

The Papacy and the National Shrine

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The history of the National Shrine and that of the papacy is one of blessed coincidences and historical intertwining; it is the story of men and women, clergy and religious, bishops and cardinals, gathering around the “heart of a Mother.” While the National Shrine chronicles only one papal visit, three of the last five popes visited the Shrine as cardinals.

Pope Pius XII (1939-1958)

Eugenio Cardinal Pacelli, Vatican Secretary of State, became the first Vatican official, excluding the apostolic delegate, to set foot within the National Shrine. Outranked only by the Pope in hierarchical importance, Cardinal Pacelli began his Washington visit on Oct. 22, 1936 by blessing America before an assembly of 4,500 men and women, in the gymnasium of The Catholic University of America (CUA). Until 1948, the National Shrine was part of CUA. The cardinal then proceeded to the Crypt Church, where he spent time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel of the Good Shepherd. In a conversation with Msgr.



David T. O'Dwyer (second director of the National Shrine) Cardinal Pacelli recalled that 25 years ago, the Shrine's founder, Bishop Thomas J. Shahan, then rector of the University, invited him to teach Canon Law at CUA. Pope Pius X however, “would not hear of [Cardinal Pacelli] leaving Rome.” Three years after this visit to the National Shrine, the College of Cardinals elected Eugenio Maria Giuseppe Giovanni Cardinal Pacelli pope in the shortest conclave since 1623. Ten days later, Pope Pius XII restored an ancient tradition by having his coronation held outdoors on the balcony of the Basilica of St. Peter.

Pope Paul VI (1963-1978)

On June 7, 1960, while en route by plane to Washington, D.C. Giovanni Battista Cardinal Montini, Archbishop of Milan, spotted the great dome of the Shrine from the air. When told it was America's Shrine to Our Lady, he asked the welcoming committee if he could tour the Shrine before beginning his official visit, which was less than 24 hours. A member of the staff of the apostolic delegation tele-

phoned the Shrine from Washington National Airport, asking if a member of the staff would be available to give a VIP tour within the next 30 minutes. At this time, the interior of the Shrine was still “empty”; it was only seven months since the dedication and the only interior furnishings were the north apse mosaic, *Christ in Majesty*, and the main altar, without baldachin. Still, the size and architectural plan awed the cardinal; he noted the harmony between the traditional architectural principles and commented on their expression in contemporary modes. Before leaving, the cardinal remarked, “The strength of this beautiful Shrine is much more than its massive dimensions; to me it represents America's deep faith in Christ and his Blessed Mother.” On June 21, 1963, Cardinal Montini became Pope Paul VI. He would be the last pontiff to have a coronation ceremony.

Among the treasured artifacts of the National Shrine is the papal tiara of Paul VI displayed in Memorial Hall. On Nov. 13, 1964, at the close of the second session of the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council, the bishops celebrated Mass in the Byzantine Rite, to underscore the need for unity between Catholics of the East and West. At the end of Mass, Pope Paul VI walked to the main altar of St. Peter's and laid his coronation tiara – a gift from the people of Milan to their former archbishop – on the altar as a sign of solidarity with the poor of the world and as the first contribution towards their care. This was in response to the address given to the Council Fathers by James J. Norris (Nov. 5, 1964) on world poverty and the Christian conscience. Norris wrote to his old friend, Paul VI, thanking him for his “beautiful letter” after his address, and assured the pope that, “Your beautiful gesture of giving your tiara for the poor of the



world is sure to have not only symbolic effects, but will have many long range effects in Your efforts to make our Catholic people aware of the serious and grave problems of poverty and hunger in the world.” Diagonal with the display case, which holds the tiara of Paul VI and the stole worn by

John XXIII at the opening of the Council, is a bronze bust of James J. Norris, a member of the National Shrine's Board of Trustees and one of Paul VI's closest friends. From 1964 to 1968, charities and churches displaying the tiara helped raise more than \$35,000 for the poor. On Feb. 6, 1968, Archbishop Luigi Raimondi, Apostolic Delegate to the United States, presented the tiara to the National Shrine, as a tribute to the charity of the American people. Funds collected annually benefit papal charities.



Following the death of Paul VI on Aug. 6, 1978, Msgr. John J. Murphy (seventh director of the National Shrine)

recalled a private audience four years earlier, in which he and Pope Paul VI reminisced about the 1960 visit and the size of the church. During the audience the Pope confided to Msgr. Murphy, "I thought to myself, there are not enough trees in all of Milan to make so many pews."

Pope John Paul II (1978-2005)

On the night of Oct. 16, 1978, a large crowd cheered enthusiastically in a floodlit St. Peter's Square, as white smoke curled from a chimney atop the Sistine Chapel, signaling the election of a new pope. Minutes later, Pericle Cardinal Felici emerged on the balcony and introduced Karol Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow, as the first non-Italian pope since Adrian (Hadrian) VI (1522-1523).

Pope John Paul II, as he chose to be known, was not a stranger to the National Shrine, having first visited in 1969 and 1976. The second visit was at the invitation of William Cardinal Baum, Archbishop of Washington. After the International Eucharistic Congress held in Philadelphia, Cardinal Wojtyla led a delegation of Polish bishops and priests to the National Shrine (Aug. 9). In the Upper Church, they celebrated Mass in Polish; Cardinal Wojtyla was the main celebrant. Polish-Americans living in the Washington area filled the church. At the end of Mass, all walked in procession to the Polish Chapel, where they sang Marian hymns traditionally sung at the Shrine in Czestochowa.

In a private audience on Oct. 28, 1978 with Cardinal Baum, Msgr. James Gillen (the cardinal's secretary) and Msgr. John Murphy, John Paul recalled his visits to the National Shrine with joy and made a point of asking for the prayers of all who visit that his pontificate would reflect Christ's vision for the world.

Almost one full year after his election John Paul II made his first pastoral trip to the United States. It began on Monday, Oct. 1, in Boston and ended on Sunday, Oct. 7, in Washington, D.C. As the motorcade came up Fourth Street, it was greeted by the peal of bells from the Knights' Tower. The thousands standing in front of the Shrine greeted the motorcade with shouts of "Long live the pope" and "John Paul II, we love you." Before entering the Shrine, the pope addressed the crowd, "Make Jesus always a part of your hunger for truth and justice ... and your dedication to the well-being of your fellow human beings." John Paul II entered the National Shrine to the fanfare of a 150-voice choir, a brass ensemble and strains of *Tu es petrus*, and the applause of 7,000 women religious. After greeting the handicapped sisters at the communion rail, he went to the Blessed Sacrament Chapel for a moment of silent prayer. The Upper Church was still except for Durufle's *Ubi Caritas*, sung *sotto voce*. The pope then returned to his chair in the chancel and began Morning Prayer. John Paul II then delivered his address to the women religious. At the conclusion

of the ceremonies in the Upper Church, the pope went to the Chapel of Our Lady of Czestochowa to offer another prayer. A stone tablet in the chapel commemorates this visit. From there he proceeded to the Crypt Church and Memorial Hall to greet and to bless the people and religious mementos, including the first stone for the Czech National Chapel of Our Lady of Hostyn. He also autographed the Shrine's guest book. Outside once again, John Paul's two-hour visit came to an end. Descending the stairs he took the zucchetto (skull cap) from his head and saluted the blue and white banner hanging from the Knights' Tower that proclaimed his motto: *Totus tuus*. He then handed the zucchetto to Msgr. Murphy as a reminder of his visit to the National Shrine.

Pope Benedict XVI (2005-)

Not far from Munich, about 45 miles east, on the way to Salzburg, is the town of Altötting. In the center of this town stands the *Gnadenkapelle* or Holy Chapel. For more than 1,250 years, Altötting has been the spiritual center of Bavaria and for over 500 years, the most important place of pilgrimage in Germany associated with the Virgin Mary, the patroness of Bavaria. One year after his visit to the National Shrine (1980), Pope John Paul II visited the shrine in Altötting, where he received one of four hand-carved exact replicas of Our Lady of Altötting.

On Saturday, April 16, 2005, the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception dedicated a new Oratory in honor of Our Lady of Altötting. Located near the north apse of the Upper Church, this oratory is now home to one of the four replicas of the Madonna of Altötting. The other two replicas are in Altötting. As history would have it, this day of dedication was also the 78th birthday of Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger. Born in 1927 in the village of Marktl am Inn, a village approximately 12 kilometers outside of Altötting, Cardinal Ratzinger was a frequent pilgrim to the shrine in Altötting. Informed a few years earlier of the proposed new "German Oratory" here in the Basilica of the National Shrine, the cardinal was delighted. On April 19, the second day of the conclave,



white smoke emerged from the Sistine Chapel shortly before 6 p.m. Rome time. On the fourth ballot of the first conclave in 27 years and the first of the 21st Century, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger became the 264th successor of Peter, the 265th pope, and the 16th to take the name Benedict. This election was only one ballot slower than the 1939 conclave that elected Pius XII.

In his first blessing "to the city and to the world," Benedict XVI stated, "the cardinals have elected ... a simple and humble laborer in the vineyard of the Lord.... Let us move forward ... confident of [God's] help ... and [that] Mary, his Most Holy Mother, will be on our side."