

Pilgrims to Italy have special appreciation for JP II

ROME - Few traveling with the Archdiocese of Baltimore and the Catholic Review on this canonization pilgrimage feel a greater debt to Blessed John Paul II than Kevin and Anna Harkins.

They are here celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary, courtesy of her parents and their pride in their homeland of Poland and its most famous son of this era, Karol Wojtyla.

Anna was born in Staszow, Poland, and was 17 years old when she emigrated to the U.S. in 1982 along with her mother, Barbara. Anna's father, Konstanty, had come to the U.S. earlier, and a reunion was made difficult by Soviet satellite politics.



"Anna's Dad came to the U.S. from Poland on a travel visa," Kevin said, "but then the authorities said 'You can't come back and family can't leave.' "

Kevin and Anna are parishioners of St. John the Beloved in McLean, Va. A retired U.S. Coast Guard officer who spent most of his time in the service at a station in Cape Cod, Harkins runs his own human resources business.

Anna's parents reside in Brooklyn, N.Y.

"Mom said there is never going to be a perfect time, just drop everything and go," Anna Harkins said. "She is a wise woman."