

Vatican officials, Catholics on the street talk about Pope John Paul

VATICAN CITY – Vatican officials, Catholic leaders around the world and ordinary people on the streets and in St. Peter's Square were more pleased than surprised by news that Pope John Paul II will be beatified May 1.

Portuguese Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins, retired prefect of the Congregation for Saints' Causes, said, "finally" more than once during a brief conversation Jan. 14 just minutes after Pope Benedict XVI signed a decree recognizing the miracle needed to beatify Pope John Paul.

"This is what the whole world was waiting for," said Cardinal Saraiva Martins, who was the head of the saints congregation when Pope John Paul died and when his sainthood cause was opened.

"I can't help being happy. This is the crowning moment of a work I began," he said.

The cardinal said the written work of Pope John Paul is so vast and the time before his beatification so short that the best "spiritual preparation" Catholics could make would be to "thank God for Pope John Paul's example of holiness and recommit ourselves to follow his example."

Carl Anderson, supreme knight of the Knights of Columbus, said Pope John Paul's upcoming beatification is a "call to each of us to emulate his personal holiness."

Anderson, who stood in St. Peter's Square on the day of Pope John Paul's funeral as many shouted "Santo subito!" ("Sainthood now!"), said there were many who were ready to have him beatified that very day.

In an e-mail to Catholic News Service, Anderson called the upcoming beatification a great opportunity for the world to focus on the pope's message of human dignity.

"He led by example, caring for the poor, the intellectually and physically disabled, the unborn, the oppressed. He forgave those who did him harm, and he broke down

barriers. He had great respect even for those who differed with him religiously. In short, Pope John Paul is a model the world needs," he said.

Anderson said the beatification is not a recognition of the pope's "successful papacy or a thank-you for his good work" but a call for each person to "imitate the holiness, the love of God and neighbor that this man exhibited throughout his life."

Jim Nicholson, a former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, who also attended Pope John Paul's funeral, said the vast crowd that day was a testament to the pope's exceptional qualities "of leadership and hope."

In a phone call from his Washington law office, Nicholson told CNS he was "extremely pleased" for the pontiff, whom he frequently described as a "hope-filled freedom fighter." During his 2001-2005 role as ambassador, he got to know Pope John Paul pontiff personally and said he greatly admired his "adherence to hope, faith and prayer, coupled with courage and clever actions."

Jim Young, a Presbyterian from Ohio, was in St. Peter's Square when the beatification announcement was made. He said his only real reaction was that he'd better make sure he found some Pope John Paul souvenirs because "I'm related to a bunch of Polish Catholics who were already convinced he's a saint."

Giovanni Caponi, one of the souvenir-sellers who has a stand on the boulevard leading to St. Peter's Square, said the news will be good for business.

From a sales point of view, "John Paul is our most popular figure. No one greater exists. He's No. 1," said Caponi, who described himself as a nonbeliever.

Kaitlin Benedict, a 21-year-old Catholic from Eden, N.Y., said she thought the decision to beatify Pope John Paul just over six years after his death "is a little fast. I was surprised. Usually these things take decades and now they're just changing up tradition. But if they feel so strongly ...," she said, her voice trailing off.

Brigida Jones, a 26-year-old Australian from Melbourne, said Pope John Paul "was probably one of our best popes; he was a people's pope."

The young woman said, "I think he did so much when he was alive, and you'd just

see him on television and get this sense of peace – obviously he was holy.”

Contributing to this story was Carol Zimmermann in Washington.