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Remembering a Cardinal's visit The future Pope John Paul II does lunch in Alexandria

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One of the little-known facts of Old Town's history is that alongside the historical greats who have graced this charming Potomac River port city was the late Pope John Paul II.

His visit occurred on Aug. 11, 1976, when as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, archbishop of Krakow, the future pope lunched at Gadsby's Tavern in the adjacent American Legion Hall.

He was accompanied by 125 guests, including 15 Polish bishops, the cardinal's secretaries and members of the Polish-American community.

At Mayor Charles Beatley's initiative, the cardinal was presented with the keys of the city by Vice Mayor Nora Lamborne, one of Alexandria City Council's first two female members.

Father Philip Majka, then assistant pastor of St. Mary's and a third-generation Polish American, served as the cardinal's guide.

Recounting those events for The Alexandria Times, Majka said the initial idea was to make the visit here part of a vacation tour, following Cardinal Wojtyla's attendance at Philadelphia's International Eucharistic Congress and observances of the United States' bicentennial. Instead, his trip grew into a visit with Washington's Polish community.

Barbara Witulska Lazo, a Polish émigré and owner of Old Warsaw Galleries, said it was a "wonderful" occasion, and that she remembered the future pope's "tremendous spirit of goodness."

As the tour's "front man," Majka said he spent little time conversing with or closely observing Wojtyla. But he remembers watching as the cardinal prayed and feeling that "God sort of informed me: 'You're in the presence of a very special person.'"

Majka said the day's tour included the Library of Congress and the new Smithsonian Air & Space Museum, and that the selection of Old Town for the afternoon was by happenstance. Caterer Joseph Gallegos thought it a nice venue, given what he considered its similarities to Krakow, and Gadsby's was a convenient location before departing the Washington area.

But the selection of this historic tavern in Alexandria might have held symbolic importance, as well, for a priest who had built a career in Communist Poland after World War II and who as pope would urge freedom for people living under oppression. For colonial American taverns such as Gadsby's served as gathering places where our founding fathers met to plot the American revolution to seek freedom from England's rule.

Similarly, first as a young priest (1946-1958) and with ever-increasing impact as bishop of Krakow (1958-1963), archbishop (1963-1967), cardinal (1967-1978) and finally as Pope John Paul II (1978-2005), Wojtyla played a strong role in fighting communism's control of people's lives.

A pivotal event was his first visit as pope to his native Poland in June 1979, which drew millions of Poles in an outpouring that shocked Polish authorities.

On Oct. 6, 1979, three years after visiting Old Town and a few months after that historic Polish gathering, Pope John Paul II spoke on the White House south lawn and mentioned the impact of what he had seen in his earlier visit here.

He said that "during the bicentennial celebration, which I was fortunate to participate in... it was obvious to everyone that concern for what is human and spiritual is one of the basic principles governing the life of this community... respect for the freedom and the dignity of every individual, whatever his origin, race, sex or creed, has been a cherished tenet of the civil creed of America... backed up by courageous decisions *and actions."

His 1976 trip and participation in the bicentennial observances had apparently marked the first time in a long while that such a delegation was legally allowed to travel outside communist Poland.

He had visited America once before, in September 1969. Then the world's second-youngest cardinal, he traveled here at the behest of Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, primate of Poland, to "bring thanks from his country and church for the aid Americans gave to Poles following World War II."



Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, the future Pope John Paul II, and then Bishop John S. Speuse, read the plaque for Ignace Jan Paderewski outside the Mast of the USS Maine.



Cardinal Karol Wojtyla is in the Memorial Display Room at the Amphitheater standing in front of the ceremonial headdress and "coup sticks" of Crow Chief Plenty Coups.

(Photos taken by Fr. Majka in 1969, now part of Arlington Cemetery Archives)

The trip marked the first time a Polish cardinal had visited the United States. Majka also served as tour guide for the Washington leg of that trip; he said that in keeping with the cardinal's wishes, "the whole visit was simply spiritual."

Contrary to later accounts, Majka said that first Washington trip did not include a visit to Old Town Alexandria.

But as with his visit in 1976, it did include Arlington National Cemetery, where he visited the graves of President John F. Kennedy and former Polish Prime Minister Jan Paderewski, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.

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John Paul II: The road to sainthood



Courtesy photos

Father C. John McCloskey with Pope John Paul II in January 2000, just over five years before his death.

Shortly after succeeding Pope John Paul II – whose funeral was punctuated by spontaneous and frequent shouts from the crowd of "Santo Subito!" (i.e., sainthood immediately) – Pope Benedict XVI announced he was waiving the traditional five-year waiting period to begin the cause of beatification and declared Pope John Paul II a "servant of God."

The official process for beatification began in the diocese of Rome on June 28. The path typically includes milestones such as declarations of someone as "venerable," "blessed," then canonization as a "saint."

Press reports have also raised the possibility that John Paul II might be declared a "martyr" as a result of the attempted assassination on May 13, 1981, on the basis of that attack causing much pain and suffering and ultimately contributing to his death. Such a declaration could make it easier to canonize him as a saint.

According to Father C. J. McCloskey III, research fellow at Faith and Reason Institute "current rules and regulations" require two miracles for canonization – "one after death and another one after beatification," but that "if Pope John Paul II is declared a martyr, he needs no miracle."

However, said McCloskey, "the pope can declare anyone a saint, when and how he wants, as long as the person is dead!" That power "belongs to him as supreme pontiff," but is "rarely used," he said.

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The Significance of May 13

It's no accident Pope Benedict XVI chose May 13 to commence the process for beatification of Pope John Paul II.



May 13, the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima, was the same day in 1981 that Mehmet Ali Agca attempted to assassinate John Paul II in St. Peter's Square in Rome. The pope believed his life was spared that day because he bent over to look at a young girl's pendant of Fatima just as Ali Agca fired, causing the bullet to miss his heart.

On May 13, 1917, three peasant children first reported seeing a vision of the Virgin Mary near Fatima, Portugal, a city 110 miles north of Lisbon. Between May 13 and Oct. 13, 1917, those three children returned to the Cova da Iria, where they said Mary appeared and asked them to pray the rosary for world peace, for the end of World War I, for sinners and for the conversion of Russia.

Two of the children had died in 1919 and 1920, but the third of those visionaries died just this past summer.

The children had said that Mary gave them three secrets. One of them revealed the first secret in 1927, concerning devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The second secret was a vision of hell. The third secret, which Pope

John Paul II directed the Holy See's secretary of state to reveal in 2000, spoke of a 'bishop in white' who was shot by soldiers who fired bullets and arrows into him. Many people linked this to the assassination attempt in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981.

The city of Fatima interestingly was named after the daughter of the prophet Mohammed in Islamic legend. She was considered "the purest of women," one who brings healing and compassion for individuals and nations alike, and helps in achieving forgiveness and understanding.

Original article on which "Remembering a Cardinal's Visit" was based:

The Future Pope John Paul II's Visit to Old Town Alexandria

by
Mary Claire Kendall

One of the little known facts of Old Town's history is that alongside the historical greats who have graced this charming Potomac River seaport, including most notably America's first four Presidents, stands a giant of the ages – Pope John Paul II.

His visit occurred on August 11, 1976, when, as Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow, the future Pope lunched at *Gadsby's Tavern* in the adjacent, affiliated *American Legion Hall*, where, accompanied by 125 guests including 15 Polish Bishops, the Cardinal's secretaries and members of the Polish-American community, he was presented, at Mayor Charles Beatley's initiative, the Keys of the City by Vice Mayor Nora Lamborne, one of Alexandria City Council's first two female members.

Fr. Philip Majka, then assistant pastor of St. Mary's and third-generation Polish American, served as the Cardinal's guide. The initial idea, he said, was to make this a vacation tour following Cardinal Wojtyla's attendance at Philadelphia's International Eucharistic Congress, where he also participated in bicentennial observances; but, instead, it became a visit with Washington's Polish community. Barbara Witulska Lazo, a Polish émigré and owner of *Old Warsaw Galleries*, was effusive, recalling this "wonderful" occasion and the future Pope's "tremendous spirit of goodness."

As the tour's "front man" Fr. Majka spent little time conversing with or closely observing the future Pope; yet, one memory stands out: While the Cardinal was praying, he watched him – before interrupting to announce the start of the morning's tour (*Library of Congress* and the new *Air & Space Museum*). "God," he reminisced, "sort of informed me: 'you're in the presence of a very special person.'"

While the selection of Old Town for the afternoon was by happenstance – the caterer Joseph Gallegos thought it a nice venue given what he considered its similarities to Krakow; and *Gadsby's* was a convenient location prior to departing Washington – the venue could not have been more appropriate. For Colonial American taverns such as *Gadsby's* served as *gathering places* where our founding fathers met to plot and plan the American revolution of liberty and freedom. Similarly, as a young priest (1946-1958) and with ever-increasing effect as Bishop of Krakow (1958-1963), then Archbishop (1963-1967) then Cardinal (1967-1978), then as Pope (1978-2005), this *very special person* played a (if not "the") defining, central role in quashing communism's method of atomizing people. He did so precisely *by gathering people together* and helping them embrace their dignity as children of God, thus rejecting the depersonalization of philosophies at variance with this dignity. A most pivotal *gathering* was his first visit as Pope to his native Poland in June 1979, when millions, not the expected few old ladies, turned out, shocking Polish authorities into realizing the power of his message to "Be Not Afraid."

On October 6, 1979, three years after visiting Old Town and a few months after that historic Polish gathering, Pope John Paul II spoke to America's revolution of liberty and freedom on the White House south lawn: "... during the bicentennial celebration which I was fortunate to participate in... it was obvious to everyone that concern for what is human and spiritual is one of the basic principles governing the life of this community... respect for the freedom and the dignity of every individual, whatever his origin, race, sex or creed, has been a cherished tenet of the civil creed of America... backed up by courageous decisions and actions."

The 1976 trip allowing participation in the bicentennial observances apparently marked the first time in a long while such a delegation was legally allowed to travel outside communist Poland, making it particularly poignant.

Cardinal Wojtyla had, however, visited America one time prior in September 1969, when, as the world's second youngest cardinal, he traveled here at the behest of Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, to "bring thanks from his country and church for the aid Americans gave to Poles following World War II." The Washington leg of the trip, on which Fr. Majka also served as tour guide, marked the first time a Polish cardinal had visited the United States. In keeping with the Cardinal's wishes, Fr. Majka noted, "the whole visit was simply spiritual." Contrary to later accounts, this first Washington itinerary did not include Old Town Alexandria. But, as with his visit in 1976, it did include Arlington Cemetery where he visited the graves of President John F. Kennedy and that of former Polish Prime Minister Jan Paderewski, on which Cardinal Wojtyla placed roses he had received at the airport arrival ceremony. He also visited the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which "very much impressed" him.

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