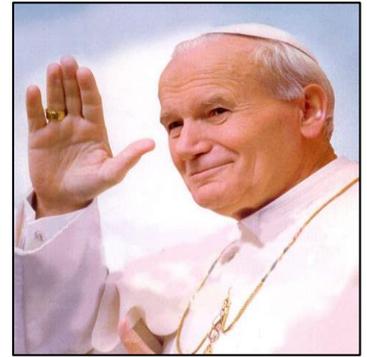


Saint John Paul II

Feast day: October 22nd

Today we celebrate St. John Paul II. Born Karol Józef Wojtyła on May 18, 1920 in Poland, he was ordained in 1946.

He became the bishop of Ombi in 1958 and archbishop of Krakow in 1964 and was ordained a cardinal by Pope Paul VI in 1967. He took part in the Vatican II Council. As cardinal archbishop of Krakow, he lobbied for permission to build a church in Kraków's new industrial suburb, Nowa Huta, during the period prior to the fall of communism in Poland. He planted a cross in the field where the church was to stand and defied communist authorities by holding masses there. Eventually, he was successful at establishing Ark Church in 1977. In 1978, he took the name Pope John Paul II, making him the first non-Italian pope in more than 400 years.



His life was marked by tragedy and tribulations. He lost his mother when he was 9 years old and his older brother three years later. His school - Krakow's Jagiellonian University – was shut down in 1939 due to Germany's invasion of Poland. During the occupation, he studied at a secret seminary until he was able to return to a Krakow seminary and complete his religious studies. In 1981, he was shot twice in a failed assassination attempt in Vatican City; fortunately, he was able to recover. He died on April 2, 2005 at his Vatican City residence, at the age of 84. His time as pope (27 years) is considered the third longest in history.

Throughout his life, Pope John Paul II was a vocal advocate for human rights. He is known for his strong stances on topics such as nonviolent political activism, capital punishment and contraception. During his papacy, he canonized an estimated 482 saints, which is more than all the popes of the previous millennium combined. This act serves to validate the concept that all people, from all walks of life, have this potential to be made holy. There is no “perfect” path to sainthood; rather, human beings are transformed by the Spirit to unwaveringly pursue the kingdom of heaven.

St. John Paul II was a missionary. In the course of his papacy, he made pastoral visits to 129 countries including multiple visits to Poland, France, and the United States of America. He began World Youth Day, three days of catechesis and prayer for young people, that was held every three or four years in countries around the world. He wrote the encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (The Mission of the Redeemer – On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate) that was published December 7, 1990, on the 25th anniversary of *Ad Gentes*, the Vatican II document on mission.

St. John Paul II, pray for us.

Questions for Reflection:

How are the tragedies from your past affecting your pursuit of holiness? How does the life of St. John Paul II inspire you?

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