



# He Changed *the Course* of World History

The pontificate of John Paul II changed the course of world history.

Quite simply, he transformed the minds and hearts of hundreds of millions of people. This makes his pontificate one of the most important in the two-thousand-year-period of Christian history.

## **An Explosion of Love and Respect**

In the days immediately preceding John Paul II's death, and again before and after his funeral, we stood witness to an unparalleled explosion of love for the person of the deceased Pope – this not only among Catholics but also among other Christian confessions and faith groups as well as non-Christians and people of good will. **The Holy See reports that 4 million pilgrims from all over the world converged on Rome to take part in the funeral of John Paul II. 6000 accredited journalists covered all the events associated with the illness, death and burial of the Pope. 137 television networks from 81 countries broadcast the funeral ceremonies; but it is certain that the number was substantially higher, since**

many of the media outlets were not registered. **Delegations of presidents and world leaders from 180 countries** attended the event, as well as many others from the various Christian churches, religious communities and non-Christian religions. Relying on information provided by the Italian policing services, the Holy See reported that between April 4 and 7, when the body of John Paul II lay in state in St. Peter's Basilica, about 350 people entered the Basilica every minute – 21 thousand every hour. In order to see and pay final homage to the body of the Pope for a few seconds, people had to wait for an average of 18 to 24 hours in a line that extended five kilometers. To enable those who could not get to St. Peter's Square and the Via della Conciliazione for the funeral Mass, 29

Telebeam "jumbo screens" had to be set up at various points throughout the city of Rome.

**During the Pope's final agony, death and funeral we witnessed a public display of respect, affection and love for John Paul II on a massive scale such as human history has never known.** Day and night, throughout the Holy Father's final illness, tens of thousands of people, mostly youth, stood gathered in prayer in St. Peter's Square to express their spiritual solidarity with the dying Pope. **Finally, at 9:37 p.m., Saturday, April 2, on the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, the Holy Father whispered a soft "Amen" and departed for the house of his Heavenly Father.** At the same time, in St. Peter's Square, about 100 thousand of the faithful were praying the rosary. Archbishop Leonardo Sandri announced the death of John Paul to the assembled crowd. After a short applause, all knelt down, and a period of profound silence ensued. After this, the crowd resumed praying the rosary.

Meanwhile, in Italy, Poland and elsewhere throughout the world, hundreds of millions of people stood





: Praying the rosary for the Holy Father, 2 April 2004

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by in prayer. Everywhere one sensed an extraordinary mood of goodwill and fraternal feeling. There was no despair, only a sense of solemnity and the profound peace that flows from the Risen Lord. People gathered spontaneously in town squares and churches to form prayer groups, to take part in eucharistic adoration and avail themselves of the sacrament of penance. **Long lines formed in front of the confessionals. Numerous conversions took place.**

**Commentators agree that world interest in the person of John Paul II during the time of his illness, death and funeral was so great as to be far and away the greatest happening in the history of mankind.** Over the course of 72 hours, the death of the Holy Father received tens times more media coverage than did the last U.S. presidential elections over the same period of time. Publishing the results of its study, the *Global Language Monitor* reports that the Vatican

broadcasts covering John Paul II's final illness, death and funeral commanded a far greater viewing audience than did dramatic events such as September 11 and the tsunami disaster. This was certainly the case in the United States, where every television station provided coverage of the events in the Vatican for hours on end; but the same was true for Latin America, Europe, the Philippines, South Korea, and many other countries.

In secular Great Britain, where the mass media take very little notice of faith matters, the death of John Paul II brought about a complete about-face. The April 4 edition of *The Daily Mirror* devoted 19 pages to the deceased Pontiff; *The Independent*, 13 pages; *The Times*, 11 pages. Other dailies and periodicals as well as radio and TV stations followed suit.

Grace Davie, director of the Center for European Studies at Exeter University in England, opined that the reaction of Europeans to the death of the Pope revealed the fragility of modern secularism.

In the United States, in an April 7 article, even the anti-Catholic *New* ☞

: Procession from the Apostolic Palace to St. Peter's Basilica, 4 April 2005

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Mourners lined up in front of St. Peter's to pay homage to the deceased Pope

for Arturo Mari

*Lord's will. He alone will decide when and how I must end my earthly life and pastoral ministry. In life and in death—"Totus Tuus" through the Immaculate One. Accepting this death even now, I trust that Christ will give me the grace necessary for my final passage, or Pasch. I trust also that it will prove useful to that most important cause which I am striving to serve: the salvation of mankind, the survival of the human family, all nations and peoples (here I am especially mindful of my own homeland), as well as those particular individuals who have been entrusted to me 'for the glory of the Church and the glory of God Himself.'*

John Paul II's desire as expressed in his final testament has been completely realized. **Jesus made extraordinary "use" of his death "for the salvation of mankind."** We witnessed the great miracle of Christ's love acting on countless numbers of people through the suffering and death of John Paul II. God alone knows how many people throughout the world opened their hearts to Christ, through the Sacrament of Penance and their resolve to walk the "narrow path" of faith with Christ every day (cf. Mt 7:14).

In his funeral homily the new Pontiff, Benedict XVI, observed that "in offering his life to God on behalf of his flock—the flock of the whole world—in his daily service to the Church and, above all, in the difficult trials of his final months, John Paul II remained a priest to the very end. In this way he became one with Christ, the Good

*York Times* admitted that John Paul II had *enjoyed great success among the youth, since he left behind him an entire generation of engaged young Roman Catholics, who give the Church a more conservative character than their parents.*

Astonishing also was the reaction of the mass media in the Muslim countries. Archbishop Giuseppe de Andrea—papal nuncio to Kuwait, Bahrain, Yemen and Qatar, and apostolic representative to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Oman—commented on the striking beauty and comprehensiveness of those countries' coverage of John Paul's illness, death and funeral. Newspapers and magazines devoted their first pages to the person of the Pontiff, while TV and radio stations gave extensive airtime to the Vatican's coverage of the events. All seven countries of this region sent official state representatives to the funeral of the Holy Father.

### **The Fascination with John Paul II's Holiness.**

John Paul II's extraordinary personality fascinated people throughout the world. Everyone who had the good fortune of meeting him could sense his radiant love, holiness and closeness to God. **John Paul II was a man of prayer and a mystic. For this reason Jesus Christ was able to act through him and manifest His love.** People knew this intuitively. Thus their spontaneous cries and banners calling

for his instant canonization, *Santo subito!* John Paul II carried out God's will "to the very end." With enormous courage he walked the path of faith and total commitment to Christ through Mary. In the final years, days and hours of his life on earth, he embodied the Gospel of suffering in the most persuasive and heart-moving way. His life was an object lesson in how to die. In his last will and testament he wrote: *Each one of us must take into account the prospect of his death and be ready to stand before the Lord and Judge who is at once Redeemer and Father. I too never stop taking this into account and entrust that decisive moment to the Mother of Christ and the Church—the Mother of my hope....I desire once more to commit myself totally to the*

The United States delegation







Mourners lined up in front of St. Peter's to pay homage to the deceased Popei

Shepherd, who loved his sheep (...) **The love of Christ was the mainspring of our dear Holy Father's strength.** Those who saw him pray, who heard him speak knew this. Because of this, thanks to his deep roots in Christ, **he was able to carry a burden that exceeded purely human strength:** he was the pastor of Christ's flock, of His Universal Church (...)

In the early period of his pontificate, while he was still young and robust, the Holy Father followed Christ to the remotest corners of the world. However, as time went on, he entered more and more into a communion of suffering with Christ. He came to understand ever more deeply the truth of the words, *Another will gird you.* And precisely in this communion with the Suffering Lord, he proclaimed the Gospel, the mystery of love, to the very end (cf. Jn 13:1). He taught us that the Paschal mystery was the mystery of God's love. In his last book he wrote that it was ultimately God's mercy that sets limits on evil (*Memory and Identity*, 10). Meditating on the attempt on his life, he observed: *In suffering for us all, Christ gave new meaning to suffering. He brought a new dimension to it, a new order: the order of love... It is the suffering that burns up and consumes evil in the flames of love. It brings manifold fruits even out of sin* (*ibid*, 26). Enlivened by this vision, the Pope suffered and loved in communion with Christ, and this is what made his suffering and love so eloquent and fruitful.

The Holy Father found the purest reflection of God's mercy in the Mother of God. Having lost his own mother while still a child, he loved the Blessed Mother all the more. He heard the words of the Crucified Lord, *Behold your mother!* as though they were directed at him personally. And he went forth like the beloved disciple, receiving Her into the depths of his being (*eis ta idia*; Jn 19: 27) **Totus Tuus.** It was from his Mother that he learned how to conform himself to Christ.

St. Peter's Basilica: pilgrims paying their respects to the Popei



for. Arturo Marti

We will all remember that unforgettable moment when, on that final Easter Sunday of his life, the Holy Father, marked with suffering, appeared once again at the window of the Apostolic Palace to impart his *Urbi*

*et Orbi* blessing for the last time. We can be certain that our beloved Pope stands now at the window of his Father, and looks down upon us and blesses us. Yes, bless us, Holy Father. We entrust your dear soul to Our Blessed Mother, who led you every day and will now take you into the eternal glory of her Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

## His Spiritual Legacy

Our late Pope has left us a huge spiritual legacy: the example of his holy life, suffering and death, and a treasury of teachings set down in 85 thousand pages. John Paul II had enormous respect for every person and demanded that every single human being be guaranteed the fundamental right of freedom of conscience and to life from the moment of conception to that of natural death. For him every person was equally important. He never spoke ill of anyone or treated anyone with disdain or contempt. At the same time, the Holy Father proclaimed Revealed Truth fearlessly, never pandering to his audience or seeking applause. With great courage he proclaimed the truths of the Faith regardless of how uncomfortable and unpopular they might be to his listeners. He went against the current, without compromise and without relativizing God's truth.

John Paul II's pontificate lasted 26 years and six months. In that time he undertook 104 pilgrimages to 129 countries, made 144 trips throughout Italy, and visited 74 parishes in the Roman diocese and Castel Gandolfo. In all, he covered a distance of 1,271, 000 kilometers, i.e. a distance equal to 31 times around the globe. He wrote 14 encyclicals, 15 apostolic exhortations, 11 apostolic constitutions, 45 apostolic letters, and 30 *motu proprio* as well as countless addresses and homilies made on the most diverse occasions. He canonized 482 saints and beatified 1338. So great were the accomplishments of John Paul's pontificate that only his holiness and total dedication to Christ through the intercession of Mary and *Totus Tuus* could account for them.

M.P. ■