

# They Came to See Him

Rome—They came last Thursday to see the fallen Pope—the long, the short and the tall; business magnates and laborers, men with children on shoulders, sisters, priests, black, yellow and red, they were there in the thousands beginning at 7 a.m.

The throng down the center aisle of St. Peter's Basilica, the world's biggest church, was 10 wide and snug for more than five hours until it reached more comfortable proportions at about noon.

The people came from all over the world and represented many nations and faiths. The Pope's body lay in state in the confessional of St. Peter. A Swiss guard of four stood watch along with four clergymen who would periodically chant prayers as the great crowd inched by under the prodding harassment of the omnipresent Vatican ushers.

"Avanti, avanti," they said over and over trying to keep the people from lingering near their fallen leader.

Naturally most of the people were Italians but there

also were people from all over the world; most on vacation in the Eternal City and caught by surprise by the death of the pontiff.

The visit to the bier was the occasion for a family from Israel to see for the first time a dead body.

"We bury our dead before sundown of the day they die," the father said, "and always in a closed casket."

Everyone noted that the Holy Father seemed unduly green so it had to be explained to the Israeli family that not all corpses had that appearance.

An American family from State College, Pa., had arrived Wednesday.

The mother explained that "we were hoping to see the Holy Father—but alive. Naturally we feel very bad to be here for his funeral."

A young man from Ghana spoke in the same vein: "I am here on vacation and this is a terrible thing to hap-

pen."

All agreed that the ceremonies were conducted in excellent taste. Many were pleasantly surprised by the absence of pomp and circumstance. Everything was done simply and the people were allowed to pass within about 15 feet of the body.

Except for one woman who broke through the barriers and ushers to touch the body, the people were equally reserved.

For a time, the Pope's brother and his family sat at the bier. Shortly, the American representative to the Vatican, David Walters, was ushered to the side of the bier and stood silently there for some minutes.

By 12:55 p.m. the crowd slimmed down and the ushers relaxed their vigil somewhat. But though the numbers of the onlookers were less the lines were continuous. And they had until Saturday night, two days hence, to see the remains of the Pope.

## ... And to Praise Him

As the news flashed around the world of Pope Paul VI's death on Sunday, Aug. 6, 1978, civic and religious leaders raised their voices in praise of both him and of his pontificate.

Father James B. Pritchard, assistant to Episcopal Bishop Robert Spears, who is attending the Lambeth Conference, noted: "We have lost a valued advocate for justice and peace, a compelling example of strong spiritual discipline and an effective participant in ecumenical dialogue."

The 440 bishops gathered at the Lambeth Conference sent a message of condolence on the death to Cardinal George Basil Hume, England's Roman Catholic primate. Earlier, in a special tribute, Archbishop Donald Coggan of Canterbury told his fellow bishops, "I was impressed by his gentle firmness, his desire for unity in the Church worldwide despite the frailty and the pain of his increasing years."

Elsewhere, in a joint statement, Dr. Philip Potter, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, and Archbishop Edward Scott, Anglican Primate of Canada and moderator of the central committee of the WCC, declared that the pope's pontificate, "will be remembered as a crucial period in both the life of the Roman Catholic Church and that of all other Christian Churches." During that time, they said, "the

foundation has been laid for a new and lasting communion among all Christian Churches. The openness towards other churches so strongly desired by the Second Vatican Council and expressed in the Decree on Ecumenism has been developed step by step and has become an irreversible reality. Pope Paul constantly sought to promote and deepen mutual understanding among the Churches."

Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, who served as general secretary of the WCC from 1966 to 1972, and was stated clerk of the United Presbyterian Church during the council, said that Pope Paul's death "is a loss to the whole Christian church."

In another joint statement, Dr. Claire Randall and William P. Thompson, general secretary and president of the National Council of Churches in the U.S., said "Pope Paul VI leaves a permanent ecumenical legacy to all Christians. He brought to completion the work of the Second Vatican Council, a body whose teachings and attitudes greatly enhanced the goal of reconciliation among all who confess the name of Christ."

Evangelist Billy Graham suggested that "history may show he was one of the most significant popes of modern times... Many of his public statements showed a genuine concern for evangelism. His statements were

also frequently marked by a strong Christ-centered emphasis."

Dr. Kenneth L. Teegarden, general minister and president of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), declared that "The Roman Catholic Church has helped kindle the ecumenical fires in recent years when Protestants seemed too tired for the effort... Pope Paul and the Catholic Church have reminded Christians and the world that the Church of Jesus Christ is one Church, and that Christians ought to act like it."

Dr. Jimmy Allen, president of the Southern Baptist Convention said that "The world has lost a leader in the cause for peace, and a man who has cared for the poor and hungry of the world. His implementation of the Vatican II decisions made him an instrument for opening communication and understanding among Christian bodies."

Dr. Joseph H. Jackson, president of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., said, "He was indeed a conscientious and courageous religious statesman. He followed the footsteps of Pope John XXIII, who himself embraced not only the great Catholic community but the so-called separated brethren, who for him were brethren by desire. The religious world has lost a great statesman, the Roman Catholic Church has lost a noble pope."

Dr. J. Robert Nelson, professor of

systematic theology at Boston University and the only United Methodist to have taught at Rome's Gregorian University, maintained that "during the 15 years of the pontificate of Pope Paul VI, more was done to strengthen ties between Catholics and Methodists than during the past two centuries."

Dr. Avery Post, president of the United Church of Christ, described Pope Paul as "a gentle man with great depths of human understanding... He was a man of peace and the champion of peace in the face of the terrorism that has spread over the world. Fellow Christians will sorely miss his leadership in the ecumenical world. He was deeply devoted to the fostering of close relationships among the Christian bodies of the world."

Dr. Robert J. Marshall, president of the Lutheran Church in America, said the death of the pope is a "time for remembering the heavy responsibility he carried and the long hours of prayer and work that he expended for the benefit of his Church and for people in all parts of the world."

Dr. Waldron Scott, general secretary of the World Evangelical Fellowship, said that "evangelicals admired Paul's commitment to social justice and world peace, respected his efforts to establish dialogue with Communists, and approved his personal initiative in giving Third World Catholics a larger voice in the affairs of the Church."

## A Spiritual Legacy

Castelgandolfo (RNS)—"An incomparable destiny awaits us if we have honored our Christian vocation, if we have lived it according to the demands which the commitment of Baptism imposes on us."

These were the words that Pope Paul had intended to utter in a public address on Sunday, Aug. 6, the Feast of the Transfiguration the day he died.

They were part of a brief homily on the significance of the feast that commemorates the revelation of Jesus

Christ's divinity to the apostles Peter, John and James on Mt. Tabor.

The pontiff was to have delivered the homily to pilgrims and visitors gathered in the courtyard of the papal summer residence here for the Pope's customary Sunday noon appearance.

A sudden worsening of a serious arthritic condition from which he had long suffered led to the announcement on Aug. 5 that he would have to cancel the Sunday talk.

Pope Paul later suffered a heart attack, which was complicated by an edema, or accumulation of fluid, in the lung, and died after receiving the Church's last rites on the evening of Aug. 6.

Vatican Radio broadcast the text of Pope Paul's homily, which said in part:

"The Transfiguration of the Lord, recalled by the liturgy of today, throws a dazzling light on our daily life and makes us turn our minds to our immortal destiny.

"On the Mount of Tabor, Christ unveiled, for a few moments, the splendor of his divinity and showed himself the chosen witness of what he really is — the Son of God, the radiant knight of God's glory, the perfect copy of God's nature.

"But he also shows us the transcendent destiny of our human nature, which he assumed to save us. That body which was transfigured before the astonished eyes of the apostles is the body of Christ, our brother. But it is

also our body...

"An incomparable destiny awaits us if we have honored our Christian vocation, if we have lived it according to the demands which the commitment of Baptism imposes on us."

Then, according to the text, in a turn typical of his summertime Sunday homilies, Pope Paul would have reminded vacationing Christians that suffering and

poverty still abound in the world.

"Even on this Sunday," said the text, "we cannot forget those who are suffering because of the particular situation they find themselves in... the unemployed who are unable to provide for the growing needs of their dear ones; the hungry, whose numbers are increasing daily in frightening proportions; and all those in general who are struggling to find a satisfactory arrangement in economic and social life."