity, until the Middle Ages, beatification was spontaneously performed by the bishop of a given location where God’s people venerated a candidate for sainthood. Later in Christian history, consent of a synod of bishops and the Holy See was needed. Since 1634, beatification and canonization have been approved by the pope.

The process of John Paul II’s beatification began in St. John Lateran Basilica and was conducted by the Diocese of Rome. Part of the process also took place in Krakow where Cardinal Karol Wojtyla served as

archbishop before becoming pope. During the investigation, more than a thousand witnesses were interviewed and documents were forwarded to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, which drafted a *position*, a several thousand-page document evaluating the life of John Paul II in light of the theological virtues (faith, hope, love) and the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance). At the end of the process, Pope Benedict XVI signed a decree on the heroic virtue of Pope John Paul II in December 2009.

The next stage of the process was the recognition of a miracle through John Paul II’s intercession. Among the many extraordinary graces, the Congregation chose the cure of Sister Marie Simon-Pierre of Parkinson’s disease. After completing the procedure on a miracle, Pope Benedict set the date for the beatification as May 1, Divine Mercy Sunday. This is a meaningful date, since John Paul II was an apostle of Divine Mercy throughout his life.

The beatification process for John Paul II lasted nearly six years. It was necessary to carefully examine his rich life, his childhood and youth, his theological studies during the Second World War, his work as a young priest and professor, and his time as archbishop of Krakow and pope. Although the belief in John Paul II’s holiness was prevalent from the very beginning, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints has retained all the procedures so as to avoid any suspicion that the process was accelerated or conducted superficially.

The beatification of Pope John Paul II will be celebrated by Pope Benedict XVI, who usually celebrates only the canonization of candidates for sainthood. In this way, the pope wants to express his great respect for his predecessor, to whom devotion is present throughout the Catholic Church.

Blessed John Paul—Evangelizer

The following piece was written by Greg Burke, a Rome correspondent for Fox news. This article and the previous one appeared in the April edition of the Knights of Columbus magazine *Columbia*.

When Pope John Paul II was shot on May 13, 1981, he nearly bled to death on his way to the hospital. He considered his survival a miracle. But what if the bullets that struck the pope had actually killed him?

Certainly, history would have been a bit different if John Paul II had died a martyr. The Berlin Wall would still have fallen, and communism would still have crumbled, even if this would have taken significantly longer. I say this not to diminish the pope's role in the fall of the Soviet Union, but simply to emphasize that this is probably not his greatest accomplishment.

A comprehensive assessment of John Paul II's impact on the Church and the world would fill volumes. Still, we may observe a number of recurring themes of John Paul II's extraordinary life and teaching that continue to be felt today.

A NEW EVANGELIZATION

Above all, Pope John Paul II was an energetic and tireless evangelizer. This became clear with some of the first words the former archbishop of Krakow spoke upon his election as pope in 1978.

"Brothers and sisters, be not afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power," John Paul II said during the homily at his inauguration Mass. "Be not afraid. Open wide the doors to Christ. To his saving power open the boundaries of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilization and development. Be not afraid."

These words set the tone of John Paul II's entire pontificate. "Let Christ speak to man," the pope implored. "He alone has words of life, yes, of eternal life." That message would be fleshed out in a more intellectual manner in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (*The Redeemer of Man*), but in his homilies it was relatively simple.

I had dinner not long ago with a group of friends, all 30-somethings who describe themselves as part of the "John Paul II Generation." They are smart, sophisticated people whose lives were changed by the late pope. While this is largely due to a long tradition of World Youth Days — a John Paul II initiative — the pontiff had a way of attracting and challenging young people from the very start of his pontificate.

When John Paul II celebrated Mass on Boston Common on Oct. 1, 1979, he made a special appeal to young Americans: "To each one of you I say therefore: heed the call of Christ when you hear him saying to you: 'Follow me! Walk in my path! Stand by my side! Remain in my love!' There is a choice to be made: a choice for Christ and his way of life, and his commandment of love."

The pope added that despite all the technological advances and material goods that the world has to offer, people still yearn for "more truth, for more love, for more joy. And all of this is found in Christ and in his way of life."

A CLEAR MESSAGE

While many of Pope John Paul II's encyclicals were theologically dense, his message in general was simple, clear and demanding — which is probably why young people felt so attracted to it.

The Catholic Church is ultimately about following Christ, which means allegiance to his Church and knowing what the Church teaches. It sounds simple, but John Paul II saw a tremendous amount of ignorance in the world, even with regard to very basic Christian principles, and he did his best to combat it.

The pope did not shy away from tough Catholic teachings on sexual morality, marriage or the sanctity of life. On the contrary, he did his best to make these teachings accessible, and he presented them in an attractive way. This was part of John Paul II's secret: People could sense his authenticity. They saw someone who could demand of others because he demanded of himself. They also saw the joy of one who has left everything to follow the Lord.

One of the pope's constant messages was respect for human life. This became increasingly important in a world where abortion became widespread, scientific developments allowed for the manipulation of life at its earliest stages, and a movement to promote euthanasia was spreading.

Pope John Paul II in many ways led the battle in defending life against a growing number of threats. His encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (*The Gospel of Life*) helped advance a culture that respects every human life from conception until natural death. Related to this was his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, in which the pope articulated the central role of the family as a school of life and love. Likewise, in developing a "theology of the body," he explained how our creation as male and female relates to this call to build a culture of life.

Certainly, a hallmark of John Paul II's papacy was the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, first published in 1992. In essence, the *Catechism* is a summary of what the Church teaches (the title could have been, "This Is Who We Are, This Is What We Believe"). While it is a massive, comprehensive tome, the *Catechism* is also accessible and promises to be an important point of reference for generations of Catholics to come. Whether someone is approaching the faith for the first time, coming back after years away, or just trying to remember a particular doctrine or teaching, the *Catechism* is the place to go.

A POPE OF SURPRISES

John Paul II surprised a lot of people during his long pontificate, including many of the prelates who worked closely with him. These surprises were often small

things, like walking through the back of the plane on his trips to take a question from each reporter or sneaking out of the Vatican for a day of skiing.

But sometimes the surprises were bigger, and one that certainly shocked many people was his *mea culpa*, made in the jubilee year 2000, for all the situations in which the Catholic Church failed to be faithful in its mission to Christ over the centuries. While that may have surprised some people, for John Paul it all seemed very logical. We are a Church of sinful human beings. We acknowledge our faults individually every time we go to confession, and we should acknowledge them as a community.

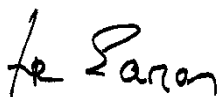
While taking nothing away from all the glories of the Catholic Church over the centuries — among them outstanding examples of Christian charity, heroism and holiness — the pope's public prayer of forgiveness was a kind of purification. It may have all been providential as well, because it helped pave the way for a deeper purification in the wake of sex abuse scandals within the Church.

It was difficult to watch John Paul II's health decline, especially for anyone who remembered him as a robust athlete. Yet, it was also a striking example of someone putting himself entirely in God's hands. It reminded us that, ultimately, we are not in control, not even the pope.

Pope John Paul II believed in divine providence and entrusted himself to the loving hands of Our Lady, who was there to protect him, not only when he was nearly killed in 1981, but every day of his life. His motto — "*Totus Tuus*" (All Yours) — referred to the deep, almost childlike devotion he had to Mary. You could see this devotion in the way he prayed the rosary and constantly asked for Our Lady's help.

A friend once told me that in 500 years, people will not be talking about John Paul II and the fall of communism. Rather, he argued, John Paul II will be remembered best for instituting the five new mysteries of the rosary, the Mysteries of Light. Whatever the case, one thing is for sure: John Paul II contributed much to the Church and to the world during his nearly 27-year papacy, and he will be warmly remembered for many generations to come.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Le Saran". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.