

HOMILY
BY ADAM CARDINAL MAIDA
MASS FOR THE 25TH JUBILEE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
BLESSED SACRAMENT CATHEDRAL
SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2003 – 10:00 AM

Bishop Anderson, Monsignor LeFevre and my dear Friends of the Cathedral Parish of the Most Blessed Sacrament, and my Brothers and Sisters from all around the Archdiocese:

On this day, as a Church of Detroit, we give thanks and praise to God for the gift and blessing of the twenty-five years our Holy Father has served as Vicar of Christ and Vicar of St. Peter. This anniversary is rather unique in the history of the Church, since only two popes have served longer than our Holy Father. But even beyond the blessing of stability that his pontificate has offered to the Church, we rejoice in the many charisms and beautiful faith qualities that radiate from this holy man of God.

We truly have been blessed to enjoy his leadership in our Church for a whole quarter century as he has helped us to continue to implement the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, and as he has led us into the beginning of the Third Millennium of Christianity. He has been an outspoken prophet and messenger of the Gospel of Life in over one hundred pastoral visits throughout the world and has probably met and touched more individuals than any other human being in world history. And he has done all this in the name of the Lord Jesus as his humble and faith-filled servant.

There are many ways that we could reflect upon the pontificate of our Holy Father and put it in perspective, understanding its meaning and application for our own lives. Historians and the media tend to look at things in terms of the external accomplishments, and so, they are quick to highlight Pope John Paul II's influence in bringing about the fall of Communism in Poland and throughout Eastern Europe. But his primary ministry has not been in the realm of

politics; it has been a service of the Word. In the tradition of missionary apostle, St. Paul, he sees himself as a pilgrim pope, evangelizing and *re*-evangelizing the people of God and people of good will everywhere. He has proclaimed the Gospel of Life in word and in deed – through fourteen encyclicals and countless messages and apostolic letters, but above all, by the witness of his own faith journey which has included tremendous personal suffering and much patient endurance.

Looking at today's Scriptures in conjunction with the life and ministry of our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, it struck me that we could summarize this pontificate with the following phrase: "God's grace is at work *everywhere!*" This theme resonates with the Scriptures for this 26th Sunday of the year; it is a message which challenges each of us to take a new look at how we ourselves are living the faith that we have received, the faith that we share in common with our Holy Father.

Among the many gifts and qualities of our Holy Father, I would like to focus on three specific ones which accord well with the Scriptures for today. First of all, whenever anyone thinks of our Holy Father, we cannot help but remember May 13, 1981, when he was almost assassinated on St. Peter's Square as he made his way among the thousands of pilgrims who had come to greet him. Who of us was not touched deeply by his exquisite act of tenderness and forgiveness toward his would-be assassin as he visited him in prison and explicitly spoke of his own forgiveness and the mercy of God? This gesture of our Holy Father, combined with his deep faith and the providence of God and the protection of Our Lady of Fatima, is a genuine tribute to his deep faith and the grace of God at work in everyone and in every event.

Our Holy Father speaks about seeing the "seeds of the Gospel" in every culture and in every human heart; the role of the Church is to awaken that potential and help each person to

realize its potential according to the circumstances of his or her life. As we all know, the best preaching is done not with *words* but with *deeds*. And so, our Holy Father – eloquent linguist though he is – preaches most powerfully by the way that he has forgiven his assassin and by the way he has reached out with genuine love and compassion to people of every possible life circumstance. It is no wonder that he wanted his own 25th Jubilee to coincide with the beatification of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, a woman who certainly embodied, exemplified and summarizes our Holy Father’s complete selfless giving. When he was ordained a bishop over four decades ago, he chose well a motto which reflects his life and ministry: *Totus Tuus* – which means “completely yours,” a phrase from St. Louis DeMontfort, paraphrasing the Blessed Virgin Mary and her attitude of complete disposition to God’s will.

This theme of rejoicing in God’s grace at work in everyone and everything certainly is a strong part of the message of today’s first reading from Numbers and also the Gospel from St. Mark. Just as Moses rejoiced that God’s spirit was at work in Eldad and Medad, even though they had not been present on the mountaintop, Jesus also rejoiced that people outside the circle of disciples were using His name to bring about healing. We are challenged, therefore, by the example of our Holy Father and by the Scriptures for today to ask ourselves the question: Are we truly open and looking for the grace of God and rejoicing in the grace of God at work in very unlikely circumstances and people we might readily dismiss?

A second quality of our Holy Father is related to the first. Just as he believes the grace of God is to be found everywhere and respected as it is discovered, at the same time, he is ready and willing to be a missionary. What does this mean for us in the circumstances of our lives? After all, we are not the pope! While that is true, at the same time, there is a way that each of us can and should proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ by fidelity to our own vocation, by a life

of daily prayer, by the way we live justly and use the resources God gives us for building up the common good, always thinking beyond our own personal advantage. During his pontificate, our Holy Father has beatified more than one hundred thirty people, and canonized well over four hundred fifty saints. Again and again, in those ceremonies, he has reminded us of the call to holiness that we experience in and through the normal circumstances of our lives. He himself is a great witness to this very message as he patiently and humbly accepts his own frail health and limitations. A person can be a missionary in spirit even without necessarily traveling very far. Consider the example of St. Therese of Lisieux, the Little Flower, the greatest missionary of all time, who never even left the Carmelite Monastery where she lived and died at the age of 26.

Here in Detroit, we can take special pride in the fact that we were one of the many cities that our Holy Father chose to visit during his 1987 pastoral visit to our nation. We have a special bond of affection and significance in his heart, and so we are challenged for our part to respond to his care as our shepherd, asking ourselves whether we are truly building up the whole Church and working for the salvation of all people everywhere.

As we honor our Holy Father this day, it is not so much about him personally, but more about recognizing his ministry and his office and the role he has played and continues to play in keeping the Church united in faith and service. We will be reflecting on that service in a very vivid way this afternoon as many of us listen to the concert arranged by Dr. Norah Duncan IV, on the theme of solidarity, a virtue which our Holy Father has exemplified and underscored in his writing and speaking, the virtue of putting the common good ahead of our own personal needs or desires. Mr. George Wiegel will also speak to this same point as he reflects on his own personal experience of having closely followed our Holy Father and written his official biography.

A third and final message I would like to highlight is the way our Holy Father has continually affirmed the dignity of every human life from the first moment of conception until last natural breath. He sees the absolute connection between the mystery of the Sacraments and the presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist and the way we must treat the least member of the Lord's Body – whether it be a child in the womb or a person struggling with chronic health in body or spirit, an immigrant or a person with disabilities, or one who is breathing his or her last. He truly believes and lives out the teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel that we must care for the least of our brothers and sisters – even to the point of offering them something as simple as a cup of water.

It is no surprise that he would have a great love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Since she herself had the privilege of carrying in her own womb, the body of the Lord Jesus, she truly can be called Mother of the Redeemer. From the very beginning of his pontificate, our Holy Father has encouraged us not to be afraid and to look to the Blessed Virgin Mary as our guide and model; we are to follow her very special pilgrimage of faith by responding wholeheartedly to the gift and grace of God as it is made known to us.

Yes, the grace of God is at work everywhere! We rejoice this day in the way God's grace has been shining *upon* and *through* our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II. According to God's will, may he continue to be a strong, charismatic leader for our Church as we work and pray together for the coming of the Lord's Kingdom when God's grace will truly be fulfilled in the Communion of Saints forever. Amen.