



POPE JOHN PAUL II:

Living the virtue of hope

By Judie Brown

By now trillions of words have been spoken about our late pope, John Paul II—most a tribute to his legacy. He exemplified the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity like no other person we've known in our lifetime. His papacy was rich with the gifts of the Holy Spirit—rich in wisdom and courage, so that his personal outreach was incomprehensibly transcendent. His charisma attracted all ages, but most significantly young people. The World Youth Day projects he instituted were phenomena in themselves as millions of young people were drawn to the authentic meaning of love anchored in Jesus Christ. The

Holy Father spoke their language, and they, in turn, will continue to speak his.

Unique statements

So what can I say about this pope that is unique? Perhaps nothing, but from my perspective as a pro-life worker in the Lord's vineyard, there is the beautiful theme that everything His Holiness did emphasized the dignity of the human person.

It's no exaggeration to say that during his illustrious journey on earth, Pope John Paul II celebrated God's gift of life in every aspect of his being. His actions told everyone that Jesus Christ is truly present and never abandons us, regardless of what

the world dictates or what may happen to each of us personally. Pope John Paul II's commitment to the principle that every innocent human being is a special message from the hand of God was evident every time he held a baby, embraced a teenager or touched the aged, infirm and brokenhearted. No world leader was able to humble the wicked or strengthen the meek like John Paul II, because no other leader represented the heavenly Father so well.

Pope John Paul II was indisputably in love with the Author of Life. Indeed, he preached life until he drew his last breath. The language he spoke with his being was, to my mind, frequently misunderstood by "the world." During the his heroic struggle with Parkinson's disease, how often did we hear nonbelievers suggest, even wish, that he should or would resign, that he could not possibly rule the Church, or that he was growing more incompetent with the passage of each day? These cheap shots at his physical cross intensely pained the faithful.

Apparently his critics feared that supernatural faith is infinitely more potent than the fleeting powers of the world. We who knew this pope realized that the Real Presence of Christ was the central focus of his concentration. In thought, word and deed, Pope John Paul II imitated Jesus and the world noticed because, as he often said, "Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever." Like the Lord, our late Holy Father spoke truth with body and soul. Thus, he gained immeasurable might in his weakness, and surely that confounded the proud.

Pro-life witness

Pope John Paul II's life was a witness to every single one of us. In his example of loving the Cross, he challenged the humanistic world to acknowledge the supernatural. He changed the way many persons view frailty because he bore it with holy joy. Yet as I ponder the final visit of his friend Archbishop Comastri, the Holy Father's loss is almost unbearable. This is what the archbishop told Vatican Radio: "When I found myself before the Pontiff, I felt an indescribable emotion, and at that moment images came to my mind that the television transmitted on Good Friday night, when it focused

on the pope's back, with the Crucifix before him. Seeing him in his bed of suffering, I said to him: 'You truly are the Vicar of Christ to the end, in the passion you are living with an edification that moves the world.' I also told him that all the controversies about the pope's efficiency in the past months had not understood that there must be a distinction between efficiency and efficacy." With that, the Holy Father's friend proceeded, "There are efficient people who are not at all effective, and there are inefficient people, as the pope was in his suffering, who are extraordinarily effective. With his suf-

As we pray for the happy repose of Pope John Paul II's soul, let us also pray that we may become better human beings.

fering, the pope has written the most beautiful encyclical of his life, faithful to Jesus to the end. I knelt down, I asked him for his blessing and the pope moved his hand lightly. I realized he wanted to bless me, but again he weakened. Then I rested my head on the pontiff's hand, I wept and I stayed a few moments in silence."

I have thought long and hard about the one aspect of this man's very being that overcomes every cynic, every nonbeliever and every would-be Catholic who thinks Church teaching is a matter of opinion. I have come to the conclusion that the best virtue describing Pope John Paul II is hope. As George Weigel's biography properly recognized, this pope was a *Witness to Hope*. His Holiness knew that Christ reigns forever and in all things this pope gave witness to Christ.

"Hope." That is how I will remember the Holy Father. Even in death, he continues to challenge our perception of what life is really all about and where it should end. How well will we be prepared when, like him, Christ calls us to give an accounting of how we used the gifts He gave us?

As we pray for the happy repose of Pope John Paul II's soul, let us also pray that we may become better human beings. How blessed we are to have witnessed the power of purity in this unrepeatable, most loving and holy Vicar of Christ.

Judie Brown is president of American Life League.