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Pope Cites Central American Suffering

By Nancy Frazier

Vatican City (NC) — Tens of thousands of people turned out to welcome Pope John Paul II back to Rome March 13 after his firsthand look at what he called the "tensions and sufferings that threaten lives" in Central America and Haiti.

In his first public comment on the eight-day, eight-nation trip since his March 10 return. the pope told some 50,000

people in St. Peter's Square that he had "sought to give witness ... above all to show the poor and those who are tried by any suffering the love found in the heart of the Church.

"This love cries out: 'Justice and peace for the societies of Central America," " he said.

The unusually large crowd had come to St. Peter's Square for the pope's Sunday noon angelus prayer and talk in

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response to an appeal from Cardinal Ugo Poletti, papal vicar for Rome, and several Catholic groups. Romans had been asked to come to show support for the pope after his difficult journey, which included a shouting match with Mass participants in Managua, Nicaragua, March

"There are so many tensions and sufferings that threaten lives in these societies," Pope John Paul said. "The events of the past years have caused so many victims."

'May our common prayer help the peoples of Central America to achieve justice on the way of peace." he added. "May the Church serve the great cause of the gospel; it in fact indicates the way of peace and reconciliation.

Many people in the crowd held signs or banners welcoming the pope back and thanking him for making the Central America trip. "Welcome back to the wandering witness," read one. "Rejoice, Peter. The lave of enemies wins the world," said another.

The pope returned to the Vatican on the evening of March 12 after resting two days at his summer residence in Castelgandolfo, 15 miles from Rome.

On his arrival at Castelgandolfo, he greeted a small group

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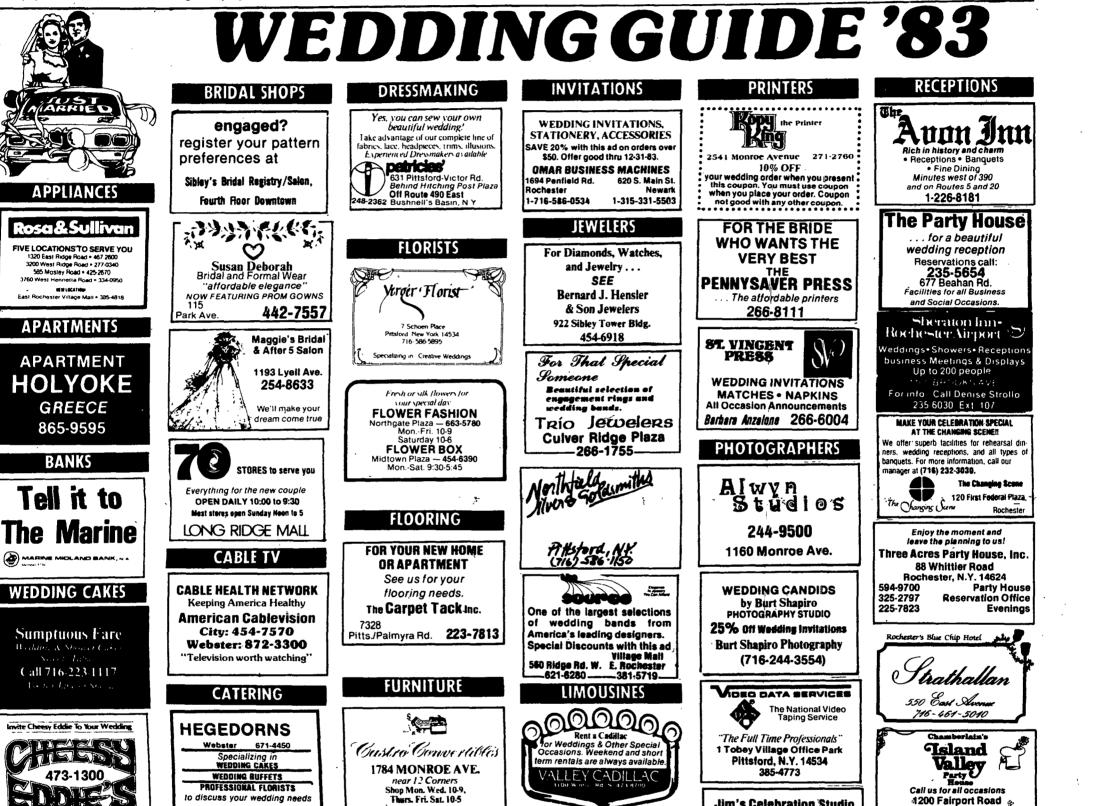
of well-wishers.

"With this pope, you never know where he'll be. If he's in Rome, if he's in Central America, if he's in Castelgandolfo," he joked.

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"But certainly, you can help him," the pope added. "If he's in Rome, you help him. If he's in Castelgandolfo, you help him more. When he was in Central America, there was a specific assistance. I thank you for this and I bless you."

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