

Papal visit creates long-lasting memories

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

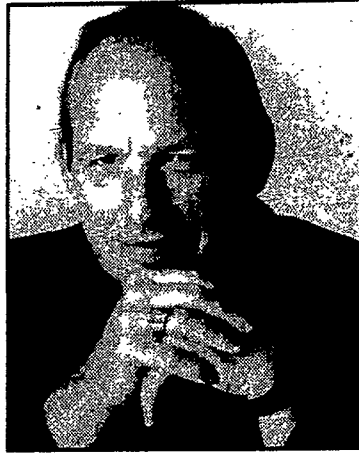
It's Sunday night, and I'm watching the telecast of Pope John Paul II's departure from the Baltimore Washington International Airport. At the moment he is greeting Vice President and Mrs. Gore, as hundreds of people await an opportunity to thank him for his visit and to wish him a safe return trip to Rome.

As I watch, I remember the experience of being in New York on Friday and Saturday for the joyful celebrations surrounding his visit to that incredible city. I had the privilege of celebrating with the Holy Father at Eucharistic Liturgies with the people of the Diocese of Brooklyn at Aqueduct Raceway and with the people of the Archdiocese of New York on the Great Lawn at Central Park.

We also experienced other prayer forms. On Friday evening at St. Joseph's Seminary, Yonkers, John Paul II presided as we prayed evening prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours. The next afternoon at St. Patrick's Cathedral he led us in praying the rosary; between the decades we listened to hymns and readings from Scripture.

The last event in which I participated was the lovely dinner Cardinal John O'Connor arranged in honor of our dear brother from Rome. Present at that event at the cardinal's residence were members of the papal party from Rome, the cardinals from the United States and the bishops from the dioceses of New York state. I think we numbered about 50 people.

The events I mention were widely televised and reported in our nation's media, so I won't even attempt to do what they did so well. But let me mention in brief fashion some of the



LONG THE WAY

personal memories and reflections I have carried home with me:

• The ministry of Peter, the papacy, has the responsibility to call Christians and the whole human family to the unity that is Christ's will for us. John Paul II leaves me with the impression that he recognizes that responsibility and cares deeply about it. I also believe that most people who meet him intuit that disposition in him and respond very warmly to it.

• In New York, John Paul II struck two themes, which have been part of his papal ministry since his election in October, 1978: the dignity of every human person and our responsibility to serve the weak, poor, vulnerable and voiceless members of the human family.

• I especially enjoyed the pope's oft-repeated encouragement not to be afraid. It was in development of that theme that he sang a

piece of a Polish Christmas carol, which encouraged the shepherds who heard the Christmas message not to be afraid of what they heard. In one of the warmest moments of those days the tens of thousands of people gathered in Central Park responded to him by singing a verse of Silent Night.

• It has always astounded me that John Paul II could stay abreast of so many complex issues and communicate about them in so many languages.

• In similar fashion I am impressed by the warmth John Paul can communicate to great crowds of people and to individuals when he has a moment to spend with them.

• In a comment to the assembly in Central Park, the pope expressed the hope that those who came did so not just out of curiosity, but out of a sense of faith. I think his hope was realized that morning.

• I'll remember for many years the music of Placido Domingo at Communion time during the Mass at Central Park.

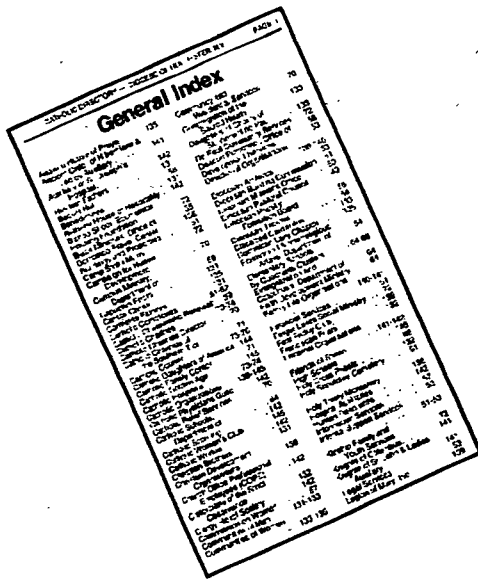
• I love two things in particular about John Paul II: his quiet sense of prayer and his love for children. I always think of those qualities as his ways of remaining humble about the ministry of the papacy and about his obvious efforts to carry it out as generously as he possibly can.

• Lastly, I must say that I have no way of understanding how he manages to cope with the demands of the schedule he faces day after day. Whatever the source of his energy, I hope we will all pray that he will continue to enjoy an abundant supply of it so that he can realize his dream of leading us into the third millennium of Christianity.

Peace to all.

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