
TESTIMONY OF THOSE WHO LIVED WITH JOHN PAUL II

SOURCE: *L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO*

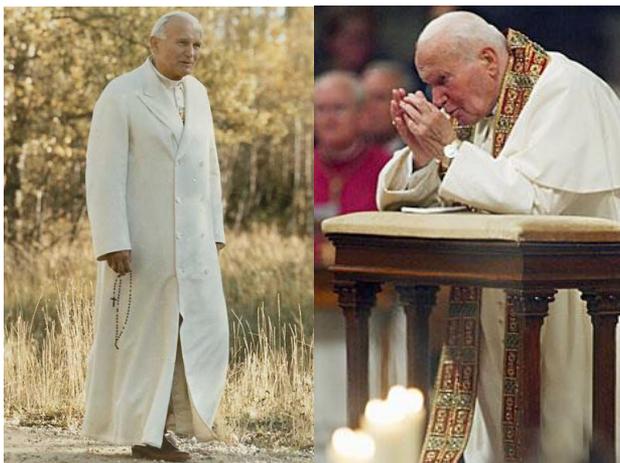
"For the Pope, the Most Important Thing is Prayer"

WHERE IS THE CENTER OF THE WORLD?

REMEMBERING JOHN PAUL II SIX YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH

By the Assistant Papal Master of Ceremonies

Konrad Krajewski



We were on our knees at the bedside of John Paul II. The Pope was lying in the semidarkness. The soft light of the lamp lit up the wall, but he was clearly visible. When a few moments later the time came when the whole world would know, Archbishop Dziwisz suddenly stood up. He turned on the light in the room, thereby interrupting the silence of John Paul II's death. In emotional but surprisingly steady tones, he began to sing, in his typical mountain lilt, prolonging one of the syllables, "We praise you, O God: / we proclaim you as Lord".

The sound seemed to come from Heaven. We all look wonderingly at Fr Stanisław. However with the light on, in singing the following words, each one of us found reassurance: "Everlasting Father, / All the world bows down before you". Here, we thought, we are in a totally different reality, John Paul II has died: this means that he lives forever.



Even though we were shaken by heartfelt sobs and choked by tears, we went on singing. With every word our voices grew stronger and louder. The hymn proclaimed: “You overcame the power of death / Opening the Father’s Kingdom to all who believe in you”.

Thus, in singing the *Te Deum*, we glorified God, clearly visible and recognizable in the Pope’s person.

In a certain sense this is also the experience of all who met him in the course of his Pontificate. Anyone who came into contact with John Paul II met Jesus, whom the Pope represented in himself; with his words, his silence, his gestures, his way of praying, his manner of interceding within the liturgy, his recollection in the sacristy; with his whole way of being. This was immediately apparent. He was a person filled with God. And for the world he had become a visible sign of an invisible reality, in spite of his body – disfigured by the suffering of his last years.

It often sufficed just to look at him to discover God’s presence and thus to begin to pray. This was enough to make one go to Confession: not only for one’s own sins, but also for not being as holy as he.



When he stopped being able to walk and during celebrations became totally dependent on the Masters of Ceremonies, I began to realize that I was touching a holy person. Perhaps I irritated the Vatican confessors when, before every celebration, I went to make my confession, impelled by an inner imperative and feeling a strong need. I needed to receive absolution in order to stand

beside him.

When one is beside a holy person, when a human being in some way attains holiness, it shines from his whole body. Yet at the same time, one also feels in one’s own skin a kind of temptation: evidently the evil spirit does not like the air of holiness.

When, at about three O’clock in the morning, I emerged from the Apostolic Palace, a crowd had gathered in the Borgo Pio. People were walking in deeply meditative silence. The world had stopped – some were kneeling and had been weeping. Some wept only because they had lost a person they loved and then went home as they had come. Others, combined with their visible grief their inner weeping, which welled up from feelings of inadequacy and unfaithfulness before the Lord. These tears were blessed. It was the beginning of the miracle of conversion.



On all the following days until the Pope's funeral, Rome became an Upper Room; all understood each another, even if they spoke different languages.

I had been in touch with the Pope for seven long years: during his life, but also at the moment when his soul departed his body. At the time of death we are left with nothing but mortal remains that will turn to dust; the body vanishes and the person is welcomed into God's mystery.

Laying out the late Pope's body is one of the tasks of the Masters of Ceremony. I did this for seven long days until the funeral. Shortly after his death, I dressed John Paul II, together with three nurses who had been looking after him for a long time. Although an hour and a half had passed since his death, they continued to talk to the Pope as though they were talking to their own father. Before dressing him in the cassock, alb and chasuble, they kissed and caressed him, touching him with love and reverence, just as if he had been a member of their own family. Their attitude did not only demonstrate their devotion to the Pontiff: I felt it represented the timid announcement of a forthcoming Beatification.

Perhaps for this reason I never dedicated myself to praying intensely for his Beatification, for I had already begun to take part in it.

Every day I celebrate the Eucharist in the Vatican Grottos. I see how the Basilica's employees and their families and all those who work at the various dicasteries and offices of the Vatican – the gendarmes, the gardeners, the drivers – begin the day with a moment of prayer at the tomb of John Paul II; they touch the gravestone and blow him kisses. It is like this every morning.

From 2000, the Pope began to grow weaker and weaker. He had great difficulty in walking. In preparing the Great Jubilee, Archbishop Piero Marini and I expressed the hope that he would at least be able to open the Holy Door. It was almost impossible to think of the future.

While I was in the mountains in Poland, I once heard this affirmation: "We still don't know each other, because we have not suffered together". For five long years Archbishop Marini and I shared in the Pope's suffering, in his heroic battle to bear his suffering.

The Words of Psalm 51[50]:7 spring to my mind: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean", which can also be understood as: "Touch me with suffering and I shall be pure". Being with John Paul II meant living in the Gospel, being inside the Gospel.

In the last years of my service beside him I realized that beauty is always linked to suffering. It is impossible to touch Jesus without touching the Cross. The Pontiff was so severely tried, albeit tormented by suffering, but this made him extremely beautiful, since he joyfully offered all he had received from God and joyfully gave back to God all he had received from him. Holiness, in fact – as Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say – does not only mean that we are offering everything to God



but also that God takes from us everything that he has given us. The athlete who hiked and skied in the mountains could now no longer walk. The actor had lost his voice. Little by little everything was taken from him.

Before beginning the funeral, Archbishop Dziwisz and Archbishop Marini covered the Pope's face with a silk cloth, a symbol deeply meaningful symbol: his whole life had been concealed and hidden in God.

While they were performing this rite, I was standing by the coffin holding the Gospel Book, another powerful sign. John Paul II was not ashamed of the Gospel. He lived in accordance with the Gospel. He solved all the problems of the world and of the Church in accordance with the Gospel. In accordance with the Gospel he had built the whole of his interior and exterior life.

The mystery of John Paul II, that is, his beauty, is expressed very clearly in the prayer of Pope Clement xi which was found in the old Breviaries. "I want to do what you ask of me: in the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it". Those who speak these words with their hearts become like Jesus who humbly conceals himself in the Host and offers himself to be consumed. Those who make these words their own begin to live with the spirit of worship of the Most Blessed Sacrament.

Accompanying the Pontiff on his Apostolic Journeys, during the long-haul flights, I often wondered, where the centre of the world was. Thirteen days after the election the Pope went with some of his collaborators to Mentorella, not far from Rome, where the Shrine of the Mother of Grace is located. He asked his travelling companions: "What is most important for the Pope in his life and in his work?". They suggested to him: "Perhaps Christian unity, peace in the Middle East, or the destruction of the Iron Curtain...?". But he answered: **"For the Pope the most important thing is prayer"**.

In my country there is the following saying: "The king is naked before the eyes of his servants". The better acquainted we became with John Paul II, the more convinced we were of his holiness, we saw it at every moment of his life. He did not obscure God. If I wished to indicate what is most important for priestly life and for each one of us, looking at him I could say: **not to hide God with oneself, but on the contrary, to show him and to become the visible sign of his presence. No one has seen God, but John Paul II made him visible through his life.**

When he prayed, I had the impression that he threw himself at Jesus' feet. When he prayed, one could see on his face his total entrustment to God. He was truly transparent; he was, to use a poetic image, like the rainbow that links heaven and earth, and his soul was running up the ladders joining earth to Heaven.

I now return to the question: "Where is the centre of the world?".

Little by little, I began to realize that the centre of the world was always where I was with the Pope: not because I was with John Paul II but because everywhere he





happened to be he prayed. I understood that the centre of the world is where I pray, where I am with God, in the closest union that exists: prayer. I am at the centre of the world when I walk in God's presence, when "in him we live and move and have our being" (cf. Acts 17:28). When I celebrate or participate in the Eucharist I am at the centre of the world; when I hear Confessions and I make a Confession, in the confessional there is the centre of the world; the place and time of my prayer constitute the centre of the world because, when I pray, God breathes within me. The Pope let God breathe through him: every day he spent a long time before the tabernacle. The Blessed Sacrament was the sun that illuminated his life. And he went to

that sun to warm himself with God's light.

John Paul II's life was woven of prayer. He always had between his fingers the rosary beads with which he addressed Mary, confirming his *Totus tuus*.

Once, after the accident in 1991, Cardinal Deskur brought the Pope a container of holy water from Lourdes and said to him, "Your Holiness, when you pour it on the painful part, you are supposed to recite the 'Hail Mary'". John Paul II answered: "Dear Cardinal, I always say the 'Hail Mary'".

My task in the Office of Liturgical Celebrations consists in taking care of papal celebrations under the Master's guidance and not of writing articles or preparing lectures. This is how it has been for thirteen years.

Ever since 2 April 2005, when someone asks me to give a testimony on John Paul II, I often answer: "Yes, with great joy". And I invite him or her to take part every Thursday in Mass in front of his tomb in the Vatican Grottoes. Just as I ask people to go to the Church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, where every afternoon the Chaplet of Divine Mercy is recited, followed by the Way of the Cross. Priests who work or study in Rome, sisters and lay people meet in my apartment every Thursday evening. We say Vespers, we pray and we sit at table together. Gathering in prayer and being together is to be at the centre of the world: I learned this from John Paul II.

I am not surprised that the Pope should be beatified on Divine Mercy Sunday, even if it is a surprise of Providence that this year it coincides with 1 May. Thus that day will speak mainly of holiness. Benedict XVI and John Paul II will transform the day into a religious event unprecedented in history: a May procession towards holiness and prayer.



INTERVIEW WITH THE POSTULATOR OF JOHN PAUL II'S SAINTHOOD CAUSE

Monsignor Slawomir Oder

First Part - April 7, 2011

The Beatification Process

One of the greatest treasures that came to light during John Paul II's beatification process was his close, personal and profound relationship with Christ, says the postulator of the Pontiff's cause.

Monsignor Slawomir Oder, who is also the judicial vicar of the court of appeal of the Diocese of Rome, revealed to ZENIT that John Paul II was "a man who lived in the presence of God, who let himself be guided by the Holy Spirit, who was in constant dialogue with the Lord, and who built his whole life around the question [asked to Peter]: 'Do you love me?'"

John Paul II died April 2, 2005, at the age of 84. The cause for his beatification began on June 28, 2005, after Benedict XVI waived the customary five-year waiting period before a beatification process can begin. He will be beatified May 1 in Rome.

Leading up to the Pontiff's beatification, ZENIT is presenting a four-part interview with Monsignor Oder in which he reflects on the Pope's beatification process, and the aspects of John Paul II's life that most impressed him. Part 2 of this interview will appear Friday.

In what way have you, as a priest, lived this process? Was it a cross, a joy, has it transformed you?

Monsignor Oder: The cross is always the prelude of joy; we experience this during Easter. On the other hand, there is no true joy, as the transfiguration of Jesus teaches us, without passing through the cross.

The task that was entrusted to me had its paschal aspects, if for no other reason than because it was superimposed on the work I ordinarily carry out as judicial vicar and the pastoral activity I am engaged in as



rector of a parish in Rome. My days have been full these past five years! Also, the process itself presented some elements that implied a great effort and involvement, even on the emotional level. So, the moments of difficulty weren't lacking.

It seems as if the process of canonization for John Paul II is a "fait accompli." Is the Pope being given preferential treatment, or is the canonization process following the normal route?

Monsignor Oder: Yes, absolutely. The only dispensation that was obtained in this process was the dispensation from the [five-year] waiting period to begin. But the process itself was carried out, absolutely, in full observance of the canonical norms. Therefore, there was no real dispensation, or preferential treatment, in this sense.

Instead, what we can say is that the practice of the [Congregation for Saints' Causes] is to go ahead with cases that, in addition to the [declaration of] heroic virtue, already have a miracle, which are two different processes.

Normally, the process takes place in this way: the diocesan investigation is carried out, the documentation is transmitted to the Congregation for Saints' Causes, where the *positio* [the documentation that proves the heroic exercise of virtue] is prepared, which is then subjected to the discussion of theologians and cardinals. The discussion of the *positio* must normally wait because a miracle is necessary [for the cause to advance].

[For John Paul II], the *positio* went ahead and was immediately subjected to the discussion of theologians and cardinals because the miracle [attributed to the Pope] happened very soon. In fact, the paperwork on the miracle was submitted to the Congregation for Saints' Causes the day before the documentation on the virtues, and this made it possible for the cause to advance.

How much time passed from John Paul II's death to the presentation of the miracle?

Monsignor Oder: The miracle, recognized as such, happened in July [2005].

And after how much time was it recognized?

Monsignor Oder: We concluded the process in 2007. The miracle was presented the day before the closing of the diocesan investigation on the virtues, which ended in June 2007.

Were other miracles presented?

Monsignor Oder: There were so many graces and also alleged miracles. Some were examined more in-depth, because this is the practice. Before carrying out a study on a miracle, a prior study is done which in some way guarantees the process itself. In some cases we did further studies and the preliminary statements were good, but



we did not continue to study them because the study on the miracle that had been chose was already under way.

Can you tell us in what countries these miracles happened?

Monsignor Oder: They were verified in France, in the United States, in Germany and in Italy.

Was a further medical study necessary?

Monsignor Oder: It is a normal that in the process regarding the miracle an investigation is carried out and that the material is then subjected to the study of doctors. It is obvious that a doctor can ask for clarifications, additional documentation and supplementary analyses. It is all very normal. All the investigations that were carried out were considered appropriate by the doctors involved in the process.

Then there wasn't really a shadow of a doubt?

Monsignor Oder: You ask me questions that I cannot answer because they are covered by the secret of the process and because they are not known to me. These particulars are the competence of the doctors.

Did you discover things that you didn't previously know about John Paul II -- a private side that was never shown in public?



Monsignor Oder: The process was clearly a beautiful adventure, because a person is never known through and through. And it is clear that so many aspects affected the particulars of his life, the activities and personal contacts he had. However, I would say that it is an adventure that could be undertaken with each person, who is a world unto himself.

With regard to what emerged in the context of the process of beatification, there was nothing outstanding in the sense that, effectively, Wojtyla was the way we knew him in public. So there was no split personality, but rather a perfect transparency of the person. Undoubtedly, however, the process did bring to light many aspects.

Is there an aspect that you didn't know and that particularly struck you?



Monsignor Oder: The aspect that amazed me, which also happens to be the most important aspect of his life, was the discovery that the source and origin of his extraordinary activity, of his generosity in acting, of the depth of his thought, was his relationship with Christ. What came to light was certainly a mystic. A mystic in the sense that he was a man who lived in the presence of God, who let himself be guided by the Holy Spirit, who was in constant dialogue with the Lord, who built his whole life around the question [asked to Peter]: "Do you love me?" His life was the answer to this essential question posed by the Lord. I think this aspect is the greatest treasure of the process.

And because of being a mystic, he often found himself alone...

Monsignor Oder: The encounter with the Lord is always a solitary path. We are, clearly, supported by the Church, by brothers in the faith, but then every one of us must travel on that path. Moreover, his relationship [with Christ] was truly personal and individual, and very profound. Those who worked with him would often recount that they would have a clear sense of being before a moment of what we could call a "raptus mistico," in which [John Paul II] was in such a profound dialogue with the Lord that the only thing one could do was to stand back and let him live this moment.

And in that dialogue, was there something that for John Paul II was a cross? For example, he spoke often about the suffering of solidarity. Were there things on this point that troubled him at times?

Monsignor Oder: Look, a man with as great a sensitivity as his could not be indifferent in the face of the sufferings of the world. And we were witnesses to that; he was very vigilant, attentive to anything that happened in the world. He was not afraid to raise his voice and say things that were not in line with the common way of thinking. It is enough to recall his heartbreaking appeal for peace on the eve of the Gulf conflict, when he said "I belong to the generation that knows war." They were very strong words. Surely it was a thought that did not go down well with the politically correct.

Undoubtedly, what he always had in his heart as a great concern was the silent genocide that goes on with abortion. The question about the richness of human life from conception was certainly a constant cross and a suffering in his life.

[Translation by ZENIT]

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INTERVIEW WITH THE POSTULATOR OF JOHN PAUL II'S SAINTHOOD CAUSE

Monsignor Slawomir Oder

Second Part - April 8, 2011

The Trials of a Young Polish Pope

Monsignor Slawomir Oder, who is also the judicial vicar of the court of appeal of the Diocese of Rome, told ZENIT that John Paul II "providentially brought to his Petrine ministry the energy of a young man; he was a young Pope."

How did the Polish authorities see John Paul II? Did he slip by them under the radar, or did he not attract their attention?

Monsignor Oder: *They were afraid. In fact, there are traces in the documentation of the Secret Services that speak of the danger of Karol Wojtyla. He was dangerous because he was a sublime intellectual, a man of dialogue; from the moral point of view he was unassailable. Precisely because of this he was dangerous. He was a man of weight; the weight of a man of God, a man of dialogue, of openness, absolutely prepared intellectually, superior, and yes, they feared him.*

However I think that, as always, the Lord was greater than they were. The Evil One was doing his accounts and God was doing his accounts. Karol Wojtyla did not escape the attention of the Communists.

Perhaps they feared Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński more because he was, in fact, a different man; he was different also in the way he faced the authorities. And yet, Providence moved Wojtyla's history forward in the way we know.

I remember the embarrassment of the journalists when he was elected; they did not know how to transmit the news, which in any case was important for Poland. It was one of many news items they gave during the television newscast, but they had to report it.

Then I remember the first trip he made, it was overwhelming. They didn't know how to invite him, who should invite him. He was invited by the Church, but he was also a guest of the government. They found a diplomatic loophole so that he could come, because in any case, as a Pole, he could return. He wished to return and bring with him the leaven of the revolution of the spirit. In this first trip one could see how the Polish media was manipulated. If one sees shots of the broadcast, one



sees only close-ups of the Pope or some elderly man, without **seeing** the millions of people who surrounded the Pope. No young faces, no families.

When John Paul II became Pope at the age of 58, the Church was facing a series of grave challenges that seemed to have no solution, and by the end of the pontificate so many steps had been taken to unite the Church and to resolve these problems.

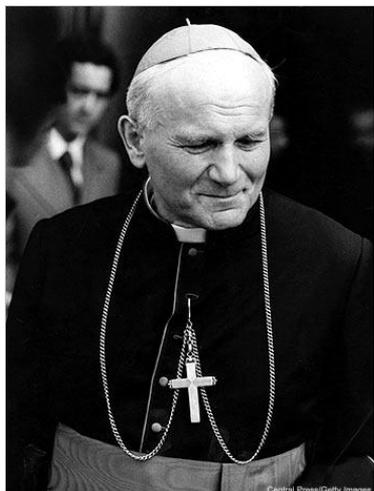
Monsignor Oder: Yes, *he was a Pope who providentially brought to his Petrine ministry the energy of a young man; he was a young Pope. He was also a Pope used to living a situation of confrontation with hostility: the Church in Poland in confrontation with Communism. [He was] a Pope of great intellectual, cultural and scientific preparation, a Pope of great sensitivity, including aesthetic, and mindful of so many values.*

And he was able to give back freshness to the Church, always making reference to the freshness [the Church] was given by the Second Vatican Council. He was the Pope who actualized, who carried forward the thought of Vatican II. And in this regard he took ever so many steps, he undertook so many activities which were able, somewhat, to restore the boat of the Church.

One sees that the Church took a big step forward during the time of John Paul II's Pontificate.

Monsignor Oder: Certainly a renewal of the faith, of evangelical enthusiasm.

The Pope used to say that he was Pope because he was the bishop of Rome. How did he live this out?



Monsignor Oder: He felt himself very much the bishop of Rome, and he repeated this often, "I am Pope because I am the bishop of Rome." And this is how he approached his pontificate. He always maintained a particular interest in the diocese, and a sign of this were the numerous pastoral visits that he made.

There were two moments in which I saw the Holy Father almost angry: during an address in which he was defending the family and once when he was speaking out against the mafia in Sicily. In both cases was it because the value of life was at stake?



Monsignor Oder: Certainly, because of the value of life, but also because at stake was the truth about man. He was a Pope who built his pontificate in a very humanistic key, in the evangelical sense. His first encyclical, "Redemptor Hominis," gives a correct perspective on how to understand precisely the centrality of man who has, at the center of his existence, Christ himself. His was a Christian humanism. This concern of his for human life in all its dimensions stemmed from the Christian concept that he had about the value of life, for which the Savior gave his life.

It seems as if holiness ran in the family. Are there plans to begin the cause for the beatification of John Paul II's father [also named Karol Wojtyła], who was an extraordinary paternal figure who truly marked his son?

Monsignor Oder: Absolutely. *But look, to see this family is to see how the Lord worked. John Paul II always said that his father was his first teacher of spirituality, first guide in the spiritual life, the first seminary he attended. No doubt he had this image of his father, this military man, soldier, who knelt down and prayed at night before the icon of the Virgin. These are things that remain in the heart of a boy. A man who accompanied his child by the hand on pilgrimage to Czestochowa.* He initiated him in prayer. However, there was also the figure of his brother Edmund, who was also an uncommon figure. He dedicated himself completely to the service of charity and then paid the price [John Paul II's brother Edmund worked as a physician, and died of scarlet fever.]



It was John Paul II who wanted the beatification of the parents of Thérèse of Lisieux. Did he learn from his own family the value of the beatification of spouses?

Monsignor Oder: This is difficult for me to say, but no doubt he had an extraordinary example [of holy spouses] in his life. Nevertheless

he gave clear signs of being truly convinced of the truth confirmed by Vatican Council II, namely, of the universal vocation to holiness of all Christians. With the number of beatifications and canonizations during his pontificate, which represented the entire spectrum of the Church, he gave a tangible sign that [holiness] is possible for everyone.

[Translation by ZENIT]

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*"Love explained everything to me. Love solved everything for me.
That is why I admire love wherever it is found."
(John Paul II)*

INTERVIEW WITH THE POSTULATOR OF JOHN PAUL II'S SAINTHOOD CAUSE

Monsignor Slawomir Oder
Third Part - April 10, 2011

The Pontiff's Cross

How did John Paul II react to the sexual abuse crisis, which took place for the most part toward the end of his pontificate.

Monsignor Oder: It is enough to think of his reaction when the problem surfaced, such as the convocation of American bishops here in Rome to address the problem. When these painful situations came to his direct knowledge, one saw him overwhelmed and determined to give an appropriate answer.

He was the one who promulgated the new rules in regard to this type of crime, as a juridical instrument to resolve these situations.



The sufferings of this Pope were evident toward the end of his life, what can you tell us about the sacrifices he made throughout his pontificate.

Monsignor Oder: The suffering caused by his illness was an aspect that at the end of his days became almost an icon of his pontificate, but it wasn't the only dimension of mortification in his life. From his youth he was initiated into the Carmelite spirituality, he was fascinated by the Carmel, so much so that when he was still a boy he had some thoughts in mind of a Carmelite

vocation. *He remained fascinated by St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Ávila, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and then also the practices of personal penance were present in his life. This was an aspect that no one knew about, which we learned only in the context of the process, and I remember that it bothered many when it became known. And yet this was a sign of his profound faith, of his spiritual life.*



In regard to suffering, I learned recently that already as bishop of Krakow he wrote a letter to the sick to ask them, to entrust to them, to their intercession, his episcopate. It is truly a key to the fecundity of this pontificate. Not only the sick Pope who shares in the cross, but who leans on this communion of the Church.

Monsignor Oder: Absolutely, but this is also the Christian sense of suffering. Not only did he entrust his ministry as bishop of Krakow to the sick. In the period in which the discussion of Vatican Council II was taking place, he asked the sick for their support to bring the council to a good end. He made them participants in this extraordinary event. *I think the letter "Salvifici Doloris" gives an idea of John Paul II's vision of the Christian meaning of suffering, and as well as when he speaks of personal participation in the sufferings of Christ and the Gospel of the Good Samaritan, which was written virtually around this reality of suffering.*

And furthermore, he founded the Good Samaritan Foundation for patients with AIDS.

Monsignor Oder: It must be remembered that in regard to the world of suffering, it was he who created the Pontifical Council for Health Care Ministry.

There was another painful case, that of the founder of the Legionaries of Christ, Marcial Maciel. He knew about it at the end of his pontificate?

Monsignor Oder: We have carried out all the investigations that, of course, were geared to deepening the knowledge of this most painful case for the Church, which indeed exploded after John Paul II's death. However, it must be recalled that the investigations got under way during his pontificate. Nevertheless, from the investigations carried out on the basis of the documentation, we can exclude any personal involvement of the Holy Father in this affair, in the sense that his knowledge at the time that he died did not go beyond that which was commonly known.

He was somewhat of a "scandal" in the sense that in a world where everyone is afraid of growing old, of not being efficient, he carried his illness to the end, without hiding it in any way.

Monsignor Oder: Precisely this capacity of his to speak, when he was mute, when he could no longer say anything, but he simply persevered, he stayed, he expressed his closeness, his love, his "here I am" before the Lord, and perhaps he gave the greatest Spiritual Exercises without saying anything, simply as witness.

And then, yes, because it was precisely a very serene way of going forward with this reality that is part of the human experience, we can say it is a prospect of Christian life, suffering and death are also a part of life, naturally, as a passage. However, with this testimony, with his "not being embarrassed," he gave back hope to so



many persons, above all he also gave back dignity to persons who, so often, are marginalized, shut out and hidden, almost as a disgrace because they are ill and old.

We are in a civilization that wishes, in some way, to charm death away. He went ahead with these signs of suffering, of the death that was approaching, making one understand that it is a stage of life.

Monsignor Oder, do you now feel unemployed, or are you now continuing the cause of canonization?

Monsignor Oder: As I have said, this work of postulator is added to other things, so I'm absolutely not thinking of remaining unemployed. In any case, if now the whole preparation of the event of the beatification is under way it, of course, also has the figure of the postulator involved in some aspects. Also, the mandate given to me was for the process of beatification and of canonization. This means that the stage of beatification has been achieved, this first moment is done, but the process proceeds until the canonization.

In regard to the beatification, how can a Christian who wishes to participate prepare himself for this event?



Monsignor Oder: This process of beatification has been for me personally a time of spiritual exercises that has enabled me to deepen both the reasons for my faith and the enthusiasm of my response to the Lord's call to become a priest. It was enhanced by the splendid encounter with the example of this fulfilled, happy priest, who gave his life for Christ and for the Church. The time we now have to prepare coincides with Lent, during which we undertake our spiritual journey, our journey of conversion, our journey to deepen our faith and love of Christ, to live truly a particular experience with the Lord's Easter that, in some way, will now be prolonged in this event of beatification.

When all is said and done, the Lord's Easter is the point of reference for the life of all Christians, which must be realized in the life of each one of us. Easter, the attainment of sanctity, and arriving to heaven, is the fulfillment of the Christian life. Hence, we can say that this year we have truly had the good fortune to live Lent looking at the Lord's Easter. It is a splendid testimony of this Easter.

[Translation by ZENIT]

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INTERVIEW WITH THE POSTULATOR OF JOHN PAUL II'S SAINTHOOD CAUSE

Monsignor Slawomir Oder

Fourth Part - April 11, 2011

On Mercy and Forgiveness

Even though Pope John Paul II was a true son of Poland who remained closely tied to his homeland and his culture, *he was able to touch the lives people from all corners of the globe, says the postulator of the Pontiff's cause.*

There has been talk of the Holy Father's spiritual legacy of mercy. What was John Paul II's understanding of mercy?

Monsignor Oder: There are so many interventions of his that relate precisely to this aspect of mercy, of magnanimity, of the capacity to imitate the greatness of the love of God who bends down before mankind, who is weak and fragile. He himself said that forgiveness -- and he said this in the letter he was thinking of publishing, the open letter to Ali Agca after the attack, and which then was not published -- he said that forgiveness is the foundation of all true progress of human society.



Essentially, mercy means the understanding of weakness, the capacity to forgive. It also means the commitment not to receive in vain the grace that the Lord gives, but rather to produce in one's own life the fruits worthy of one who has been graced and covered by the mercy of God.

He also saw forgiveness as a political tool, and that forgiveness was what moved history forward.

Monsignor Oder: Yes, absolutely, because he had a Christian, theological vision of history in which not everything can be referred solely to mere economic or political matters, where the element of humanity, compassion, understanding, repentance, forgiveness, acceptance, solidarity, love, become the essential elements to engage in a true politics of God.

What is the impact of John Paul II's beatification on the Church in Poland?



Monsignor Oder: Certainly for Poland, it goes without saying, this is a milestone in our history and a very intense,



important moment, but John Paul II is not a Polish phenomenon. This is the extraordinary thing, which struck me very much, and which is one of the elements of fascination of John Paul II. He was not ashamed to speak of his homeland, of its history, of using its language, of identifying himself also with the popular religiosity of Poland, to speak of his fellow countrymen. However, that man who felt so strongly tied to his nation, was also able to be a gift for others; John Paul II was a gift for humanity.

Not only Poland wept [when John Paul II died], also Mexico, and the entire world! He truly became a gift for humanity. This is precisely his greatness. Although remaining firmly his own person, he was able to receive people from all parts of the world. And because [the Pope] was so genuine in his love for his own homeland, he was able to inspire others to recognize their own identity, history, and roots. In a certain way he brought about this new sentiment in the Church of feeling oneself a child of God, and a brother to others.

There is a second aspect that relates precisely to Poland -- and I must say that it inspired me -- was when Pope Benedict XVI was elected. There were so many Poles in St. Peter's Square who came for the funeral and who stayed, because Rome had become for them a second homeland, thanks in part to the Roman spirit that is so hospitable, generous. At the moment of the election in St. Peter's Square, you could hear shouts in Polish, "Long Live the Pope!" This truly made me understand the faith of the people of Poland. It had really grown and matured next to this great Pope who was able to live his ministry with such a strong and charismatic personality, and at the same time was able to do justice to the office itself, vicar of Christ.

Look, he was no longer, but the Church was, Peter was, the new Pope was, a German Pope, and the crowd cried out in Polish and in Italian "Long live the Pope!" This was something beautiful for me!

Were there detractors who disagreed with the Pope's desire to gather the youth together in Rome for the first World Youth Day in 1985?

Monsignor Oder: There was no disagreement on the part of the Pope nor on the part of the young people, but rather on the part of those who thought in an old-fashioned way. [John Paul II] thought in a very modern way. He was a priest who sensed things. He himself said that the gift is a mystery, that a priest must not seek to be in fashion because he is always in fashion, he is always up-to-date, because what a priest represents is Christ, and Christ is always the same. That is why the real novelty that a priest bears is Christ. And he was able to convoke these young people, based on the novelty that is Christ.

And then there wasn't enough room for the youth to stay in Rome! The Pope allowed the young people to sleep on the floors of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in sleeping bags!





Monsignor Oder: Who would have ever thought of a revolution of that sort? But this was seen from the first day, from the beginning of the pontificate when he raised the cross against every protocol, when he drew near to the people, against every tradition. Already seen was this novelty of his, the day of his election when from the balcony, other than the blessing, he was not supposed to do anything, and then he spoke. Can you imagine the confusion!

What can we tell the youth of today and future generations when they ask about John Paul II?

Monsignor Oder: I think there will be young people of the "JPII Generation" who will speak to their children as a father because, effectively, the figure of John Paul II for that generation embodied paternity. He was a father, they loved him, they argued with him. I remember, I believe it was in Mexico, a meeting where the Pope engaged in dialogue with young people: Will you give up wealth? We will. Will you give up arrogance? We will. Will you give up sex? No, they shouted. It was a dialogue, I would say, that was almost dialectical, with the young people, and yet they loved him. They didn't put all he said into practice, but they wanted to hear what he had to say, and for me, herein lies the mystery of this paternity.

It was not simply his being able to be with them, with the youth, when he joked around with his cane, when he sang, when he would take them by the hand, all of which are beautiful gestures. However, the true paternity that he was also able to exercise was to set the bar high, because a father who loves his children cannot be content just with the fact that the youth live in mediocrity. Knowing his children, he knows they have potential, a richness. He is a father. He cannot do anything but demand, expect, wish, urge, and he did this. Maybe they didn't always respond, but they knew that he relied on them, that for them he was a father who truly placed his hopes on them. I think this was a very important aspect.

And I personally had a moment that stuck with me since the first meeting I had with him when he came to Poland and spoke to young people there. In the midst of that Communist grayness, his visit was a first ray of light. He told the youth, "You young people must remember that you must expect a lot from yourselves even when no one expects anything from you. You must be demanding with yourselves." And these are the words of a father.

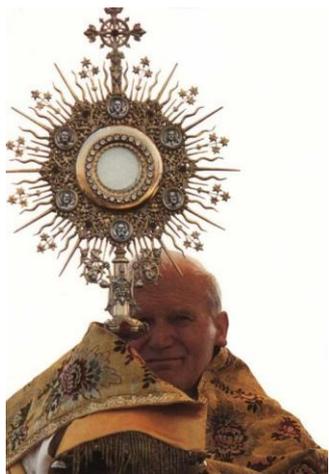
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THAT HYMN SUNG SOFTLY BEFORE THE TABERNACLE

Cardinal Giovanni Coppa

April 6, 2011





John Paul II's love for the Virgin knew no bounds. He never missed an opportunity to speak of Mary. He dedicated the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater* to her. Redemption was in fact the guideline of his Petrine Magisterium. Furthermore, he not only honoured her with his ministry as Supreme Pontiff but also in many other ways.

From the outset he wanted to recite the Rosary with the faithful on every first Saturday of the month. With his unflagging creativity he enriched the Rosary with the Mysteries of Light and, towards the end of his Pontificate, he celebrated the Year of the Rosary which bore so many fruits of devotion and spiritual renewal.

Then I remember his pilgrimages to Lourdes and Fatima. Besides, **on all his journeys he planned a visit to the world's most important Marian Shrines.**

I know of his longing to have an image of Our Lady stand out in the Vatican Basilica, where, moreover there are some marvellous chapels dedicated to her. And he wanted the Apostolic Palace at least to display an image of Our Lady, that rises tall and maternal on St Peter's Square.

Everyone knows that the motto he chose prior to his episcopal Ordination was *Totus tuus*. The future Pope took these words from the prayer of Louis Marie Grignion de Montfort, a great Marian saint. Well, not only did the Pope recite that prayer every day but he also wrote a passage of it on every page of his Homilies, Discourses and Encyclicals, on the top right hand corner of the page.

On the first page he wrote the beginning of the prayer: *Tuus totus ego sum*, "I am all yours"; on the second page he wrote *Et omnia mea tua sunt*, "And all that I have is yours", on the third, *Accipio Te in mea omnia*, "Be my guide in all things!" on the fourth, *Praebe mihi cor tuum*, "Give me your heart". And he continued in this manner on every page, when necessary repeating the individual invocations until he had finished writing.

In the archives of the Secretariat of State there are thousands of these pages in which John Paul II expressed his love for Our Lady in such intimate and moving way.

His boundless love for Mary was born from the love he had for Christ. Loving Jesus is the fulcrum of our whole life. And if this is



true for every Christian, it is even truer for the Pope. It is something so obvious that it might seem pointless to stress it, but I mention it to you because I have a special memory of John Paul II's last Apostolic Visit, which he made to the Czech Republic in 1997.

He had already been to Czechoslovakia in 1990, just after the Fall of the Berlin Wall. He then stopped in Prague, Velehrad and Bratislava. In 1995 he came on a second Visit, stopping in Prague, Bohemia and Olomouc, in Moravia. He was already ill. He was beginning to use a walking stick and joked about it with the young people, ever enthusiastically gathering around him. But he was still strong so that he could walk up stairs and did not need to take the lift.

On the first evening, after his arrival and dinner with the Bishops, he paused in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament. The sisters had prepared a large prieditiu for him but he preferred to kneel on the kneeler. I accompanied him, waiting outside the chapel. On the following evening I was detained by some engagements and urgent telephone calls and could not go with him to the chapel. I arrived there later, when he was already kneeling.

Before entering I had heard some barely perceptible singing and, when I quietly pushed the door open, I heard him singing softly before the tabernacle as he knelt on the bench. **The Pope was singing in a low voice before Jesus in the Eucharist: the Pope and Christ in the Host, Peter and Christ. For me this was overwhelming, a very strong appeal to faith and love of the Eucharist, and for the reality of the Petrine Ministry. I have never forgotten that faint singing which was, as it were, a loving conversation with Christ.**

I have only once recounted this episode in the Czech Republic, but it is good to make it known, especially now, when his Beatification is approaching because it says magnificently that we must always have a living, intimate and profound bond with Jesus, alive in the Eucharist. And it shows superlatively that John Paul II was truly in love with Christ.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize the love of the Slav peoples for the Polish Pontiff. In 1990 I was posted to Czechoslovakia, which two years later was peacefully divided into two States, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This was the greatest gift that John Paul II gave to me after that of ordaining me a bishop. I remember further that on my departure for Prague I saw him at the Vatican heliport, returning from a Visit to an Italian diocese and I said to him; "Holy Father, I am leaving tomorrow, so at last I shall see 'your' Tatra Mountains in Slovakia". But he answered me smiling, "Oh! The *Tatry* are far more beautiful on the Polish side than they are on the Slovak side!"

My experience as an Apostolic Nuncio was the most intense I had ever had. In those years, I could feel tangibly how deeply the Pope was loved by the Czech and Slovak peoples, starting with the authorities.



President Havel told me twice that John Paul II had played a fundamental role in the fall of Communism: "Of course", he maintained, "there were also other causes for the victory of freedom over Communism, but, without him, the result would not have been so sudden and unexpected".

On other occasions he stressed to me that his conversations with the Pope had always been very informal and cordial: "He spoke in Polish and I in Czech", he said, "and we understood each other very well".

What made everyone like him was the fact that he was the first Slav Pope of history. The people, born for 40 years with atheistic propaganda were beginning to realize what the Church was, what the mystery of communion and brotherhood was that she brought to people together with faith in God and the love of Christ, for so long denied.

For this reason too, John Paul II was a great gift of God to the Church and to humanity.

"Mother, Queen of my heart, I am with you...I always remember you...I am always attentive to your voice." (John Paul II, Czestachowa, 1987)

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JOHN PAUL II'S METHODIST PILOT RECALLS 'POPE OF ALL PEOPLE'

MARCH 29, 2011



Kevin Kelly talks with the Kansan who piloted Pope John Paul II during his first U.S. visit in the upcoming edition of the Catholic Key:

Pope John Paul II, fresh from a rain-soaked Mass on the Boston Commons, gave the baby-faced pilot of Shepherd I a bear hug. Then held he held him at arm's length for a good look, and proclaimed, "You are so young!"



The 32-year-old Nelson Krueger, stunned to be unexpectedly face-to-face with the pontiff in the airliner's cockpit, replied with the first words that came to his mind: "You are so wet!"

The pope let out a big laugh and looked Krueger straight in the eyes.

"The guy was so warm and friendly," Krueger told The Catholic Key. "There I was face-to-face with the Holy Father. Our eyes met, and those millions of bits of information that happen in such a moment were exchanged."

It was the start of a relationship that would last a week, and, to this day nearly 32 years later, one that the pilot would remember in minute detail for the rest of his life.

Krueger was already one of the top international pilots for Trans World Airlines when he was hand-selected by Capt. Sal Fallucco, the airline's director of flight operations, to sit in the left seat for Pope John Paul's first pastoral and state visit to the United States from Oct. 1-7, 1979.



Krueger, now retired and living in Lawrence, was on a layover in St. Louis in mid-September when he got the call from TWA's chief scheduler to get back to headquarters in Kansas City right away.

Krueger's first thought was that he was in some sort of trouble. But when he asked, the reason stunned him.

"They said, 'Go to the overhaul base. We are fitting a plane for Pope John Paul II. You are going to oversee that, because you are going to fly it,'" he said.

"I almost died," Krueger said. "I was speechless. I was stunned."

As pilot, Krueger and co-pilot Clarence Powell would take the pope from Boston to New York to Philadelphia to Des Moines to Chicago – an itinerary that was always behind schedule because the pontiff could not be pried from the millions who came to see him at every stop.

"He had to meet everybody," Krueger said. Krueger had seen the world and would see much more of it before his days as a Boeing 727 pilot would end. He had seen the pyramids of Egypt, the Holy Land, nearly all of Europe, Asia and India.

He had flown the rich, the famous, and the infamous. But this is the trip that still brings tears to his eyes. And Krueger is a Methodist.



As the Roman Catholic Church prepares to beatify Pope John Paul II on May 1, Krueger said his memories are taking on even deeper meaning. He flew not just a pope, but a certain saint.

“It’s taken 32 years to have this sink in,” he said from his home overlooking a golf course in western Lawrence, where he has dedicated a room to his memorabilia of years behind the controls, and much of it dedicated to the flight of Shepherd I, including scores of photographs, newspaper articles, and even copies of Time, Life, Newsweek and U.S. News & World Report, all with Pope John Paul II on the cover.

“This beats everything I have done in my life,” Krueger said. “There is no higher peak in my human experience than the time I got to pilot Shepherd I.” Even for a Christian of another tradition.

“He was the pope of all people,” Krueger said. *“I know a lot of Methodists and Presbyterians and Baptists who view him as their pope too. He allowed all of us to revisit and deepen our calling as Christians.”*

“He just loved people — all people,” he said. “He was just so warm and friendly with everybody he met.”

Pope John Paul II was 59 and just a year from his election when he began to build a reputation for globe-hopping. He was filled with boundless energy, even after long days in front of crowds that number in the millions.

Earlier that year, he had gone to Mexico, then to a historic pastoral visit to his native Poland, still under communist control, meeting millions at every stop.

His first U.S. visit was preceded by a pastoral visit to Ireland, where nearly a third of the island’s population attended Mass with him, and where his schedule of 16-hour days would kill a mule.

But not the pontiff that Nelson Krueger met, and grew to know better on that six-day tour of the United States. He drew energy from people who came by the hundreds of thousands everywhere he went, including airport tarmacs.



Still, the pope had time for his flight crew.

Pope John Paul II signed Krueger’s family Bible. And he blessed a rosary once owned by the Catholic grandmother of Krueger’s father-in-law. (When he returned it, his father-in-law pressed it back into the pilot’s hand. “This is for you,” he said, as tears filled both men’s eyes.)



Krueger also showed his 12-string Takamine guitar that Pope John Paul II played during a delay in the takeoff from Philadelphia to Des Moines.

Hearing that the pope played a guitar for youth in Ireland, Krueger brought his along, just in case.

Waiting for clearance to take off, Krueger unpacked his guitar and strummed a chord. Like a shot, the pontiff raced to the cockpit, a phalanx of cardinals, bishops and reporters right behind.

“He looked at the guitar, so I handed it to him,” Krueger said. “He started strumming it, then he adjusted two strings by ear. Then he strummed a full C chord and belted out ‘Silent Night,’ in a big, full, nice voice.

“Then he looked at me and nodded, like, ‘Aren’t you going to join in?’ so I did. Soon, everybody was singing, ‘Holy night. All is calm, all is bright.’”

By the time the song was finished, the flight had received its clearance. Krueger put the guitar back in its case with a TWA sticker, telling the pope that TWA meant, “This Way America.” “Oh, no,” said the pope. “It means, ‘Traveling With Angels.’”

“Everybody in the press heard that,” Krueger said.

The skies over Des Moines were overcast, but cleared when Shepherd I broke through the clouds. Then the weather turned picture-perfect for the papal Mass in Joe Hays’ Miracle Farm pasture with 400,000 people.

It was a stop that the pope himself added to his U.S. itinerary after Hays personally wrote to him that the backbone of America was its farms. This was in the midst of the worst farm crisis in the nation since the Great Depression, and one the pontiff couldn’t resist expressing his solidarity.

They were supposed to leave Des Moines in time for the pope to arrive in Chicago by 8 p.m. It wasn’t going to happen. The pope spent so much time in Iowa, especially with Hays, that the flight didn’t arrive at O’Hare Airport until past 10 p.m.

Not a soul among the people who waited extra hours for a glimpse of the pope left the Chicago airport. He disembarked to the cheers of a half a million people.

The next day, Krueger and the flight crew were issued press passes to attend the Mass in Grant Park, with a million Chicagoans.

It was at that moment that Krueger began to realize more deeply that he was witnessing something far greater than he could imagine. “Here he comes with his miter and crozier. He gets to the altar and says, ‘I look up and I see you, the people of God.’ He has no doubt that his presence is enough to bring these people together.”



“For two hours, Grant Park was a gleaming cathedral, with this leader of over a billion people at the center of it all,” Krueger said.

Standing next to Krueger was Jeff Lyons, reporter for The Chicago Tribune.

“Lyons turned to me and said, ‘Isn’t he a great guy?’” Krueger said. “What higher thing can anyone say about you?”

On the final leg of the trip from Chicago to Washington, D.C., Pope John Paul II asked to see his pilot one more time. This time, he presented Krueger with two gifts – one of 99 crystal obelisks he had commissioned with etchings of a monstrosity and cross, and a solid platinum medal with Pope John Paul II’s image.

Thirty-two years later, Krueger – the hard-boiled pilot who had done it all, seen it all – still has to wipe his eyes as he takes it from the special case in his special den, dedicated to both airline history and to the flight of Shepherd I, half his lifetime ago. And he is not ashamed to admit he cried when the pontiff died in 2005, suffering for years with Parkinson’s.

“You knew he was dying, but it still got to me,” he said. “I was thankful in one respect because he had suffered so much. I thought about going to the funeral, but so did a lot of people, and I didn’t.”

He did make one special trip to the Vatican. Krueger was on a special assignment in the fall and winter of 1991, flying U.S. soldiers to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and Operation Desert Storm. On the morning of Christmas Eve, he and his crew had a layover in Rome. Krueger went to the Vatican with a note he handed to the Swiss Guards for Msgr. Thaddeus Rakoczy, the pope’s personal secretary whom he had met 12 years before, asking if they could attend Midnight Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica. Before he got back to the hotel, he had a message.

“He remembered me,” Krueger said. “He told us to arrive two hours early in uniform with our identification.”

Krueger and his flight crew were seated in the seventh pew, five seats from the center, as they watched the preparations for the papal Mass. “I would have sat there for a week,” Krueger said. When he landed Shepherd I for the last time in 1979 and bid the pontiff farewell, Krueger and his flight crew quietly returned to Kansas City, then to his home in Lawrence.

“I picked up my wife and kids, and we went to a Kansas University football game,” he said. “But I was forever changed.”

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WEIGEL REFLECTS ON JOHN PAUL II'S LEGACY

George Weigel

George Weigel is underlining the legacy of John Paul II, noting that the Pope's achievements were rooted in decisions of his youth.

The author of "Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II" and "The End and the Beginning" gave an address on March 7 at the Rome campus of Christendom College. The lecture was titled "The Achievements of Blessed John Paul II."

Weigel said to the students, *"The achievement of John Paul II flowed from decisions he made when he was your age."*

"All of you have grown up in a culture that constantly panders to the young people," he said.

Weigel added that John Paul II, in contrast, "did not pander to them."

The author continued: *"He told you that you were capable -- through the grace of God -- of great things, and he said to never settle for anything less than the spiritual and moral greatness that the grace of God makes possible."*



"Young people responded to that by the millions, as I hope you will too -- particularly through this special time in Rome."

He recalled how Karol Wojtyla attended a clandestine seminary run by Archbishop Adamo Sapieha while the Nazis occupied Poland.

Weigel noted, "In that experience was formed a heroic image of the priest and bishop as a defender of the rights of the human person in this very talented young man who would become John Paul II."

Timothy O'Donnell, president of Christendom College, affirmed after the address, "Along with the rest of the world, we look forward to the beatification of Pope John Paul II."

He added, "This talk definitely helped our students enter into this great moment in the Church."

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