



JOHANNES SIMON/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The faithful wave a banner reading "Santo subito!" (Saint now) to call for the immediate canonization of Pope John Paul II during his funeral in St. Peter's Square at Vatican City, April 8, 2005.

## 'SAINT NOW!'

**John Paul II — witness to God's love and defender of human dignity — may soon be declared a saint.**

by Patrick Novacosky

Even before Pope John Paul II was laid to rest on April 8 in the crypt beneath St. Peter's Basilica, the faithful were crying out for him to be declared a "saint now!" and elevated to the rank of John Paul the Great. His cause for canonization could begin moving forward as soon as Pope Benedict XVI approves it and waives the five-year waiting period, as John Paul II did for Mother Teresa.

As the world now adjusts to a new Holy Father, the faithful agree that John Paul II has left us a remarkable legacy. He lives on through his writings, his prayerful witness to the love of Christ, his diplomacy on the world stage, and the underlying theme of his pontificate: the dignity of every human person.

A profoundly human Pope, John Paul II always lived what he taught, says the Very Rev. Fr. John Rokosz, MIC, Superior General of the Marians of the Immaculate Conception.

"He defended human life from the moment of conception until natural death," Fr. John said. "He established personal

contact with those who found themselves marginalized by our technologically-oriented society — the sick, the elderly, and the poor."

### A POPE WHO SUFFERED FOR THE CHURCH

Perhaps John Paul's greatest teaching came at the very end of his life, when he was unable to speak. He lived out the words of St. Paul: "I am content with weaknesses ... and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

Once an athlete who skied into his early 70s, John Paul in his later years offered us a precious gift in his suffering by uniting it with Christ's for the Church.

Vatican officials described the suffering Pope as "lucid and serene" in his final days. His closest collaborators surrounded him in the papal apartment, and he was aware of the thousands of faithful who had gathered in St. Peter's Square to pray for him.

The faithful knew that the end was near when the Vatican reported on April 1

that he was in “very grave” condition after suffering cardio-circulatory collapse and septic shock.

### A POPE LOVED AND MOURNED BY MILLIONS

After serving the Church as Pope for more than 26 years, John Paul II died in the evening on Saturday, April 2. He passed away after his personal secretary, Archbishop Stanislaus Dziwisz, presided at a Divine Mercy Sunday Mass on the vigil of the feast in the Holy Father’s presence.

Upon receiving news of his passing, an estimated 4 million mourners made their way to Rome to pay tribute to their beloved Pope. The April 8 funeral Mass drew about 400,000 pilgrims to St. Peter’s Square with millions more watching on large TV screens in the streets of Rome.

“Today, we bury his remains in the earth as a seed of immortality — our hearts are full of sadness, yet at the same time of joyful hope and profound gratitude,” Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinals, said in his homily at the funeral.

Alluding to John Paul’s sanctity, the Cardinal — who is now Pope Benedict XVI — said the Holy Father was a “priest to the last” who had offered his life for God and his flock “especially amid the sufferings of his final months.”

### A POPE WHO DEFENDED HUMAN DIGNITY

John Paul II’s papacy touched on everything from the responsibilities of those in public office to reflections on the arts. He expressed contempt for any ideology that was not marked by a profound respect for human life.

Papal biographer and former Superior General of the Marians, Fr. Adam Boniecki, MIC, recalled that even as Cardinal of Krakow, the future Pope was focused on human freedom in communist Poland. “He encouraged

me, a priest, to take certain actions which were forbidden by the [communists], saying that we should expand the sphere of freedom at the risk of a fine or having to stand before a tribunal,” he said in the video version of George Weigel’s papal biography *Witness to Hope*.

“These efforts may not have been spectacular,” Fr. Adam said, “but they were very deep-reaching and, because of that, long-lasting and effective [in undermining the communist regime in Poland].”

That effort continued in John Paul II’s papacy and eventually led to the downfall of communism in Eastern Europe.

### A POPE WHO LOVED EVERY PERSON

Father John, who attended the funeral Mass, said that there was such an outpouring of love for John Paul II at his passing because of his profound witness to the love of Christ.

“He demonstrated that a Pope does not stop being a man and does not lose his right to express his love for God and man in a natural way,” he said. “People who were fortunate to meet him in person tell how well he was able to approach each of them in a personal way.”

Another hallmark of John Paul’s papacy was his affection for the young. He would often stop to embrace children as his popemobile made its way through St. Peter’s Square, and he established World Youth Day.

“He had a deep affection for young people whom he won over by his authenticity, but also by giving them challenges and demands,” Fr. John said.

This man of deep love for every human being may one day be known as St. John Paul the Great. He leaves an enduring legacy for the Church and the world. MH

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### In the News: Pope Benedict XVI

On April 19, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger — a close confidant of John Paul II — was elected Pope with surprising speed on the second day of the conclave of Cardinals. He chose the name Benedict XVI and called himself “a simple and humble laborer.”

Early that evening, the 265<sup>th</sup> Pope appeared smiling and calm on the balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica as he greeted tens of thousands of the faithful who had quickly filled St. Peter’s Square to receive his first Apostolic Blessing. The crowd responded to the new Holy Father’s greeting by chanting, “Benedict! Benedict!”

“Dear brothers and sisters,” said the German-born prelate, “after the great Pope John Paul II, the Cardinals have elected me, a simple and humble laborer in the

vineyard of the Lord.

“The fact that the Lord knows how to work and to act even with inadequate instruments comforts me, and, above all, I entrust myself to your prayers,” he said. “Let us move forward in the joy of the Risen Lord, confidant of His unfailing help. The Lord will help us, and Mary, His most holy Mother, will be on our side. Thank you.”

The new Pope, who turned 78 on April 16, was the longtime Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under his predecessor, John Paul II. He had served as Dean of the College of Cardinals since 2002. Further, he oversaw preparing the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for its first publication in 1992. As Cardinal Ratzinger, he had been widely considered one of the

brightest minds in the Church.

As Dean of the College of Cardinals, Cardinal Ratzinger presided at the funeral of Pope John Paul II. He also presided at a Mass with the Cardinals before the conclave started — asking God for “a new Pope, like John Paul II, who will guide us to the love of Christ.”

Joseph Ratzinger was born April 16, 1927, in Marktl am Inn, Germany. He was ordained a priest June 29, 1951. After obtaining his doctorate in theology in 1953, he taught dogmatic theology at various German universities.

He was appointed Archbishop of Munich and Freising by Pope Paul VI in March 1977 and then elevated to Cardinal by Paul VI in June 1977.

*Based on April 19 stories from Zenit and the Vatican Information Service.*