

Catholic Throwback Thursday: Remembering the day Pope John Paul II died



Blessed Pope John Paul II (1920-2005)

Today we are flashing back to 2005:

April 2 was the ninth anniversary of the death of Blessed Pope John Paul II. This holy and much-loved pope will be canonized at the Vatican on Divine Mercy Sunday, this April 27th.

Elected in 1978 at the youthful age of 58 as the 263rd successor to Saint Peter the Apostle, Cardinal Karol Joseph Wojtyla went on to serve God and the Church as pontiff for longer than any of his predecessors except for Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) and perhaps Saint Peter himself. He was the first pope from Poland and the first non-Italian elected in 455 years.

Years of debilitating illness:

For years, the Holy Father suffered from a neurological disorder believed to be Parkinson's disease. I remember how his hands trembled continuously during the homily of his Mass here in Baltimore at Oriole Park on October XX, 1995. As his health declined over the years, the pope offered all of us the powerful witness to suffering.

"It is wonderful to be able to give oneself to the very end for the sake of the kingdom of God. At the same time, I find great peace in thinking of the time when the Lord will call me: from life to life... And so I often find myself saying, with no trace of melancholy, a prayer recited by priests after the celebration of the Eucharist: 'In hora mortis meae voca me, et iube me venire ad te' (at the hour of my death, call me

and bid me come to you). This is the prayer of Christian hope.”

Letter to the Elderly, 1999

Holding vigil with the Holy Father:

After months of rapidly declining health, it had been announced the day his death that the Holy Father was in “very grave” condition. He had been unable to participate in the Holy Week and Easter liturgies for the first time in his more than 26-year pontificate.

Thousands of the faithful had gathered in St. Peter’s Square to hold a vigil for the Holy Father. Cardinal Edmund C. Szoka had led a candlelight prayer service right before the announcement of his death was made.

“Like children, we draw close around our beloved Holy Father, who taught us how to follow Jesus and how to love and serve the church and the people. This is the gift we present to him as he prepares to take his last journey. May the Madonna present him to her Son and obtain for him, through her intercession, the reward promised to the faithful servants of the Gospel.”

—Cardinal Edmund Szoka, then-President of the Governate of Vatican City State

CBS News video from that 2005 Easter Sunday: The silent pope

One of the most poignant and heart-wrenching moments occurred on Easter Sunday night when Pope John Paul appeared at his window for the final time to bless the crowds gathered below in the Square. When I found this video yesterday, I cried again as I had when I first saw the news reports on that 2005 Easter Sunday, remembering the frustration of the Holy Father who so clearly wanted to speak one last time to the faithful.

Pope John Paul II taught us not only how to live, but also how to die as he united his sufferings with those of Christ.

Born to eternal life in Christ:

Pope John Paul II passed on to eternal life at 9:37 p.m. on Saturday, April 2, 2005, just six days after Easter at the age of 84. His death was announced 17 minutes later

to journalists via an email statement from Joaquin Navarro-Valls, M.D., Director of the Vatican Press Office:

“The Holy Father died this evening at 9:37 p.m. (2:37 p.m. ET) in his private apartment. All the procedures outlined in the apostolic Constitution ‘Universi Dominici Gregis’ that was written by John Paul II on Feb. 22, 1996, have been put in motion.”

“The Holy Father’s final hours were marked by the uninterrupted prayer of all those who were assisting him in his pious death and by the choral participation in prayer of the thousands of faithful who for many hours had been gathered in Saint Peter’s Square.”

VIDEO announcing the pope’s death from CNN Headline News on April 2, 2005:

In Saint Peter’s Square:

The pope’s death was announced to the crowds in St. Peter’s Square by Cardinal Giovanni Battista:

“Dearest brothers and sisters, at 21:37, our beloved Father John Paul II has returned to the house of his Father. Let’s pray for him.”

Silence was broken by the slow tolling of one of the bells from the basilica.

A sampling of the tributes received from leaders around the world:

“The Catholic Church has lost its shepherd. The world has lost a champion of human freedom, and a good and faithful servant of God has been called home... We will always remember the humble, wise and fearless priest who became one of history’s great moral leaders.”

—President George W. Bush

“Quite apart from his role as a spiritual guide to more than a billion men, women and children, he was a tireless advocate of peace, a true pioneer in interfaith dialogue and a strong force for critical self-evaluation by the Church itself.”

—U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan

“[Without him] there would be no end of communism or at least [it would have happened] much later, and the end would have been bloody.”

—Lech Walesa

“He carried the Gospel into all corners of the world, proclaiming the dignity of every human being, the rights of the poor, and the evils of war ‘in season and out of season.’ In brief, he was a most worthy successor of the humble fisherman of Galilee upon whom the Lord built his Church.”

- Cardinal Edward Egan, Archbishop of New York

“The Church has lost a Father and a Shepherd and I have also lost a brother and a good friend.”

- Cardinal Jaime Sin, Archbishop Emeritus of Manila

“This was an extraordinary man. He was brilliant. If he had never become pope, Karol Wojtyla would have gone down, I think, as one of the major Catholic philosophers of the 20th century. ... I think that he was a strong leader, he was a brilliant guide, but more than anything else, I think, he was a man who loved people. And people understood that and people reacted to that.”

- Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, Archbishop of Washington, D.C.

“Pope John Paul II embodied the greatest qualities of the Second Vatican Council: a deep fidelity to Jesus Christ and his Gospel; profound confidence and joy in the Catholic faith; an openness to the good in the world; fraternal love for other

Christians and the Jewish people; and a respect for all persons of good will. He knew personal suffering throughout his life. He experienced the cost of war, genocide and political oppression firsthand. These things never dented his faith. They did the opposite. They led him more deeply into the heart of God.”

- Archbishop Charles Chaput, Archbishop of Denver

“This is a man who has carried the moral weight of the world for 26 years ... turning himself into the only moral reference for humanity in recent years of wars and difficulties.”

- Cardinal Jaime Ortega, Archbishop of Havana

“Pope John Paul was a leader of manifest holiness and a faithful and prayerful friend of the Anglican Church. There will be time in the days ahead for the proper tributes to be paid; for now we remember his life and ministry with thankfulness and hold the church that he led in our thoughts and prayers.”

- Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams

Pope John Paul II was “unquestionably the most influential voice for morality and peace in the world during the last 100 years. He was convinced that the complex problems of our world are ultimately moral and spiritual in nature, and only Christ can set us free from the shackles of sin and greed and violence.”

- Rev. Billy Graham

“No Pope did more for the Jews.”

- Rabbi Marvin Hier, founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles



Pope John Paul II's body was placed in St. Peter's Basilica for private prayers and

visitation by Vatican officials and foreign dignitaries. The American delegation included three presidents. Seen here: George W. Bush, Laura Bush, George H. W. Bush, Bill Clinton, Condoleezza Rice, and Andrew Card.



Archbishop Stanislaw Dsiwysz (right), longtime priest-secretary to the Holy Father, places a white veil over his face before the casket was closed. Archbishop Piero Marini looks on. (Photo: Getty Images Europe)



Crowds filled St. Peter's Square after the death of Pope John Paul II was announced. *(Photo by Alessandra Tarantino/AP)*



The Holy Father's Funeral Mass took place on April 8 with Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who would be elected as Pope Benedict XVI in the conclave that followed, as Principal Celebrant and Homilist.



Members of various Christian denominations attended Pope John Paul II's funeral in St. Peter's Square. *(Photo: Franco Origlia/Getty Images Europe)*



Many chanted "Santo subito!!" (Sainthood now!!) before and after the Funeral Mass.

Long banners displayed the hopes of the faithful that Pope John Paul II would be declared a saint on the spot. These hopes will be realized on April 27, 2014, just nine years after the death of this beloved pope.

Pre-funeral rituals and the gathering of world leaders at the Funeral Mass of Pope John Paul II:

A great resource of info on the life and death of Pope John Paul II can be found on the EWTN website and the Catholic News Service.