

Pope May Visit Poland in '82

Vatican City (RNS) — Pope John Paul II said he hopes to visit his native Poland some time next year.

Speaking at the opening of a new center in Rome for Polish pilgrims and for the dissemination of Polish culture, the pope mentioned the possibility of another visit to Poland.

During the proceedings, Archbishop Jozef Glemp, the Roman Catholic primate of Poland, formally extended an invitation to the pope to visit Poland during 1982 for celebrations marking the 600th anniversary of the

country's most important national shrine — the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

The pontiff accepted the invitation in all but final terms, saying he would find it difficult to resist. He said that he wanted to serve every nation and every person with love but that he could not hide "the particular bond which united me with the church and nation from which I come, and with all my countrymen at home and abroad."

He visited Poland in June 1979.

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Two Views of Last Judgment

Sunday's Readings (R3) Mt. 25:31-46. (R1) Ez. 34:11-12, 15-17. (R2) 1 Cor. 15:20-26.

Last year I was able to visit for a second time the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Italy. This time I studied it for hours. The ceiling, like the creation of the world depicted thereon, was Michaelangelo's masterpiece of creation.

Michaelangelo was 33 at the time. When Julius II asked him to paint the Sistine ceiling, Michaelangelo protested he was a sculptor, not a painter. Yet out of respect for the papacy, he yielded. For more than four years he worked on the ceiling, alone. And he peopled it with 343 figures, 225 of which range from 10 to 12 feet in height; plus scenes from the first chapters of Genesis. The book and movie "The Agony and the Ecstasy" capture the arduity of the task and the doggedness and dedication of the great Michaelangelo.

Years later, Paul III requested that Michaelangelo paint "The Last Judgment" on the front wall of the same chapel. The last judgment was chosen as a lesson to humanity after the sack of Rome. Michaelangelo was in his 60s; again he worked alone from 1534 to 1541. He covered the 66 by 33 foot wall with a tempestuous awe inspiring scene, peopled by more than 200 figures. The scene portrays the tragic struggle of the forces of good and evil, dominated by the awesome figure of Christ with an upraised arm demanding silence and attention amid the frenzied agitation of the judged.

In a way Matthew's Gospel can be likened to the Sistine Chapel. Matthew's Gospel was written to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets; Michaelangelo has them on his ceiling — Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezechiel, and so on.

As one walks the length of the chapel, one passes through the great scenes of Salvation History: the creation, the fall, the flood — scenes attesting to the coming of the Messiah and alluded to in the gospel. At the front of the chapel, one finds the Last Judgment scene. So as Matthew's Gospel draws to a close, the Last Judgment scene is painted in words that outshine the mastery of even Michaelangelo's brush.

Judgment means separation. That is how Matthew presents it. Christ is Shepherd King — King with sovereignty over all nations; and Shepherd, separating the good from the bad, as a shepherd separates sheep and goats.

Mary at the side of Christ, in the Sistine painting, is the symbol of the Church. In Matthew's mural, the Church is present in the last judgment scene in "my least brothers," and "these least ones."

The criterion of judgment will be the deeds done or omitted, performed or neglected, to those who belong to Christ. The final question will be, "Did you spread my Kingdom of love on earth? Did you care for those as I cared for you? I gave you the 'royal treatment.' Have you treated others royally?"

Matthew's Gospel begins with the beatitude, "How blest are the poor in spirit: the reign of God of theirs." It concludes with, "Come. You have my Father's blessing! Inherit the Kingdom."

When one finishes looking at Michaelangelo's Last Judgment, one's eyes drop to the altar beneath it. There the sacrifice of Calvary is re-enacted. After Matthew's last judgment, the Passion and Death of Jesus is narrated, who is identified with the least by being crucified between the two thieves.

When Jesus rises from the dead, He commissions His disciples to teach "all nations" — to teach all that they will be judged by their mercy toward Him in His "least."

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