

Pope hails families on Easter

Warns against society's attacks

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Leading four days of Easter ceremonies, Pope John Paul II celebrated the joy of the resurrection but warned that modern society is trying to "empty" Christian salvation of meaning through insidious attacks on the faith and the family.

On Easter Sunday, the pope announced he was sending a letter to the world's heads of state, asking them to better defend the sacred nature of life and the "precious treasure" of the family. It was one of several strong initiatives the pope has taken during the International Year of the Family.

During the March 30-April 3 weekend, the 73-year-old pontiff presided over his usual heavy schedule of Easter events in Rome and at the Vatican. He washed the feet of priests on Holy Thursday, heard confessions and led the Way of the Cross on Good Friday, celebrated an Easter vigil on Holy Saturday and celebrated Mass in a rainstorm on Easter.

The pope's blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city of Rome and the world) after Easter Mass reflected his mixed tone of happiness and concern. On this day of joy and light, he said, "may the culture of death recoil."

The culture of death, he said, "humiliates the individual, not respecting the weakest and frailest creatures, and trying even to undermine the sacred dig-

nity of the family, the heart of society and of the church."

He said he was troubled by these threats and was therefore writing to world leaders to insist that "every effort be made" to protect the value of life and the family.

The pope's blessing highlighted another contrast with the celebration of Easter: the fact that many people today are drained by "material and moral poverty" and hunger for security and peace.

He prayed that the joy of Christ's resurrection may "resound in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, in Africa and in Asia and in all the nations where the din of weapons still continues, where nationalism arouses dangerous forms of evil extremism, where races and social classes endlessly oppose one another!"

Tens of thousands of visitors braved intermittent rain to attend the Easter Mass in St. Peter's Square. A downpour at the end of the ceremony flattened elaborate Dutch flower arrangements near the altar and sent many running for cover under the nearby colonnade.

The pope's blessing afterward, televised around the world, included Easter greetings in 57 languages. In English he said: "A blessed Easter in the joy of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord and savior of the world!"

Pope John Paul began the weekend ceremonies on Holy Thursday, celebrating a Chrism Mass at the Vatican at which he blessed the chrism oils used throughout the year in administering sacraments.

That evening, at a Mass in the Rome Basilica of St. John Lateran, he commemorated Jesus' last meal with his

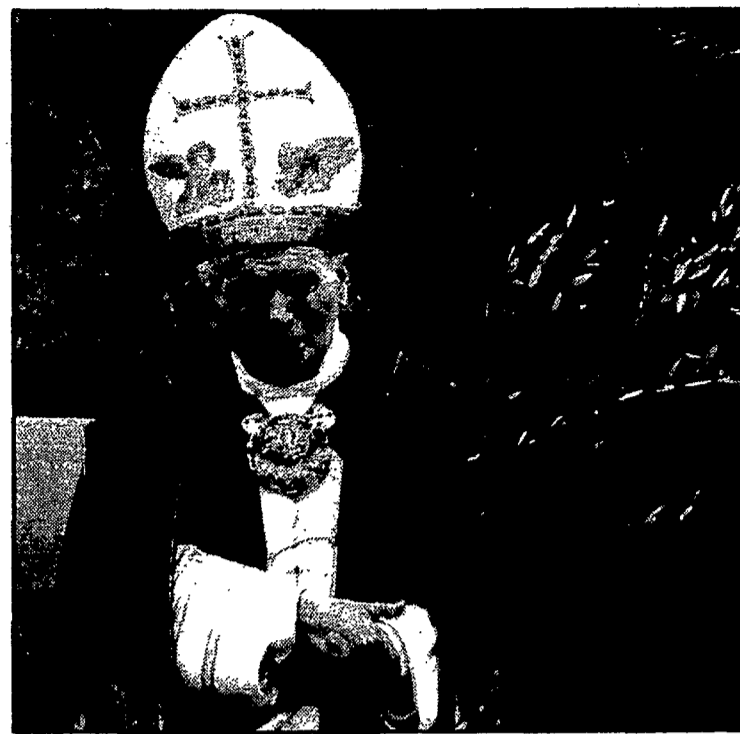
apostles and washed the feet of 12 priests. He designated the Mass collection for people in Burundi, the site of recent ethnic conflict.

On Good Friday, the pope heard confessions for more than an hour in St. Peter's Basilica — an annual event he initiated early in his pontificate. He gave the sacrament to 11 people in all, including a family from India.

As he left, he joked with the long line of hopeful penitents that it would take him a year to hear all their confessions. He encouraged them to try another priest.

He presided over a liturgy of the Passion in St. Peter's, then led a late-night Way of the Cross at the Rome Colosseum. This year, in an ecumenical first, the prayers and meditations for each of the 14 stations were written at papal invitation by the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos of Constantinople, the spiritual leader of Orthodox churches.

The patriarch's words, a deep reflection on the Passion of Christ, included the observation that "too often our churches have persecuted their enemies. Grant now to Christians the strength of humble love." Walking behind the pontiff were representatives of the Greek Orthodox and Anglican churches.



AP/Wide World Photos

Pope John Paul II began Holy Week March 27 with Palm Sunday services at St. Peter's Square in Rome.

At the close of the ceremony, the pope thanked the patriarch and improvised a talk on the common task faced by all Christians. He said Catholics and Orthodox were united — first of all by the "martyrdom" that occurred under East European communism, and now by the challenge of evangelizing in an increasingly doubtful world.

Both churches must speak the truth about the faith, "because today's world is trying to empty the cross of meaning," he said. Both churches are called upon to resist an "anti-Christian tradition that has been spreading for many centuries," seeking to convince people that the human being is merely human and should live as if God did not exist, he said.

Vatican official says pontiff will visit U.S. in October

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — Pope John Paul II will come to the United States Oct. 20 and address the General Assembly of the United Nations the following day, the Vatican nuncio to the U.N. told Catholic News Service March 29.

Archbishop Renato R. Martino said the pope would speak about the family in connection with the current U.N. observance of the International Year of the

Family and about the approaching commemoration in 1995 of the 50th anniversary of the U.N.

Pope John Paul will also participate in other activities in New York, Newark, N.J., and Baltimore before returning to Rome Oct. 23, the archbishop said. But he said the schedule had not yet been completed in detail.

Archbishop Martino discussed the trip after Cardinal John J. O'Connor of New York confirmed at a press conference earlier the same day that unofficial re-

ports of an impending papal visit were correct.

The cardinal said the only event in the pope's visit to the New York archdiocese that was already definitely determined was a meeting with youths. He said this was being arranged at the specific request of the pope.

In August, the New York archdiocese will hold a special gathering for youths, including young people from other nearby dioceses. Those attending that event would be brought back in October to

meet with the pope, Cardinal O'Connor said.

The cardinal's press conference was held just before the Holy Week Chrism Mass. The Mass also was a commemoration of the cardinal's 10th anniversary as archbishop of New York, and reporters were invited to get his reflections on the occasion.

But the first question was about rumors of a papal visit.

Cardinal O'Connor replied that while recently in Rome he had learned the visit would occur about Oct. 20, and was primarily for the purpose of addressing the United Nations, but that he did not have full details of the schedule.

New sessions of the U.N. General Assembly begin each September, with the opening weeks given to general debate.

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