
LIVING WITNESS TO PRIESTLY LOVE

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“I will appoint over you shepherds after my own heart, who will shepherd you wisely and prudently.” (Jer 3:15) “I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.” (Jn 10: 14-15, 18)

John Paul II: Made of his priesthood, a gift of love and responsibility

My small and simple gaze at his priestly heart

John Paul II chose with great love and determination to always live, at every moment and in every circumstance, the dignity of his priestly identity. Since his ordination, and through the distinctive services he offered the Church, he anchored his life on the profound mystery which touches the existence of every priest: to be a living image of the Eucharistic, Priestly and Pierced Heart of Christ.

His most elevated choice: to offer himself completely to the gift received....all of his human and masculine “I,” all of his qualities, all of his human and spiritual richness, to the service not of himself, but rather to the gift of the priesthood....a gift which he considered to be a precious mystery that had been deposited in his heart.....And his life, grafted in the mystery, upon receiving it and guarding it, germinating it....gave much fruit.



John Paul II based his priestly life in the oblation love for Christ and the faithful love for the Church....in that love which transforms the priest into the potent channel of the merciful and generous love of Christ for humanity. To give oneself unreservedly, unconditionally, without measure....without limits, and to serve to the point of giving one's life, to spend one's life for the Kingdom, was his trajectory of life. We could affirm, with humility, that the priestly heart of John Paul II was formed in the School of the Maternal Heart of the Virgin Mary, in the School of the Cross and in the School of the Suffering Church, that of Poland's.

How many priest martyrs illuminated the path of Karol Wojtyla....how many died with the cross in their hands....how many died kissing their stoles...John Paul II learned to be a priest according to the Heart of Christ in the School of the Virgin Mary and of the Cross, and in the School of the suffering and martyred Church. John Paul II lived his priesthood making the words of the Consecration his own in the first person: “This is my body....this is my blood.”

In the last letter he addressed to priests for Holy Thursday 2005, a few days before dying, he wrote:

“Christ's self-giving, which has its origin in the Trinitarian life of the God who is Love, reaches its culmination in the sacrifice of the Cross, sacramentally anticipated in the Last Supper. It is impossible to repeat the words of consecration without feeling oneself caught up in this spiritual movement. In a certain sense, when he says the words: "take and eat", the priest must learn to apply them also to himself, and to speak them with truth and generosity. If he is able to offer himself as a gift, placing himself at the disposal of the community and at the service of anyone in need, his life takes on its true meaning.”



John Paul II loved his priesthood and priests; holy priests, the dedicated and responsible priests as well as those who lived amongst temptation, amongst those who would lament over their weaknesses and sins, he even loved the priests who had left the priesthood, to whom he tried to remind of the indelible character of their ordination. What a beautiful expression of love for the priesthood in the homily addressed during the mass of the Jubilee of priests (May 18, 2000, his birthday):

“I embrace you with deep affection, dear priests of the whole world! It is an embrace that knows no bounds and extends to the priests of every particular Church, reaching you especially, dear sick priests, who are alone or troubled by various difficulties.”

John Paul II, a priest with the cross over his shoulders, walked with the cross in the difficulty of the long path of the history of the 20th Century. He knew in a personal, familial, priestly, ecclesial and world-wide manner, the hour of the cross, of the suffering, of the agony.

When the word could not pass from his heart to his lips in his last Easter Sunday here on earth, when he said good-bye with a tear, blessing the world with a silent but eloquent paternal gesture; when he knew how to make of his deathbed an altar and of his agony an offering...when looking out the window where for 27 years he constantly heard an echo, *“John Paul II, the whole world loves you”*, another tear ran down his cheek. When God granted him the grace to end his earthly pilgrimage pronouncing his last *“Amen”* and in that way dying just as he lived....When he was giving us his last priestly testimony, he ardently proclaimed what he assumed with love and responsibility the day of his ordination: to be another Christ, loving and doing in everything the will of the Father and generously offering his life for the Church and humanity.



John Paul II died as he had always lived his priesthood: loving to the extreme.