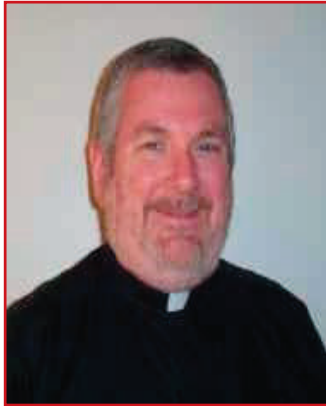


# Impressions



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## Memories of a Pope

The death of our Holy Father Pope John Paul II impacts all of us deeply. That probably goes without saying. The media coverage has been very extensive, so there is little that remains to be said about his life and accomplishments. He was clearly an outstanding and charismatic leader, not only for the Church, but also for the whole world. We are blessed to have lived through his Papacy.

My first personal memory of Pope John Paul was attending the Papal Mass at Yankee Stadium in October of 1979. I was only two years ordained and was teaching at Saint Francis University (College, at that time) in Loretto, Pennsylvania. I am back in Loretto now as I write! I was able to go to New York for the Papal Mass. My Dad had been in the seminary with, then, Cardinal Cooke and they had stayed in contact over the years. Through that connection my family had tickets to this special Mass and we sat on first base while the altar was on second base! It was such a moving Mass and I had never dreamed I would actually ever see a Pope. I took a very close picture of our Holy Father, then still a rather new Pope, as he rode by. What a thrill to have been there. I can remember calling home early the next morning, after having driven through the night to get back for class. I wanted to let my parents know I was here safely, but more, I wanted to reflect with them on such an incredible and deeply moving moment.

In May of 1995, I traveled to Italy to attend the 50th Anniversary of the founding of Pax Christi International. The meeting was held in Assisi and the Holy Father invited the delegates to the Vatican when

the meeting was over. He greeted us personally and, in a very powerful speech, blessed the work of the international Catholic peace movement embodied in Pax Christi. He also encouraged all the participants from all over the world to continue our important peacemaking work. I will never forget meeting the Pope on that May morning. One lasting impression is how the face of each of the person present lit up with joy as he blessed each one and spoke to them in turn, each in his or her own language. I remember every bit of our conversation today, over 10 years later.

I was asked to move to Rome in early 1996 and lived there for five and a half years, serving the Third Order Regular as Secretary General. I had only been in Rome for a few months when the time came for the Stations at the Colosseum led by our beloved Holy Father. I noticed that while the crowd was in the center, there was a police presence around the corner of the ancient building. I walked over to see what was up and right then the limousine carrying the Holy Father arrived! I was on the opposite side of the car when he exited. He looked over the roof of the car, smiled and waved and gave me a blessing. Needless to say, I was absolutely thrilled!

At the end of my time in Rome, in June of 2001, after the General Chapter had elected a new Minister General and Council, the Holy Father received the members of the Chapter in a private audience. I was privileged to be present and greet the Holy Father personally. It was already clear that his health was failing, but I remember his kind words and challenge to our Order. When I had the opportunity to speak with him, I thanked him for all he had done. He smiled at that and blessed me.

I think the entire world feels a loss at this time, not just the Catholic world. Pope John Paul was such a holy man, and his holiness was plain for all to see. He was a man of peace and will be missed by the world. He certainly left an indelible mark on the Church and the world. I feel blessed to have encountered him personally in these few meetings recounted here. I also saw him many other times as a member of large audiences during my time in Rome. Each time I realized that many people would have felt blessed and privileged to have seen him even once. It is for this reason that I am so bold as to share my few experiences with you, in hopes that the memory of our Holy Father be not just as a distant person, but as one who cared for his flock in a real, pastoral and individual way.