

Pope John Paul II gestures to the crowd during World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. (CNS photo)



ON APRIL 2, 2020 WE COMMEMORATED THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. JOHN PAUL II'S DEATH AND ON MAY 18, 2020, WE CELEBRATED THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH.

Many of us have special personal memories of the impact of St. John Paul II's ecclesial missionary mysticism which was forged in the constant crises he faced throughout his life.

He planted the Cross of Jesus Christ at the heart of every personal and world crisis he faced. During these days of COVID-19, we call on his powerful intercession.

We vividly recall his visits to Poland, visits during which millions of Poles joined in chants of "we want God," visits that set in motion the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall and a fundamental change in the world.

We remember too, his canonization of Saint Faustina, the spreading of global devotion to the Divine Mercy and the establishment of Divine Mercy Sunday.

We remember the personalism that connected spiritual theology and moral theology in *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), his emphasis on Love and Responsibility in Marriage and the Theology of the Body in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and his great encyclical on the Gospel of Human Life *Evangelium Vitae* (1995). On March 25, 2020, we celebrated the 25th Anniversary of *Evangelium Vitae*.

We remember his enormous appeal to Youth and the World Youth Day dynamic, the promulgation of the *Universal Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) and its impact on the world of catechesis along with his Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* (1979), his championing of the New Evangelization in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (2000), his emphasis on contemplating the Face of Christ in the Eucharist in *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003) and in the Rosary in *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* (2002), the global missiology expressed in *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) and the union of holiness and mission in the life of every canonized saint and holy person.

We remember his social justice encyclicals *Laborem exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) and *Centesimus annus* (1991) that explored the rich history and contemporary relevance of Catholic social justice teaching.

We remember his emphasis on the relationship between objective truth and history. He saw first hand in Nazism and Stalinism the bitter and tragic consequences in history

CELEBRATING THE CENTENARY OF THE BIRTH OF SAINT JOHN PAUL II



HOLINESS AND MISSION



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of warped culture-of-death philosophies.

In contrast, he asked us to be witnesses to the Splendor of Truth, a Truth that, if followed and lived courageously, could lead the world to bright new horizons of charity, holiness and mission. In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (1998), he saw so clearly that faith and reason are joined with, not opposed to, each other.

We remember his global ecumenical outreach in *Ut Unum Sint* (1995), and his championing the Sacrament of Penance to a world that had lost the sense of sin in *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (1984).

We remember his forward looking theology and spirituality of the Catholic priesthood contained in his 1992 Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*.

St. John Paul II always proposed with great charity the objective Splendor of Truth of Catholic teaching. Whether it is the objective truths in regard to the Sacred Scriptures and our Catholic Biblical Theology, whether it is the objective truths contained in the Apostle's Creed we proclaim every Sunday, whether it is the objective truths of God's grace flowing through the Seven Sacraments, whether it is the objective truths concerning every dimension of the Ten Commandments and Catholic Moral

Pope John Paul II reaches out to young women during World Youth Day in Denver in 1993. (CNS photo)



Teaching, or whether it is the objective truths about our Catholic Spiritual Theology and the teaching of the Catholic saints and mystics on prayer, the truth forms our minds, hearts, consciences and souls, and enables us to be truly free and truly holy.

As we celebrate the May 18, 2020 Centenary of the birth of St. John Paul II, we remember so many different dimensions of his philosophical, theological, spiritual, human rights and missionary legacy.

In his 1993 encyclical *The Splendor of Truth* (*Veritatis Splendor*), St. John Paul II expresses how essential it is for the common good of global society that we promote and uphold objective moral truth.

He writes: "Genuine understanding and compassion must mean love for the person, for his true good, for his authentic freedom. And this does not result, certainly, from concealing or weakening moral truth, but rather from proposing it in its most profound meaning as an outpouring of God's eternal wisdom, which we have received in Christ, and as a service to man, to the growth of his freedom and to the attainment of his happiness." (95)

In these COVID-19 times, we have seen a rediscovery right before our eyes of the sense and understanding of the sanctity and value of every individual life at every stage of life from conception until natural death as health care professionals and first responders put their lives on the line each and every day.

This past March 25th, we celebrated another dimension of St. John Paul II's legacy, the 25th Anniversary of his encyclical *The Gospel of Human Life* (*Evangelium Vitae*).

His words at the beginning of the encyclical are so poignant 25 years later as we experience the tragedies and traumas of the COVID-19 crisis.

He writes: "The Church knows that this *Gospel of life*, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person — believer and non-believer alike — because it marvelously fulfills all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. *Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Romans 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree.* Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded." (2)

Mary, Mother of the Church, pray for us!

St. John Paul II, pray for us!

St. Faustina, pray for us! †