

Mary and Blessed Pope John Paul II

Blessed Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) was born Karol Jozef Wojtyła (Voi-'til-ah) in Wadowice, Poland.

His mother died when he was nine years old. The future Pope was strongly influenced by his father, who had a great love for Polish literature. As a young man, Karol studied poetry and drama, acted, and wrote poetry. One of his most beautiful poems, "Mother," is about the Blessed Mother. It is not surprising that young Karol developed a great devotion to Mary. In Poland devotion to Mary has always played an important role in the faith of Catholics.

As a young man, Karol participated in "Living Rosary," an organization of the laity that helps others grow in their faith. After the death of his father, Karol decided to become a priest. Throughout his priesthood, and later as a bishop and cardinal, he continued to write and to spread devotion to Mary.

As Pope, John Paul II wrote about Mary as our advocate, benefactor, mediator, and spiritual mother. His writings explain that, as our advocate, Mary speaks on our behalf to Jesus, her Son. She asks him to provide for our needs. As our benefactor, Mary obtains graces for us from God. She keeps us close to Jesus by asking him to give us the help we need to live as his disciples. Mary brings us to her Son and helps us come to know and love him.

When Blessed Pope John Paul II wrote about Mary, he often described her the "spiritual mother" of the Church and of each human person. What does it mean to be a spiritual mother? To understand this term, we need to think about

human mothers first. We know that human mothers love, protect, nourish, and watch over their children throughout their lives. In much the same way, Mary, our spiritual mother, loves, protects, and watches over us. Mary asks Jesus, her Son, to provide what we need. Mary never stops praying for us. Her motherly protection never leaves us.

From the cross, Jesus said to John, "Behold, your mother" (John 19:27). Jesus was giving Mary to us to be our mother. Mary would no longer be only the Mother of Jesus. She would also be the spiritual mother of all of Jesus' followers and all



of humankind.

The scene at the foot of the cross inspired the following verses of poetry written by Blessed John Paul II.

And calling you Mother—His wish—
I beseech you: may this word
never grow less for you.
True, it's not easy to measure the meaning
of the words he breathed into us both
so that all earlier love in those words
should be concealed.

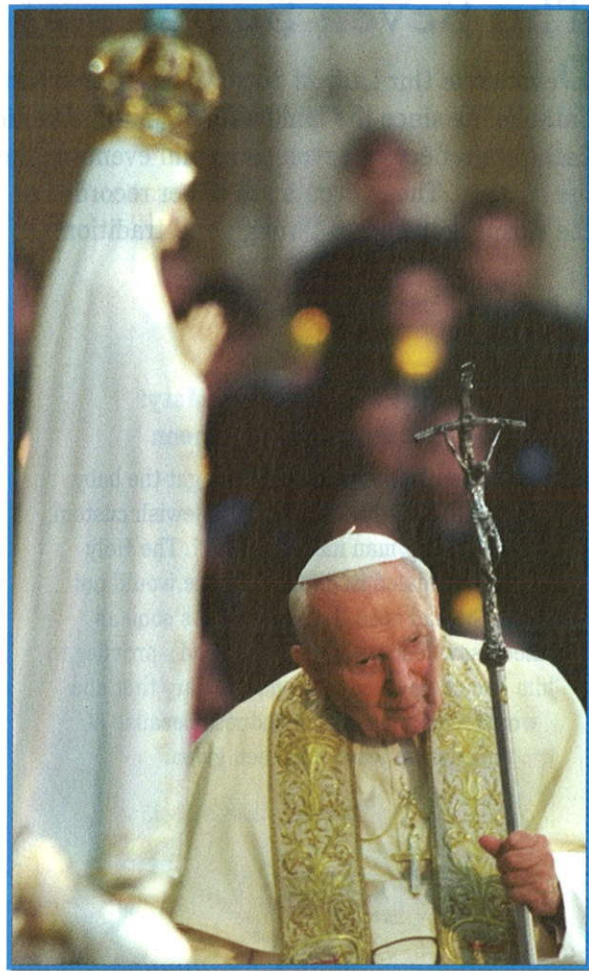
From "John Beseeches Her"

In Mary's Care

In addition to writing about Mary, Blessed Pope John Paul II always had a special devotion to her. When he became Pope, he showed the importance of devotion to Mary by putting a large "M" under the cross on his coat of arms. Later, when he was shot during an assassination attempt in 1981, his devotion to Mary grew even stronger.

In addition to writing about Mary, Blessed Pope John Paul II believed that Mary saved his life through her intercession. To honor her, he placed the bullet that was removed from his body in the crown of her statue at Fatima, Portugal. The bullet remains in the statue's crown today.

On August 15, 1990, the Pope wrote a message for World Youth Day. In it he reminded young people that they are truly sons and daughters of God. He said, "Where better than at the feet of God's Mother can we learn what it means to be sons and daughters of God?"



Activity

Although there are many official prayers we can pray to Mary, we can also use our own words. Use the lines below to write a prayer to Mary.

Ask Mary, your spiritual mother, to bring your prayer to her son, Jesus, on your behalf.

Mary, our mother, ask your son Jesus to be close to us always. Protect us, your children, with your prayers and intercession. We ask these things in your son's name. Amen.