

**Memorial Mass for Pope John Paul II,  
Friday, April 8, 2005, Blessed Sacrament Cathedral  
(Acts 10: 34-43; Phil 3:20-4:1; Jn 21: 15-19)**

**Homily by Bishop Earl Boyea, Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Detroit**

Some in our midst love to construct top ten lists. It seems to me appropriate on this day to reflect on the top ten blessings which have been ours due to the life and ministry of Pope John Paul II, of happy memory. However, I wish to start at the top, at number one.

First of all, we have called him, His Holiness, for so long that we may forget that he was an outstanding example of holiness to all of us. Certainly, he, like everyone of us, was a sinner and we do pray that whatever sins he has committed may be cleansed from him by God's wonderful love and power. However I believe, and I am pretty certain I am not alone on this, that he is a saint. While we must await the infallible verdict of our next Holy Father on this matter, nonetheless, in my heart I already revere him as a saint. He has lived what all of us live. All of us baptized are filled with the presence of the Most Blessed Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in baptism we were also filled with the great virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity. John Paul loved Jesus deeply and so fed the sheep entrusted to his care with all that he had thus showing us how to live these virtues to a heroic degree. He has also shown us how to be in conscious communion with that indwelling Trinity. As he did after the Great Jubilee Year of 2000, Pope John Paul called us into the deep, to go beyond where we find ourselves and to delve more deeply into the mystery of God who dwells within each one of us. His own example of holiness calls us to that kind of holiness. He was a mystic who spent great time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, even doing a great deal of writing in the presence of Jesus. He lived in and with God.

Secondly, when even MSNBC and FOX start referring to him as John Paul the Great, is there any doubt that he will join his brothers, Leo the Great, Gregory the Great, and Nicholas the Great? He has been a gift of God to us in this particular time in history. We needed his guidance, his vision, and his steady faith. He has been great because he has been a superlative teacher, a real Doctor of the Church. He has looked at our world and our cultures and has found therein a truth to be treasured and valued. He has insisted on dialogue with the world, on holding together Faith and Reason when others would put them asunder. He has been a most brilliant teacher about the importance of the dignity of the human person from conception to natural death, including his wonderful theology of the human body. But most of all he has been the official interpreter for all of us of the "great gift of Vatican Council II," as he called it in his final testament, concluding, "For my part I thank the eternal Pastor Who allowed me to serve this very great cause [of realizing the Council] during the course of all the years of my pontificate." His greatness is also attested by the fact that he continued to teach us in season and out, even when we may not have wanted to hear what he had to say. We all have need of being challenged, for we grow complacent in our faith. He taught with zeal, always presenting the Truth of the Gospel.

Thirdly, John Paul the Great has continued the reform of the Church, that beloved Bride of Christ, who in her members always stands in need of reform. He has given us the great revision of the Code of Canon Law, itself a testimony to the council, as well as the wonderful gift of the Universal Catechism which serves as a constant guide to all the Church as she moves toward her spouse, Jesus Christ. But John Paul has also given us a body of texts, his 14 encyclicals, which move all of us to that constant reformation of heart and mind, which alone can bring us to holiness.

Fourth, God has made this Holy Father an amazing instrument in His hands to call to and to serve our young people. Can anyone explain the appeal to so many thousands of young men and women of an old, sick man, hardly able to walk and barely understandable? It was only his love for them, the love of a real shepherd who wanted to feed them for the Lord, something that young people both knew and sensed that allowed them to reply in kind; his holiness was palpable; in his presence you could feel it as an aura about him. That is why they came to Denver and to Toronto and to so many other places.

Fifth, historians, of course, highlight his role in the defeat of godless communism, even in the face of the attempted assassination. His efforts here also flowed from his valuing of the human person and specifically his seeing the worth of the working man and woman. After all, he himself lived that life. He worked with his hands. He knew the desire for freedom which all persons crave and he gave his heart and soul to assist his brothers and sisters to achieve that freedom which ultimately flows from the dignity given them all by God. It is this same foundation that leads to some of his cries against materialist consumerism and capitalism and the neglect of the poor in our world. In this, John Paul reminded us often of that line in Paul's Letter to the Philippians we heard today, "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."

Sixth, as he also wrote in his final testament, "How can I not recall so many non-Catholic Christian brothers! And the rabbi of Rome and so many representatives of non-Christian religions!" Pope John Paul has continued to strive for the full breathing of the Church with both her lungs—east and west—and with all Christians to achieve that unity which Christ prays for; he strove with a deeply personal love to be reconciled with our elder brothers, the members of the Jewish faith; and he worked tirelessly with all religions for the common good and to reach the truth.

Seventh, this pope was a great missionary and evangelizer, traveling the world, never as an accidental tourist, but always seeking brothers and sisters to love and opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In this he was as one with the Apostles, described in Acts 10 today. He had been commissioned to preach, to testify and he did that without hesitation.

Eighth, he promoted for all of us the graces of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, including this year in which we find ourselves. This was also demonstrated so clearly in his many confessions of the sins of the Church and calls for reconciliation with the alienated. Most personally we saw this as he forgave Ali Ajca in his prison cell.

Ninth, what a gift was the final witness of his own suffering. He not only showed us how to live but he also showed us how to die. He wrote in his final testament a note in 1980: “each of us must bear in mind the prospect of death. And must be ready to present himself before the Lord and Judge—Who is at the same time Redeemer and Father.” He concluded that text in 2000 with these words “Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.”

Tenth and finally, he had an incredible devotion to Mary, the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church and clearly his mother as well. He concluded practically everything he wrote and said with a praise of Mary. Can we do any less? We commend him, our brother, our saintly, great brother, Karol, John Paul, to Mary that she will guide him to paradise even as she has guided him throughout his life. God bless you all.