

# Pope John Paul II

On the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, April 2, 2005, Pope John Paul II died, and it is Divine Mercy Sunday, May 1, 2011, that Pope Benedict XVI set for the beatification of his predecessor.

It may be especially appropriate that the Pope who declared the Second Sunday of Easter as Divine Mercy Sunday is beatified on that day. It also is fitting that the beatification occur at the start of May, the month of Mary, to whom he had a devotion and called, among other titles, Mother of Mercy.

To tell of John Paul II's 26 years of Petrine ministry is to provide a litany of encyclicals, travels, and historic events. Not only was John Paul II the first Pope to enter a synagogue since Saint Peter, but he appealed to both Jews and Christians to be "a blessing to one another," and offered repentance in the name of the Church for the Shoah.

From the moment Karol Wojtyla was elected Pope in October 1978, the man who had entered a clandestine seminary while living under Nazi occupation mesmerized the world. In the early years, Catholics and non-Catholics alike were attracted to the athletic man who snuck out of his villa to ski and reached out to the young at World Youth Days. People of many faiths prayed for him when he was shot in St. Peter's Square and were awed with the mercy he granted his assailant. And none escaped the poignancy of a feeble John Paul II praying at the Western Wall in Israel, leaving a prayer inside the wall.

Even a scant follower of the Pope knew that the man who forgave his assailant, traveled the world to evangelize, and sought healing in relations with the Jewish people looked to the Blessed Virgin as a model of faith. A week after taking on the Chair of Saint Peter, he brought reporters to the Marian Shrine of Mentorella outside of Rome. "I wanted to come here, among these mountains," he told them "to sing the Magnificat in Mary's footsteps." On that date, too, he told of his love for the Rosary, a remark that he recalled 24 years later in his apostolic letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (RVM): "The Rosary is my favorite prayer. A marvelous prayer! Marvelous in its simplicity and depth." In that letter, he explained the Christocentric nature of the prayer. "With the Rosary, the Christian people sits at the school of Mary and is led

Contemplating the scenes of the Rosary in union with Mary is a means of learning with her to "read" Christ, to discover his secrets and to understand his message (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 14).

Born: May 18, 1920

Died: April 2, 2005

Beatification: May 1, 2011



to contemplate the beauty on the face of Christ and to experience the depths of his love." In RVM, he notes Mary's conformity to Christ: "Mary lives only in Christ and for Christ!" It is such conformity that John Paul II sought. His motto was *Totus Tuus* (all thine).

To John Paul II, the woman who carried the Savior in her womb, who first gazed on him at birth, and stayed with him by the cross, is the person who can bring followers closest to Christ. In the apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, he called Mary "the sure path to our meeting with Christ." In *Ecclesia in America*, the Pope noted that Our Lady of Guadalupe's meeting with Juan Diego evangelized beyond Mexico and voiced hope that the Mother and Evangelizer of America would guide the Church in America, "so that the new evangelization may yield a splendid flowering of Christian life."

The Pope credited Our Lady of Fatima with saving his life when he was shot on May 13, 1981, the anniversary of the first apparition at Fatima. He believed that Mary guided the bullet away from his vital organs. A year after the shooting, he placed the bullet that was taken from him among the diamonds in the crown of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima. "I wish once more to thank Our Lady of Fatima for the gift of my life being spared," he said.

With the Church, many surely are thanking the man who espoused the Rosary for modeling a life of faith.

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MARY G. FOX is the editor of *Pastoral Liturgy* and *Catechumenate*.