

**Homily for the Blessing of the St. John Paul II Statue at  
St. Constance Church, Chicago  
August 16, 2020**

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It is good to be here for the blessing of the statue of Pope St. John Paul II at St. Constance Church. May 18<sup>th</sup> was the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Pope St. John Paul II.

He had a profound influence on my priesthood and my life as a bishop. He was elected Pope on October 16, 1978, just 5 months after I was ordained a priest. He would be the Pope for the next 26½ years of my life as a priest and as bishop.

His teachings were prolific and profound. He completed 146 pastoral visits within Italy and 104 outside it and visited 317 parishes as Bishop of Rome during his Pontificate. In addition to his many homilies and speeches he gave during his lifetime, he wrote 14 encyclical letters, 15 apostolic exhortations, and numerous apostolic constitutions, apostolic letters, and papal bulls during his Pontificate.

The biographer of Pope John Paul II, George Weigel, wrote 864 pages in his first volume, *Witness to Hope*, and another 517 pages in the second volume, called, *The End and the Beginning*. So I will not try to summarize the

life or teachings of St. John Paul II in this brief homily. I will just share a few personal recollections of him with you.

I saw him for the first time in person when he came to Chicago in 1979. I had only been a priest for a little over a year, so I only saw him from afar. I did get to meet Pope John Paul II several times during the 3½ years I lived in Rome doing my canon law studies from 1987 to 1991.

The first time was on September 9, 1988, when my siblings and I gave our parents a trip to Italy and Poland for their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. We attended the Pope's Mass at his summer residence, Castel Gandolfo, and my father did the reading at Mass. After Mass, I introduced my parents to the Pope and told them it was their 40<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

I also met Pope John Paul II ten years later, on February 23, 1998, when I was Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Chicago and accompanied Cardinal Francis George to Rome when he received his red hat as Cardinal.

It was Pope John Paul II who appointed me to be a bishop on January 24, 2003. I was present at St. Peter's Basilica when he was canonized a saint on April 27, 2014. It is no small thing for me to realize that I was appointed bishop by a saint!

The universal call to holiness was a major theme of his Pontificate, as he frequently reminded us that we are all called to be saints.

Meals were an important part of the life of Pope John Paul II. Meals were not just a time to eat, but to be with people, as he had guests for almost every breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Of course, the most important meal for him, as it should be for us, was the eucharistic meal, and I had the privilege of concelebrating with him on several occasions both at St. Peter's Basilica and in his private chapel at the Vatican.

When we receive Holy Communion, we are not just nurturing our own personal relationship with Christ and his Father, but through the gift of the Eucharist we are able to recognize that we are united with all our brothers and sisters who share in this Communion and indeed with those who have gone before us in the hope of eternal life.

As we give thanks for the life of Pope St. John Paul II, I invite you to spend some time today reflecting on the wonderful gift that is ours and how in the Eucharist we share in the promise of Jesus, that he is going to prepare a place for us and that in his Father's house there are many rooms.

May God give us this grace. Amen.