

Life

Saint John Paul II was originally known as Karol Józef Wojtyła. He was born in Poland in 1920, and his father was an officer. He suffered repeated misfortunes as he grew up: he lost his mother at the age of 9, lost his brother at the age of 13 and was left with his devout father, who died when he was 20. In 1938 he entered the university. One year later, the university was closed due to Germany's occupation of Poland. He went to work at a quarry and chemical factory and participated in underground anti-German activities to rebuild his country. In 1942, he had a call to priesthood and began to study in the underground seminary. After the war, he continued to take courses in the seminary and university. He was ordained a priest in 1946. He was appointed as the auxiliary bishop, Archbishop, and the Cardinal of Krakow respectively. In the meantime, he participated in the Vatican Council II and contributed to the preparation of the Constitution. In 1978, Cardinal Wojtyła was elected the first non-Italian pope since 1523. In 1981, Pope John Paul II was wounded in an assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square. He recovered after two years of recuperation. He personally visited his assassin in prison and forgave him. In 2005, John Paul II died on the eve of the Divine Mercy Sunday that he established at the age of 84.

Reflection

St. John Paul II had lost all his closest relatives early in life and faced the pain of the destruction of his country, but these sufferings taught him to pay special attention to justice and peace and made him a very caring person. Pope John Paul II visited various countries continuously to express his care to the universal church. He also met countless government officials to be the spokesperson for Christ of justice and love. Under his leadership, the Catholic, Christian, Orthodox and other religions have achieved unprecedented reconciliation. In order to enhance spirituality, he wrote a lot of documents and books, as well as proclaimed a special year dedicated to the Virgin Mary, The Year of the Eucharist, and the Great Jubilee Year 2000. In order to attract the younger generation, he launched the World Youth Day. He reformed the church and united the global Catholics under his leadership. John Paul II was tortured by illness in his later years which affected his ability to speak and move. He consciously endured these sufferings to emphasize the unification of his sufferings with all who are suffering with the Lord. Pope Francis calls him "the great witness of Christ who suffered, died and resurrected."

Prayer

On the day the Pope's mom died, his father took him to the statue of the Virgin and asked him to regard the Virgin as his only mother on earth. He had a close mother and son relationship with the Virgin and used St. Louis Marie de Montfort's "Totally Yours" (Totus Tuus) in consecration to the Virgin as his own motto. The Pope was seriously injured by an assassin on May 13, 1981 (Feast Day of Our Lady of Fatima), he believed that Our Lady protected him and saved his life, and he visited Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal the following year to thank her, and consecrated the Church and the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and placed the bullet that almost killed him on the crown of Our Lady.

Pope John Paul II pointed out in the introduction of his Apostolic Letter "The Rosary of the Virgin Mary" that the rosary is his favourite prayer, stressing that the rosary is a contemplative prayer that "led to contemplate with Mary the beauty on the face of Christ" (Chapter 1), and added the "five luminous mysteries" to enrich and complete the meditation of the mystery of Christ (Chapter 2). The pope emphasized that the decades of the rosary are centred on the crucifix, so that when praying the rosary, we start from Christ to reach our Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit. The Virgin plays the role of a mother, mentor and guide, leading us to understand and adore Jesus Christ the Son (Chapter 3).

May we learn from Saint John Paul II's efforts to build a world of justice, peace and love,
and together with Mary, use the rosary to adore Christ.

Saint John Paul II, pray for us.