

## POPE JOHN PAUL II

We gather this afternoon to observe the third anniversary of the death of Pope John Paul II, dying 3 months short of his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday, in the 30<sup>th</sup> year of his papacy. Til that day in 2005, the only Pope you had known, the Pope, and soon-to-be saint, who is the patron of your high school, the pope best known as the supporter of, and beloved by, the youth of the world. His annual World Youth Days became legendary.

There is an ancient, fascinating, and well-documented story about a man named Benedict Joseph Labre. (The story is pieced together from the diary of his parish priest. Read it someday.) This man was an obscure beggar in 18<sup>th</sup> century Rome. His cloak was tied up with a rope and he carried a sack, with a Bible and prayer book in it. He lived to pray and receive the sacraments, walking along begging and sleeping in churches.

Sounds just like any other homeless man walking the streets of New York, or Hyannis, doesn't he?

Well, the day he died, at age 35, the parish priest writes: "Scarcely had this poor follower of Christ breathed his last when the children filled the whole street with their noise: 'The Saint is dead, the Saint is dead.'" Soon all Rome joined in their cries: 'A Saint is dead.'

The children who had taken to the streets had alerted the church that someone extraordinary had passed!

**It is interesting** to note, - Pope John Paul II, our Polish Pope, died on the eve of the Feast of St. Faustina, a Polish saint, the presenter of the devotion to Divine Mercy, while mass was celebrated in his room. Then the church entered into an official mourning period of nine days, ending on the Feast of St. Stanislas, the patron of Poland.

**In that** time period people started to flock to Rome from all over the world, people of every station in life, high and low, of every age and color, even of every religion! Rome had to send out an alarm asking people to stop coming. The city was overwhelmed. They **kept** coming, - FOUR MILLION!!!

**Often**, in his letters to priests and in his autobiographical books Pope John Paul refers to three sayings of the Lord.

**First:** “You did not choose me, but I chose you, And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” (John 15:16)

**Second:** “The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11)

**And then:** “As the Father has loved me. So I have loved you; abide in my love.” (John 15:9)

**In these** three sayings we see the heart and soul of our Holy Father.

**We do** live in a time of greatness. There are people whose daily and unknown bravery, hardly noticed here on earth, must thrill the inhabitants of heaven. There is the person who summons the courage to follow his convictions though the world is going in another direction. There are people who find a 3 year old throwaway in Vietnam and bring her up with love in their home, grateful to do it.

**What courage** in the old man of the Vatican, a few days before he died, at the window of his apartment attempting to speak to the world, struggling and failing to do so, crozier shaking as he blesses the faithful,

**more eloquent than ever, even though unable to speak.**

Great men and women lift us up. They tell us that everything is possible, that as children of God we are part of God, and as part of God, we can, with Him accomplish anything – ANYTHING.

And so the millions of people who came to Rome, like the children and people of Rome did for St. Benedict Joseph Labre, told the church –

**someone extraordinary** has passed: “Here is our Hero. He won our hearts.

**Our Saint** is dead.”