

Blessings, opportunities after pope's death

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |

I mentioned in my homily the day of the Holy Father's funeral that we must not squander the outpouring of grace springing from his life and death. The past few weeks have been an extraordinary experience for the Church. They have also been an extraordinary experience of the Church.

What blessings have we witnessed, and what challenges have we been given?

✖ The clear demonstration of humanity's basic, innate hunger for God. Our fascination with all that has happened speaks of our deepest need and purpose, friendship with God. Have I responded to God's offer of friendship? Have I put off my response for another day?

✖ Christian witness of John Paul II. He gave himself so completely to Christ that everything about his life and death spoke of the Gospel. Have I given myself to Christ in equal measure, and can others see the Gospel at work in me?

✖ The spontaneous gathering of people from around the world. The crowds were drawn to Rome not just to honor the pope, but as a natural response to what God is doing through the Gospel: bringing the world together. Does my witness to Christ serve as an instrument of unity for those around me? Am I ever a cause for division?

✖ The testimony of millions of individuals who recount how the pope touched their lives, whether or not they ever saw him in person. Do I underestimate the impact I have on others, including those who see me but whom I will never meet, simply by being a good Catholic?

✖ The evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in the Church. Although John Paul II's election in 1978 was called a "surprise," it should not surprise us that the Holy Spirit gave us who we needed and continues to guide the Church, just as Jesus promised. God made his choice known through the cardinals, just as in countless other ways he keeps us faithful to his Son and shows us how to live the Gospel generation after generation. Do I trust in the continued fulfillment of Jesus' promises and place my hope in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Church? Do I pray to the Spirit when making plans and decisions of my own?

✖ The fullness of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic. The Church has its origin in the one true God who is holiness itself; proclaims the fullness of faith and abides in the midst of all peoples; is built on the foundation of the apostles and is governed by Christ through the successors to Peter and the other apostles. Do I pick and choose those aspects of Church teaching which appeal to me, or do I accept the richness of Catholic life and teaching as God's gift and try to understand it better?

✖ The sacramental life of the Church. The beautiful pageantry and liturgy we watched on television spoke to us of the power of the Church's sacramental life. Even the way the Church ritualized her mourning helped us grieve from afar. Do I appreciate and participate in the sacraments with enthusiasm and humility? Have I deprived myself of God's gifts by staying away from Mass, confession and the other sacraments available to me?

✖ The Gospel of Life. This is a phrase immortalized by John Paul II's encyclical of the same name. He will be remembered for his compassion and passionate concern for the unborn, the poor, the oppressed, the sick and the downtrodden. Does my life reflect a similar perspective or am I concerned mostly about myself? Do I assume that our culture's lack of respect for human life is irreversible, or will I stand up courageously for life as God's precious gift?

✖ The convincing power of nonviolence and reconciliation. John Paul's unique influence on the fall of communism was accomplished without firing a shot. He pressed tirelessly for peace, knowing from experience that war is not God's way. Do I push others around to get my way, or

do I work for the common good with generosity and gentleness?

✘ The mystery of the Cross. From outward appearances, much of John Paul's pontificate was marked by physical suffering; but it is clear that interiorly he gave himself both to Christ and to us through it. He would let nothing keep him from proclaiming Christ, and he taught us how relying on God reveals God's strength and hope. He carried his crosses with Christ to show us the power of our heavenly Father shining through human weakness. Do I take up the crosses life has given me and ask Jesus to teach me through them? Do I turn to God as my rock and my hope?

✘ People are asking questions about Jesus and the Catholic Church. This is a particularly blessed opportunity. Will I speak of my Catholic faith in Jesus, of what the Church teaches, and help bring more disciples to him? Will I take the time to learn more myself so that I can answer those questions?

I have no doubt that you have noticed other blessings and opportunities these past few weeks. May Karol Józef Wojtyła rest in peace, and may we who were privileged to live during his pontificate never forget what Christ taught us through him.

Do you have an intention for Bishop Sartain's prayer? If so, send it to him at Bishop Sartain's Prayer List, Diocese of Little Rock, 2500 North Tyler St., P.O. Box 7239, Little Rock, AR 72217.