

Devotees observing Fatima's 75th anniversary

Continued from page 1

it will not be long before another and worse one begins; that will be in the Pontificate of Pius XI."

Devotees of Our Lady of Fatima believe that worse war to have been World War II. The lady also told the children that unless people amended their lives, Russia "would spread its errors throughout the world," entire nations would be annihilated, and the church and the pope would be greatly persecuted.

Probably the most famous incident related to the reported Fatima appearances occurred on October 13, 1917 when an estimated 70,000 to 100,000 people — including a skeptical journalist and anti-clerical Portuguese radicals — witnessed the "Miracle of the Sun." This event is said to have been the lady's response to one of the children's requests for public proof of her apparitions.

Interviewed for *Vision of Fatima*, one of the witnesses, Carlos Mendes, described what he saw on that rainy day:

"The rain stopped; the clouds split up into tatters — thin, transparent strips. The sun was seen as a crown of fire, empty in the middle. It went around on itself and moved across the sky. It could be seen behind the clouds and in between them, rolling around and moving horizontally. Some cried 'I believe;' others 'Forgive!' The crowd prayed in terror."

Mendes' account differed somewhat from that of other witnesses, but the thousands present that day generally agreed that something extraordinary had occurred.

A Polish prelate who was not yet born at the time of the Miracle of the Sun credits the heavenly woman who appeared to the three children that day for saving his life.

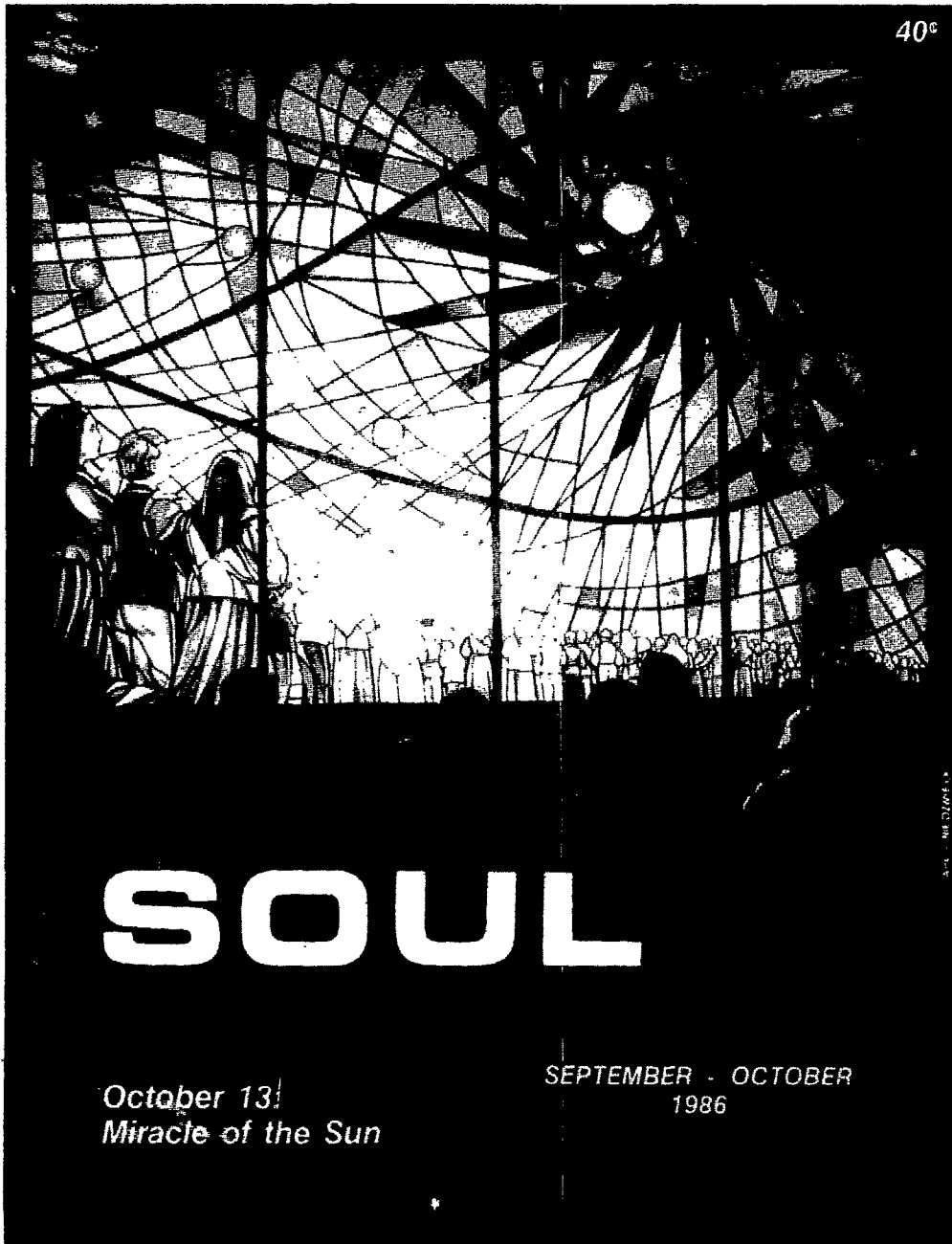
That prelate — Karol Wojtyla, better known as Pope John Paul II — was the victim of an assassination attempt in Rome on May 13, 1981, exactly 64 years from the date of the first appearance of Our Lady of Fatima.

The Holy Father was so moved by the coincidence that he traveled to Fatima on May 13 of the next year to publicly thank the Blessed Virgin Mary and God for saving his life. In March of 1984, he also fulfilled the reported request of the Virgin Mary to consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart.

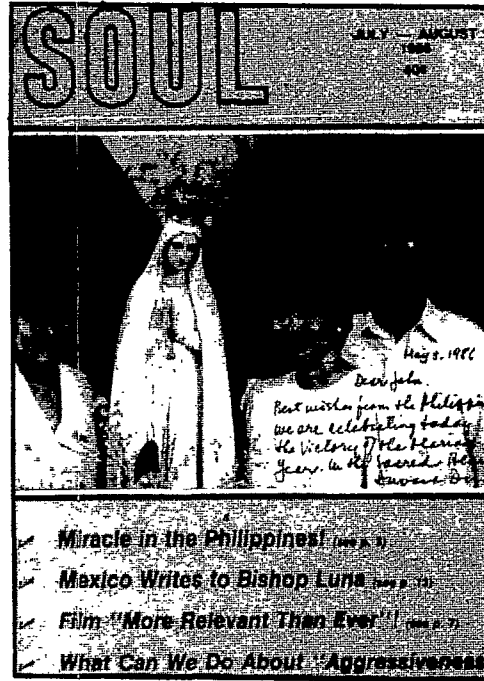
Indeed, it was the post-World War II milieu that inspired formation in this country of the Blue Army — so called because of its spiritual opposition to the atheistic Red Armies of communism.

Blue Army members make three pledges when they join:

1. to offer fulfillment of their daily



'Soul Magazine,' the official publication of the Blue Army of Our Lady of Fatima, U.S.A., is published bi-monthly. The magazine offers various features related to the alleged appearances of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the messages associated with these events.



2. to pray part of the rosary daily while meditating on its Joyful, Sorrowful or Glorious mysteries; and
3. to wear the Scapular of Mount Carmel as a sign of consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

While economists and military experts ascribe the demise of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe to a variety of economic and political factors, Blue Army members generally assert that the prayers of millions of Christians responding to Our Lady of Fatima helped bring down the Berlin Wall.

One such believer is Fairport resident Mary Kelly, who serves as the Blue Army's national secretary in the United States. Kelly noted that the Fatima apparitions took place at the same time the Bolsheviks were rising to power in Russia.

She added that Fatima devotees took

a pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima on a pilgrimage tour throughout the former Soviet bloc, starting in Poland, prior to the anti-communist revolutions of 1989 and 1990.

Not the statue but the divine power it symbolized — the non-violent love of Jesus and Mary for an atheistic world — caused the revolutions, Kelly and other Blue Army members emphasize.

Closer to home, Fatima devotees like Kelly believe that Jesus and Mary want U.S. Catholics to adopt such devotional practices as the rosary to stem the tide of evils engulfing the nation.

"The more I read about the rosary and the scapular, the more I realized that these were weapons to be used," Kelly said, noting that the battle to be enjoined is against Satan.

"I think that there is a very severe struggle going on between the Blessed Mother and (the devil) for souls today," she said.

What seems to inspire Kelly and other Fatima devotees is the direct and simple appeal to the Christian heart that Fatima devotions foster.

No weighty dogmas promulgated by learned theologians, no papal encyclicals issued with solemn announcement have stirred the faithful in this century in quite the manner that the unadorned messages from the Blessed Virgin Mary have. For the messages transmitted at Fatima — whether or not they are regarded as of heavenly origin — are unquestionably a concise summation of Catholicism's basic teachings coupled with livable tenets of down-to-earth Christianity.

"The central message of Fatima can be understood by everyone — even children," Father Aventino Oliveira, IMC, wrote in a recent article for *Soul* magazine, the Blue Army's U.S. publication.

"The absolute need for conversion, and the need for a life of prayer. These two fundamental truths, contained in the Word of God, are necessary for personal salvation and happiness, as well as for the salvation and happiness of all humanity," he continued.

What Fatima did for many lay Catholics, in particular, was to encourage them to take the means of salvation into their own hands — both literally and figuratively. The heart of those means are the string of prayer beads that gave Holy Rosary Parish its name.

Kelly and other devotees see the rosary as a vivid, contemplative encapsulation of the Catholic faith. For example, Kelly pointed out, the rosary contains the Apostles' Creed and its mysteries are, for the most part, recountings of scriptural incidents.

To promote devotion to the rosary, area Catholics have planned the 32nd International Rosary March, which will take place at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, May 3, from the Liberty Pole in downtown Rochester to Our Lady of Victory Church, 210 Pleasant St. The march will be followed by a holy hour and a Benediction.

Kelly said that she hopes parents, in particular, will attend the march with their children.

EDITORS' NOTE: For information on the march or on joining the Blue Army, call 716/377-1158.

To commemorate the 75th anniversary of the apparitions at Fatima, the following parishes have scheduled vigils of eucharistic devotion (hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. unless otherwise stated): St. Thomas the Apostle, May 15-16, 7:30 p.m. to 12 a.m.; St. Cecilia's, June 12-13; Holy Spirit, July 17-18; Holy Rosary, August 13-14; St. John of Spencertown, Sept. 11-12; St. John of Rochester, Oct. 9-10.

