

## WORLD &amp; NATION

## Pope cherishes memories of 50 years as priest

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II celebrates 50 years as a priest in November, the anniversary of a turning point in his lifelong spiritual journey.

Considering his later career as archbishop, cardinal and pope, some people may view his priestly ordination as secondary. The 76-year-old pontiff does not.

The pope has underlined the personal importance of the occasion by inviting the world's cardinals and thousands of priests and faithful to Rome for several days of prayer and festivities.

Activities marking the Nov. 1 anniversary were to begin Oct. 31 with a concert featuring the Salzburg chamber orchestra and the Mozart choir of Linz performing Handel's "Messiah" in the Vatican's audience hall. On the actual anniversary date, the Diocese of Rome plans to honor the pope with a Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. The heart of the celebration will be the Nov. 7-10 gathering of priests, bishops and cardinals from around the world who also are celebrating the 50th anniversary of their ordination in 1946.

Back in the 1940s, the priesthood was not the only option open to the future pope. As a student living in Krakow in southern Poland, he had shown talent as an actor, philosopher, poet and dramatist — and had worked as a laborer, too.

When he entered the clandestine seminary during the Nazi occupation in 1942, many of his friends were surprised. In retrospect, though, it seems apparent that the seeds of his vocation were planted at an



Reuters/CNS

**Pope John Paul II waves as he arrives in St. Peter's Basilica Oct. 27 for a special service marking the 350th anniversary of the Ruthenian Catholics' reunion with Rome.**

early age.

As a schoolboy in his native town of Wadowice, Karol Wojtyla sometimes awed his classmates by the intense way he would pray in church.

His philosophical outlook and his spiritual acceptance of hardship were also evident in youth. A friend of the family once recounted how she met the 12-year-old Karol shortly after the death of his only brother. To her consoling words, the youth

replied stoically: "It was God's will."

Though perpetually busy, he always made time for religion. In his late teens, Karol Wojtyla the actor, writer and laborer was also participating in daily Mass, spiritual exercises, Marian devotion, meditation on religious essays and Bible study.

In 1942, Wojtyla stunned fellow members of the underground Rhapsodic Theater by telling them he planned to enter the seminary. They tried to talk him out of it, citing his talent. But soon afterward he began his studies under the guidance of Krakow Archbishop Adam Sapieha.

He continued to work at a chemical plant during the day, and the seminary studies were carried out at great risk: Being caught meant deportation or execution. After one Nazi roundup, the archbishop told Wojtyla and six other seminarians they would be safer living at his residence, where they dressed as priests.

He thrived in this environment and was already viewed by the archbishop as a future church leader. Yet the young Wojtyla, who wrote poems and a doctoral dissertation on the mysticism of St. John of the Cross, was also attracted to monastic contemplation. Twice during these years he tried to join the Discalced Carmelites but was turned away with the advice: "You are destined for greater things."

On Nov. 1, 1946, he was ordained in Archbishop Sapieha's private chapel. The next day, he said Masses for the souls of his mother, brother and father. Before being sent for more studies in Rome, he had time to perform a baptism for friends.

As a student at Rome's Angelicum Uni-

versity, Father Wojtyla further developed his keen interest in Thomistic personalism and mystical theology. He sharpened an understanding of the relationship of faith to reason, and of individual conscience to church doctrine, which were basic to many of his later writings.

But the years in Italy were not all books and lectures. He spent much time visiting the sanctuaries, shrines and monasteries of the country, discovering places of prayer and spiritual renewal. Typically, he went to Sunday Mass at a working-class church in the Roman suburbs.

His advancement as bishop, archbishop and supreme pontiff has in some ways distanced him from simpler priestly ministries. But perhaps no previous pope has dedicated as much attention to the priesthood and the challenges that confront today's clergy.

He has met with groups of priests in more than 100 nations and constantly reminds bishops to pay attention to the pastoral and personal needs of their clergy.

The pope called a synod on the priesthood in 1990 and later wrote a 220-page document on the subject. Moreover, every year since 1979 he has written a letter to the world's priests — a kind of spiritual pep talk, assuring priests that he thinks of them often and prays for them.

In his 1996 letter, he recalled some of his fellow seminarians who had died in the war and looked back on his own ordination in strikingly personal terms.

"For us, the priesthood, attained in those circumstances, took on a special value," he wrote. "I still cherish in my memory that great moment."

## Pontiff says that evidence supports the theory of evolution

By John Thavis  
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — When Pope John Paul II gave the church's blessing to the theory of evolution, it was the latest in a string of bold gestures that have marked his 18-year pontificate.

Although many call the pope a conservative, he has taken a decidedly fresh approach to a number of historical issues, ranging from ecumenism to astronomy.

He has visited a Jewish synagogue and called Jews our "elder brothers." He has prayed in a Protestant church and praised the religiousness of Martin Luther. He has addressed a stadium full of Muslim youths and referred to God as "Allah."

In an important reversal in 1992, he admitted the church erred in condemning Galileo Galilei, the 16th-century astronomer who maintained that the earth

moved around the sun.

There may be more surprises in store. In view of the upcoming celebration of the third millennium of Christianity, the pope has asked the church to look closely at its own mistakes over the last 20 centuries.

His message to international scientists Oct. 22 aimed to bridge one of the more sensitive gaps between science and faith. The pontiff said it was time to recognize evolution as "more than a hypothesis."

Already in 1950, Pope Pius XII had allowed that evolution was a serious theory that could be studied and promoted without Catholic opposition, as long as it was not presented as a certainty and given in terms compatible with the faith.

Pope John Paul went a step farther, saying the evidence now clearly supports the idea that the human species developed along an evolutionary line. At the same time, he said, this also leaves room for God

the Creator to breathe spiritual life — the soul — into each person.

One interesting aspect of the pope's message was that it made no claim to have all the answers to some inevitable questions, such as: If man evolved from apes, was divine intervention the "missing link"?

The pope did say that in the church's view, evolution must somewhere along the line include an "ontological leap," a point when the human being appeared with a spiritual existence and attributes like self-awareness, a moral conscience and freedom.

He said scientific observation cannot verify such a spiritual passage, but it can register some important signs of specifically human development. Some experts, in fact, say current research supports the idea of a relatively abrupt evolutionary leap to human development.

On a religious level, the pope's message clearly separated the church from some fundamentalist Christians who continue to resist evolution in favor of a more literal reading of the Book of Genesis.

In contrast, the pope strongly believes that faith and science can be reconciled on this and other points. It's an opinion he seems to have reached early in life, perhaps when listening to one of his high school teachers, Father Edward Zacher.

Father Zacher was also a physicist, astrophysicist and engineer. The pope's Polish contemporaries recall that when the priest held religion classes, he would often begin to talk about the mysteries of the solar system or the secrets of the atom.

The teacher's point was that any knowledge based on truth is not incompatible with God — which has become one of the pope's favorite dictums.

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