Two Future Popes Visited Pittsburgh

by John C. Bates, Esq.

The recent canonization of Pope John Paul II in April and the planned beatification of Pope Paul VI in October bring back fond memories to older Catholics in Western Pennsylvania of visits by both prelates before their elections as pope.

Pope Paul VI

Giovanni Battista Montini (Sept. 26, 1897-Aug. 6, 1978) was born in the province of Brescia in northern Italy. Entering the seminary in 1916, he was ordained a priest in May 1920. At the age of 25, he entered the service of the papal Secretariat of State and adopted the view that history was the "magister vitae" (teacher of life). In 1937, he was named Substitute Secretary of State for Ordinary Affairs under Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli (later Pope Pius XII).

Montini created an information office for prisoners of war and refugees, which between 1939 and 1947 produced over eleven million responses. He undertook this work with Pittsburgh-born Monsignor Walter S. Carroll, who was a native of Holy Rosary Parish in Homewood and the auxiliary bishop of Pittsburgh, and first Bishop and first Archbishop of Miami; and Howard J. Carroll, long-time secretary of the National Catholic Welfare Conference and bishop of Altoona-Johnstown.

The then-Monsignor Montini first visited the United States in 1951, spending three weeks (Aug. 20-Sept. 9). He entered the country at Niagara Falls (having flown to Montreal), then went on to Buffalo, Washington DC, St. Louis, Denver, Chicago, New York — and Pittsburgh, where he was the guest of Bishop John F. Dearden for several days. Montini paid a condoleance call on the mother of his recently deceased colleague, Monsignor Walter Carroll (d. Feb. 24, 1950), and visited the latter's grave in Mt. Carmel Cemetery in Penn Hills, saying "I have made a pilgrimage to the grave of my friend." He celebrated a Low Mass and officiated at Solemn Benediction in Sacred Heart Church in Shadyside, to open the school year at the request of the pastor, Rev. Coleman Carroll, and spoke with the stonemasons working to complete the great tower at the church. Montini stayed at the episcopal residence on Warwick Terrace in Oakland.

Montini became Archbishop of Milan in 1954, and was made a cardinal in 1958. He was elected Pope on June 21, 1963, assuming the name Paul VI. He brought to conclusion the Second Vatican Council in November 1964. He opened the canonization process of his immediate predecessors, Pope Pius XII and Pope John XXIII. Paul VI died at the papal summer villa in Castel Gandolfo on August 6, 1978.

Pope John Paul II

Karol Józef Wojtyła (May 18, 1920-April 2, 2005) was born in Wadowice, near Kraków, Poland. He began studies for the priesthood in the clandestine seminary run by the Archbishop of Kraków during World War II. Ordained a priest in November 1946, Wojtyła then obtained a doctorate in Rome in 1948. Ten years later he became auxiliary bishop of Kraków; and succeeded as Archbishop in 1964. He was created a cardinal in 1967.

In 1968, Pittsburgh Bishop John J. Wright had invited Cardinal Wojtyła to Pittsburgh as part of the diocese's 125th anniversary celebration. Polish authorities would not permit the trip. In 1969, a tour of the United States was planned for the Polish cardinal as part of an extended celebration of the 1000th anniversary of the acceptance of the Catholic faith in Poland.

John Cardinal Wright, who was by then Prefect of the Congregation for Clergy, wanted his former see city included in the Polish cardinal's tour — which by then included Buffalo, Hartford, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Boston, Orchard Lake, St. Louis, Washington DC, Baltimore, and New York City. Wright phoned Charles Studdnicki, president of the Central Council of Polish Organizations in Pittsburgh, asking him to identify a local event and help in making arrangements.

Wojtyła visited Pittsburgh on September 20 and 21. He was driven by car from Cleveland by Father Edward Maliszewski of Holy Family Church in Lawrenceville and was greeted at the Irwin interchange on the Pennsylvania Turnpike by children dressed in native Polish costumes. The cardinal was driven through Oakland and stopped across from Lasek's Café on Bates Street, where he got out of the car, greeted Polish people on the sidewalk, and blessed a woman with a baby in her arms. Studdnicki and Joseph Gorski acted as chauffeurs for the cardinal. The cardinal loved Pittsburgh since it reminded him of Kraków, which also had steel mills.

On that first day (Saturday), he unveiled and dedicated a commemorative plaque for Marie Skłodowska Curie (discoverer of radium) at Allen Hall, the science center of the University of Pittsburgh. The cardinal visited St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in the Strip District, where he prayed before the Blessed Sacrament and then at the side altar of the Blessed Mother — which now contains a memorial to the pope. He commented on the beauty of the church, and how much it reminded him of churches in Poland. He also visited three convents. The cardinal stayed at the episcopal residence on Warwick Terrace in Oakland.

The following day (Sunday), the cardinal celebrated an afternoon Mass in Polish at St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland, with Polish war veterans and Knights of Columbus as escorts. He delivered a short homily during the Mass, which was followed by a reception and dinner at the adjacent Hotel Webster Hall.

Cardinal Wojtyła was elected pope on October 16, 1979, taking the name John Paul II. He died on April 2, 2005 in the papal apartments in Rome.

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Inspired by calls of *santo subito* ("Make him a saint immediately") during Pope John Paul II’s funeral Mass, Pope Benedict XVI began the canonization process by dispensing with the normative five-year waiting period. On December 19, 2009, John Paul II was proclaimed "Venerable," reflecting his virtuous life. Pope Benedict XVI beatified his predecessor on May 1, 2011. Pope Francis canonized Pope John Paul II on April 27, 2014, which was Divine Mercy Sunday.

**IN OUR NEXT ISSUE**

**Dennis Wodzinski**, Archivist of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God in Whitehall and a Member of the Board of Directors of the Catholic Historical Society, is completing a comprehensive biography of nationally-known artist **Nicholas Parrendo** — a native of Pittsburgh’s North Side who started as an apprentice at Hunt Stained Glass Studios and ultimately became its owner. Parrendo, in over six decades, has created thousands of stained-glass windows and other religious art creations. The next issue of *Gathered Fragments* will present the life and work of this famed Pittsburgh artist.