

The Love of Our Shepherd – April 3, 2005
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The Holy Father (may God rest his soul and seat him at His right hand!) inspired me with a sense of Christ's great love for us when I saw him on September 1, 2005.

I was in Italy in the role of a pilgrim, traveling with Fr. Chuck Kosanke and Teresa Tomeo. I had been eagerly looking forward to my audience with the Holy Father for months. Originally, I had balked at going on the pilgrimage as I am a teacher at St. Anne Elementary School. My pilgrimage would overlap the first couple days of school. But, after much prayer and consideration, I felt that I had to go because I wanted to be in the presence of His Holiness, to breathe the same rarified air, to bask in the love he exudes for the "children" he has in his care. I was afraid that if I did *not* go on this trip, I might never have the opportunity to see him ever again. My premonition proved all too true.

When the Holy Father was wheeled out onto the stage of the auditorium, tears cascaded down my cheeks. He seemed so frail, so weak, so ill. He struggled for every breath, even back then. I sobbed in empathy, and gratitude, for he did not have to be there. But there he was because of his great love for those he shepherds. As each church group from around the world was introduced, they would rise and sing him songs, cheer, and joyfully chant their love for this humble successor of St. Peter. It seemed that the outpourings of love resuscitated His Holiness. I was overwhelmed by his love, his grace, and his determination to greet us all in our languages. He was a remarkable example of redemptive suffering, of a loving Father, and an inspiration. God's love was palpably alive for me that day.

Like the other pilgrims, I had brought along many items to be blessed by His Holiness. One particular item was especially interesting to me. I had received a medal from WDEO Catholic Radio for a donation I had made. It was a medal of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. I was wearing it when he blessed my things. Imagine that – a future saint blessing a medal of himself!!

I was on a retreat for MISSION: POSSIBLE when I learned that he had passed away. I retired to my room to grieve for him in private. His Holiness had touched my heart deeply. I will never forget Pope John Paul II and the courage he exemplified. Our Holy Father did not mouth empty words about how to live as Christ. HE preached the Gospel daily by his actions--*using words only* when the rest of us just didn't "get it"!

May the Lord bless and keep Him close and grant us comfort as we mourn the loss of this GREAT and HOLY man!