



Dear Parish Family,

The events of the last few weeks have been momentous. One who will probably be regarded as among the greatest popes in history has died. The eyes of Catholic and non-Catholic have watched the ancient rituals of Christian liturgy and papal protocol. What is an appropriate Lutheran response? We would offer some suggestions.

John Paul is already being referred to as “the Great”. We have been told that only two other popes have received this title, Leo I, who lived in the fifth century, and Gregory I, who lived in the sixth century. The times in which they lived were wrought with change and danger, transition from the Roman Empire to the Dark Ages during which the seeds of European civilization were planted. Leo fended off the cruel Huns from the gates of Rome. Gregory served as a pastor to his flock during plague. In spite of the descending darkness on Europe, these times were fruitful of Christian mission. Gregory sent Augustine, not the great African doctor, to England to convert the Anglo-Saxons. During the century in which Leo lived, the Frankish people became Catholic Christians. Leo sent a long letter to the Council of Chalcedon defending the doctrine of Christ’s divinity and humanity. These men held aloft the light of Christ in dark times. So did John Paul. In the midst of Communist oppression and global violence, John Paul lifted the light of Christ. He preached the Gospel, was a warrior for peace, shepherded his people, and never lost hope. He was prepared for his ministry in the cauldron of Nazism in his native Poland. We Lutherans show respect for a fellow Christian, who was a faithful leader.

John Paul took ecumenicism seriously. He gave us no easy solutions for greater Christian unity. He held firmly not only to teachings Catholics and Lutherans share, which are many including most central doctrines, but to those in which we differ. At the same time, he reached out to a divided Christendom. He called the Christian churches to strive for greater unity. As Saint Paul reminds us, Christ is not divided. We must remember these words and work for unity.

John Paul was an adamant defender of life. He promoted a culture of life that is founded on the teachings of our Lord, the Author of life. Human life is sacred, because we come from the hand of God, the life giving Creator. We are called to turn away from the glib human tendency to disrespect life. The slaughter of the Twentieth Century in which John Paul grew to manhood and became a spiritual leader is testimony to the culture of death.

Lutherans can show the greatest respect for this great Christian leader. He was a faithful warrior for our Lord. We should pray for the Roman Catholic Church, as it decides on a new leader, and recommit ourselves to improved understanding and greater unity with our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. Lutheranism began as a reform movement within the Catholic Church. We must remember this. Our desire is to confess the true faith with all the brothers and sisters who make up the Christian communion. We are called to be witnesses and workers for unity in Christ. The road will continue to be difficult, but it must be trod.

Will John Paul be sainted? It is most likely. On our Lutheran calendar of saints we have placed Pope John XXIII, another great warrior of Christ. Someday, John Paul may also find a place there.

As we travel through the Easter season, let us celebrate our new life in Christ and remember the great Christian witnesses like John Paul who have inspired the Church with their bold witness to the Lord. We who are in Christ travel with a whole community with an ancient past and a bright future. Thanks be to God.

In Christ,

Pastor Mike & Pastor Mandy