



**Mass of Thanksgiving
Commemorating the Canonization of
Pope Saint John XXIII & Pope John Paul II**

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Cathedral of Saint Joseph**

We come together today to pray in thanksgiving for the declaration of two extraordinary men as saints of the Church. The celebration at the Vatican yesterday has been dubbed by the secular media as the “day of four popes.” It was an historic occasion and a powerful reminder of the glory of Christ’s Church with Pope Francis and Pope Emeritus Benedict together celebrating Mass in memory of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II. I do not know about you, but my heart was filled with joy and awe. How beautiful and comforting is the grace of the Office of Peter.

As Popes they have already touched our diocese with the Roncalli Catholic Schools in Aberdeen and the John Paul II Catholic School in Mitchell. In addition as we look to founding a new parish in the Sioux Falls metropolitan area I have already announced it will be dedicated to Saint John Paul II.

Yet saints are declared not for the office they held, but for the lives they led. A series of questions is asked about anyone put forth toward public sainthood. Among them are:

Does the candidate have a reputation for heroic virtue or a martyr’s death?

Have any of the faithful sought the intercession of the servant of God for divine favors?

Of what value would the canonization of the candidate be for the Church at large?

Is there anything in the candidate’s life or writings that would be an impediment to canonization?

Are there any potential miracles due to the candidate’s intercession?

The final decision of course belongs to the Pope alone.

There are many saints unknown yet as deserving. However, declared saints can officially be venerated throughout the universal Church and petitioned to intercede for those praying to them. Thus, these esteemed and beloved men were declared saints not because they were popes but because they lived lives of heroic virtue both before and during their pontificates.

Our readings today identify areas of heroic virtue these saints exhibited. In the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John were warned by the religious leaders of the day to stop preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ crucified and risen and were threatened with their lives if they did not do follow that order. Peter and John and the others sacred scripture records: “filled with the Holy Spirit,

continued to do so with boldness¹.” Angelo Roncalli and Karol Wojtyla also lived in eras when preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ was forbidden, by the Nazis and the Communists, but also by the secular culture. Yet filled with the Holy Spirit they continued to do so boldly as believers, priests, bishops and popes.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus tells a confused Nicodemus that “unless one is born from above he cannot see the Kingdom of God².” Nicodemus does not understand as many in the days of these two saints lived and in our day do not understand. Yet John XXIII in calling Vatican Council II and John Paul II in his worldwide travels continued to preach God’s mercy and love so that all peoples might be born from above, which means being filled with the Holy Spirit through conversion of heart.

Saints are raised up in the Church to encourage us and give us example. What the new saints exemplified for us is living with joy and hope, reflecting in word and action God’s ever-loving mercy, pricking the conscience of the world and its leaders to a sense of justice for all including respect for all life, and resolutely standing firm without compromise for the truth of the teachings of Christ.

These two saints are so well known, their writings so instructive and their witness so moving, that we all ought to look to them for counsel, for learning, for modes of faithfulness, and now especially for intercession and prayer.

Saint John XXIII speaks directly to me when he said, “The bishop is always a public fountain. . . . People of all kinds come to my poor fountain. My function is to give drink to all. To leave a good impression behind, even in the heart of a brigand, seems to me to be a work of love that in due season will bring forth a blessing.” He also gave this good advice: “Listen to everything, forget much, correct little,” and “Unity in necessary things, freedom in doubtful things, and charity in all things.”

Saint John Paul II in his over a quarter of a century as Pope wrote and spoke so many powerful, insightful and challenging words. Yet it was his person, his faith, and his personality that truly moves, especially his prayerfulness. A recent book noted that his focus was on five things – young people, healthy human love, the Holy Eucharist, the Cross and the Blessed Mother. One new priest secretary became alarmed when he could not find him in the chapel where he had gone. Then he discovered that the Pope was there laying on the floor his arms stretched out in the form of a cross. It was said that he often disrupted his schedule by being so absorbed in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament that time vanished. It is told that when he came to the United States and stayed an Archbishop’s House, the advance team asked that the door to the Adoration Chapel be closed so he would not be distracted and throw off the schedule. As he walked down the hall with many closed doors, he stopped, went to one, opened it and there was the Blessed Sacrament. He wagged his finger at the aides and went in. Most moving for me is his kissing the ground of every place he went, when unable to bend the ground was lifted to his lips – all lands and all people are sacred, sitting in the corner of the prison with the man who tried to kill him, and his last days showing us that all life is worthy until the last breath. “Be not afraid” was his constant message and *Totus Tuus* (Totally yours, Blessed Mother) his motto. These brief sound bites cannot be spun or ignored, and ones we ought not to forget.

Good Saint John XXIII and Saint John Paul the Great, thank you for your courage, your faith, and your inspiration. Pray for us all.

¹ – Acts 4:31

² – John 3:2