

## **Blessed John Paul II: Holy Pope of the Youth**

The 26-year papacy of Blessed John Paul II was extraordinary for many reasons. His desire for lasting peace, and transformative non-violence was felt by all. The late Pope opened wide the doors to Christian unity and inter-faith understanding; he was instrumental to bringing down Communism and averting the ‘Cold War,’ and; he developed broad social teachings on education and media.

He set the direction for the Catholic Church in the new millennium, at a time when technological and cultural influences were deeply changing societies.

The Pope was one of the most travelled leaders of his time. And everywhere he went he was bold and firm in his advocacies, gently encouraging the world to a life rooted in Christ. Despite a seemingly hard-line stance that critics predicted would polarize people, his immense charisma, playful personality and endearing childlikeness made him a popular figure with both Catholics and non-Catholics.

Yet what makes his contribution timeless is the personal witness of his faith, no matter what situation he was in or who he spoke with. His total love of God encompassed all peoples and had no boundaries.

His concern went particularly to the youth, for whom he had a special relationship even as a young priest in Poland.

“He took the spirit which had encouraged him as a priest to take young people on outdoor adventure trips into the local mountains, and brought it with him to his pontificate,” recounted school chaplain Jack Regan.

“He recognized that youth was a marginalised culture which, if Christ was to reach it, needed ministering in its own distinctive way, every bit as much as the poor, the infirm, or the inhabitants of far-flung places,” he said.

Even the decree for the late Pope’s beatification highlighted his “attention to the youth and the World Youth Day,” as one of the reasons to advance his cause for sainthood.

According to the document, while celebrating a mass in Warsaw, Poland, the Pope noticed that young people at the fringes of the gathering took breaks from the mass to drink beer or soda.

“It was not like this during the previous voyages...The VIP are always seated in the same manner, but the ‘margins’ are important and worth our attention,” the late Pope said in the report.

This influenced how the World Youth Days were structured, and how in each of his 104 papal trips, he always found time to address a youth community. Through him, the youth were placed front and center of the Church's attention.

And the young people of the world responded overwhelmingly. In the 20 World Youth Days he presided, Blessed John Paul II would meet hundreds of millions of young people who literally journeyed through mountains and valleys to be with him.

"We always cried when we saw him. It was a spontaneous response to holiness. There were times I was literally a quarter-mile away from him and convinced I was far too tired for any kind of emotional response. One glimpse of that figure in white and I was reduced to tears, as was everybody around me. We just couldn't help it," recalled Catholic sexual morality educator and author Mary Beth Bonacci.

"We loved him because he didn't talk down to us," Bonacci continued. "He didn't condescend; he didn't water down his message. Instead, he challenged us. He told us not to let our youth and inexperience hold us back but, instead, to put our lives fearlessly at the service of the gospel."

The joyous participation of the youth would continue even after his death. Especially in the Philippines, the largest Catholic country in Asia and where the biggest-sized audience for World Youth Day congregated.

From December 16, 2010 till 2011 the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is celebrating the National Year of the Youth.

This yearlong event underscores the concerns of young Filipino youths and encourages the activities of youth ministries in the local parishes.

Several festivities have been held as part of this occasion, such as the Episcopal Commission on Youth's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the World Youth Day Madrid to Manila Overnight Youth Vigil.

Its latest salvo is a major Christmas concert to be held at the Smart Araneta Coliseum on December 10, 2011 from 7 to 10 pm.

With the concert dubbed as "Namamasko Po! Karoling ng Kabataang Pinoy, various choirs and youth performers as well as popular TV personalities will show how the Filipino youth can still bring back the true meaning of Christmas in our lives today. Indeed, the Filipino Youth, with their talents and dreams, are true gifts to our Church and our Nation during this season and beyond.

The Christmas concert is organized by the Archdiocese of Manila's Commission on the Youth and Campus Ministry Office as well as the Jesuit Communications Foundation.

For details on how to get tickets or donate, please contact Jesuit Communications  
Foundation at 426-5971 or email [jcf@admu.edu.ph](mailto:jcf@admu.edu.ph). ###