

Signs of hope at dawn of a new decade

Many consider the first decade of the new millennium to have been a mostly difficult one.

The Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States set the stage for increased vigilance at home, heightened security for travelers and involvement of our nation in wars on two fronts. Global discussions around the morality of those conflicts included the reflections of leaders of many faiths, among them numerous Catholic bishops and two popes.

It's a decade in which we lost Pope John Paul II, a dynamic leader who took his message to millions worldwide, so that his reach went well beyond the more than a billion Catholics under his pastoral care. The church elected a new pope, a distinguished theologian with long experience as a wise counsel to John Paul II. Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger of Germany chose the name Benedict XVI, and though not the globetrotter that his predecessor was (age and style have much to do with it), he already has visited 11 countries, including the U.S. in 2008, and plans to add four more European countries in 2010.

The early part of the decade saw economic boom, while the latter saw a tremendous decline. Many lost jobs and homes, and their ability to feed and shelter their families. Agencies such as Catholic Charities of Baltimore were and are always ready to provide services - meals, employment assistance and housing.

While many aspects of life may look difficult at the dawn of the new decade, we do well to recall the words of John Paul II. In "Tertio Millennio Adveniente" ("As the Third Millennium Draws Near"), he noted there is always reason to hope, even as the world faced crises in the days before the new millennium and the Great Jubilee Year.

"There is also need for a better appreciation and understanding of *the signs of hope present in the last part of this century*, even though they often remain hidden from

our eyes. *In society in general*, such signs of hope include: scientific, technological and especially medical progress in the service of human life, a greater awareness of our responsibility for the environment, efforts to restore peace and justice wherever they have been violated. ... *In the Church*, they include a greater attention to the voice of the Spirit through the acceptance of charisms and the promotion of the laity, a deeper commitment to the cause of Christian unity and the increased interest in dialogue with other religions and with contemporary culture” (italics in original; TMA, 46).

Life is always about transitions, and anticipating the ups and downs that come with being alive and fully human. But we remain people of hope, because we have faith in God who has revealed himself to us in Christ, his son.

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