

CATHOLIC HERALD

www.chnonline.org

HERALD OF HOPE

Thanking God for gift of John Paul II

Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan



"Yes, he's the pope from Poland; but, what's more important, he is the pope from Palestine!" Coming from a Dominican priest from Krakow, who was so legitimately excited that his former archbishop, Karol Wotyla, was now the bishop of Rome, and that a son of Poland was now in the chair of St. Peter, I was a bit surprised to hear him say that. So, I asked him to elaborate.

"You bet I'm proud that this pope is from Poland; but what moves me most is that he is spiritually from Palestine. This man is truly the 'vicar of Christ,' and Jesus is the most important person in his life. He wants to do what Jesus did: teach, serve, sanctify. He wants to renew in the church and in the world what happened in Palestine 2000 years ago. The

defining characteristic of his life is not so much that he is a Pole but that he is a faithful disciple of Jesus."

This column comes to you on the 25th anniversary of Pope John Paul II as our Holy Father. I invite you to join me in thanking God for the gift he is to us; I invite you to pray with and for him today; I invite you to renew your love and loyalty for him.

It's almost a full-time job, but I try my best to read all the writings and speeches the Holy Father has given. One word keeps appearing over and over again: return. To priests he exhorts, "return to the Upper Room where Jesus gave the church the priesthood!"; to young people he says, "return to your inner dignity as a child of God made in his image and likeness!"; to the sick he summons, "return to the Hill of Calvary

where we find the cross which gives meaning to our suffering!"; to married couples he asks, "return to the radiance of your sacred bond which mirrors God's love for his people!"; to America he exclaims, "return to your birthright of ordered liberty, protection of life, and a welcome to those in need."

He has asked us all to return, to what is most decent, noble, and uplifting in our very makeup as children of God. He has asked us to return to Jesus, to come back to Palestine and be saved.

In his memorable address here last spring as part of our Pallium Lecture Series, George Weigel observed that John Paul II had returned the church to the era of the New Testament. Critics moan that he wants to return the church to "the way it was." They are right. Pope John Paul wants to return the church to the way Jesus intended it, and wants all of us to experience again the excitement, the invitation, the

conversion, the promise, the miracles, the teaching — the Person — who walked in Palestine 2000 years ago and lives now in his church.

How fitting that the liturgy of the word for this Sunday's

Mass, the very readings to be proclaimed in St. Peter's Square as the Holy Father celebrates his jubilee and beatifies Mother Teresa, teach of humility. Pope John Paul asks us to return to humility, and has shown us the way: simple service, contrition for past wrongs, recognition that the papacy can be seen by some as an obstacle in the quest for

unity, preference for the poor, the sick, children, and perseverance in his own present frailty have all given us a powerful lesson in humility for a quarter century. And history will undoubtedly call this humble man "Pope John Paul the Great." Return to Peter! Return to Palestine; Return to Jesus!

I invite you to join me in thanking God for the gift he is to us; I invite you to pray with and for him today; I invite you to renew your love and loyalty for him.
