

Holy Rosary celebrates canonization of two saints at Divine Mercy Sunday Mass

By Elizabeth Lowe

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Michael Chorabik encountered St. John Paul II decades before the former pope became a saint.

Chorabik, a native of Krakow, Poland, and a parishioner of Holy Rosary in Fells Point, was confirmed by Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła, then-Archbishop of Kraków, in the 1970s.

Chorabik felt goose bumps as he articulated his feelings about the canonization of St. John Paul II.

"It means a lot, especially for Polish people," he said. "He was a family man, a family pope and everybody loved him."

Chorabik was among the hundreds who filled the Polish parish for the Divine Mercy Sunday Mass, celebrated primarily in English, April 27.

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Popes John XXIII and John Paul II were declared the Catholic Church's newest saints by Pope Francis during a special Mass in St. Peter's Square April 27, the day on which the church celebrated the second Sunday of Easter and Divine Mercy.

St. John Paul II served as pope from 1978 to 2005 and was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI on Divine Mercy Sunday, May 1, 2011. St. John XXIII was pope from 1958 to 1963; then-Blessed John Paul II beatified him in 2000.

Holy Rosary, which has served Baltimore's Polish-Catholic community since the late 19th century, was visited by the future Pope John Paul II, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, in 1976.

Jeannette Krol, a Holy Rosary parishioner, grinned as she talked about the canonization of St. John Paul II.

"This is a very special day in our parish," said Krol, whose grandparents were born in Poland and still has family there. "It's a very good day for the church."

Krol noted that it is because of St. John XXIII calling for the Second Vatican Council

that Masses are celebrated in languages besides Latin.

"It is because of him we can have (parts of) this Mass in Polish," she said.

In his homily, Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, the principal celebrant, said while Ss. John XXIII and John Paul II died some 40 years apart, "their combined influence on the events of human history will last for ages to come."

Bishop Rozanski highlighted the day's Gospel reading, which he said "speaks to us not only of the doubt that Thomas experienced at hearing the news from his fellow disciples that the Lord had rose from the dead, but truly our own faith journey that can sometime be clouded by a sense of doubt and struggle.

"Today, my dear friends, there is great cause for rejoicing," the bishop said. "Two beloved fellow Christians, who were pilgrims like us, are now known as saints. Through the example of Thomas in the Gospel and with the help of Divine Mercy, we too are on that journey to holiness. May St. Faustina Kowalska, St. John XXIII and St. John Paul II be models of holiness for us, transforming any of our doubts into faith and our lives into the sainthood that God wills for each one of us."

Bishop Rozanski told the Catholic Review he concelebrated a Mass with St. John Paul II and met him in an audience following a liturgy in Rome in 2002.

"It was unbelievable that I was coming that close to a man who had been known for such holiness during his life on earth, who would be such a great influence," he said. The canonizations of Ss. John XXIII and John Paul II are "unbelievable" in a sense, Bishop Rozanski said, because we tend to think of saints as people who died centuries ago.

During the two-hour Divine Mercy liturgy there was exposition of the Blessed Sacrament as the faithful chanted the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. Also featured were a eucharistic procession and veneration of a first-class relic of St. Pope John Paul II - a drop of his blood - which the parish welcomed last year on Divine Mercy Sunday. Catholics waited in line for confession.

Holy Rosary has a special connection to St. Faustina Kowalska, a 20th century Polish nun who had a vision of Jesus in which he asked for devotions to divine mercy.

Father Ronald Pytel, a former Holy Rosary pastor, was cured of congestive heart failure after prayers were offered to the Polish nun for her intercession on his behalf. Father Pytel's unexplained recovery in 1995 was the second miracle required for St. Faustina's canonization.

The place where prayers were offered at Holy Rosary is now the archdiocesan Shrine of the Divine Mercy.

St. John Paul II established Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000 as a feast celebrated on the second Sunday of Easter. He announced the new feast day when he canonized St. Faustina.

Also on April 27, Baltimore Auxiliary Bishop Denis J. Madden led a eucharistic

procession following the 10:45 a.m. Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore to the Pope John Paul II Prayer Garden, around the corner from the basilica, and placed a wreath at the new saint's statue.

In 1995, then-17-year-old Christopher Rhodovi was a member of the Baltimore Symphony Chorus. He sang at an interfaith concert at the basilica on Sept. 21, 1995. The concert was among the events celebrating Pope John Paul II's visit to Baltimore. It was held about two weeks before his Oct. 8 visit.

"I'm really excited that Pope John Paul II is becoming a saint," said Rhodovi, now 36, a cantor and bass section leader at Immaculate Conception, Towson, and parishioner, cantor and music director at St. Leo, Little Italy. "For the first 28 years of my life, I only knew one pope."

In celebration of St. John Paul II's canonization, the basilica and Archdiocese of Baltimore created a special exhibit commemorating the former pope's visit to Baltimore.

The exhibit, which opened April 24, is housed in the Basilica Museum, in the basilica's lower level. Items include vestments, photos and a private telegram sent by the pope to Cardinal William H. Keeler, thanking him for the warm welcome he received in Baltimore.

The exhibit is open during the basilica's normal operating hours and is free.

For information, call 410-727-3564 or visit baltimorebasilica.org.

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