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“A profound image of the Holy Father that has stayed with me through the years is that of him visiting prison to meet and embrace the young Turk who had attempted to assassinate him. His mercy, compassion, and forgiveness toward the man who had tried to cut short his life is a challenge to all of us in a world where petty grudges, bitter vengeance, and blood feuds tear apart families, communities, and nations. John Paul’s example showed us that for those who follow the non-violent path of Jesus, God’s grace can bring about reconciliation and peace.

“I also remember the Holy Father for reaching out across national and religious barriers to bring together the world’s religious leaders to pray for peace in Assisi, inspiring hope for a better world. His outreach and travels all over the world reminded us that we are all children of God. Embodying the principle that true peace can only come about through justice, he challenged those who have much in this world to take responsibility for those without even basic resources, and championed the cause of human rights wherever he traveled.

“On a personal note, John Paul’s witness in his own suffering and his recent New Year’s message about respect and care for the elderly have inspired and sustained those of us caring for our aged parents.”