

FOR THE GOOD OF THE HOUSEHOLD

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POPE JOHN PAUL II

Pope John Paul II made a deep impression upon a multitude of individuals. If that were not so, Rome would not have seen an influx of over 3 million pilgrims that came to say “thank you.” I felt a need to attend his Funeral Mass and am grateful to those who made it possible for me to do so and who understood my absence from the Diocese.

On the flight to Rome, there was a man from Chicago, who took time off from work. His plan was to be one of those millions in the three-mile line (waiting for twenty hours or more) in order to get a 15-second glimpse of Pope John Paul II lying in state in Saint Peter’s Basilica. The man was returning home the following day. I sat in the same row with a young lady from around Philadelphia on my return flight. She felt a need to come for the former Holy Father’s funeral, even though she was not sure that she believed in an after-life.

Perhaps, she came because she wanted to believe. Pope John Paul II engendered a sense of hope in the young as well as the old. There was an authenticity about him. It was he who told us not to be afraid. He lived out his own counsel to the very end. Whether or not one agreed with him, he commanded respect. It appeared that the whole world grieved his death. I share with you a few comments that I received from spiritual leaders in our area.

Metropolitan Nicholas of the American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese of the USA wrote, “Surely in these days, a cynical world has been given the prospect of faith and hope, and a Christian testimony of the meaning of life and death.” To his own Faithful, the Metropolitan noted that the former pope was instrumental in the significantly improved relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church.

Bishop Gregory Pile of the Allegheny Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America said that Pope John Paul II “has shown his deep love and commitment to all people of faith...,” and Rabbi Burt E. Schuman noted that the Jewish community also feels “a profound sense of grief, for we have lost a true and beloved friend.”

The Reverend Bruce E. Cadenhead, Moderator of the Presbytery of Redstone of the Presbyterian Church, made the following observation about the late pope: “He was a man of epic proportions, concerned for the proclamation of the faith, for justice and equal rights, a strong advocate of ecumenical relations, and a deeply spiritual man. As Presbyterians, we have been inspired by his witness to the faith and his leadership both to the church and to the world.”

Rabbi Ammos Chorny of the Agudath Achim Congregation in Altoona recalled the following words of Pope John Paul II: “As Christians and Jews, following the example of

the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world. This is a common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another.”

This “common task” remains for all of us to take ever more seriously. Pope John Paul II has more than merely encouraged us on such a path. From what has been said thus far by our new Holy Father and from the hopes expressed by many, I expect that we will find new and surprising leadership along our journey in the person of Pope Benedict XVI.