

How will John Paul II be remembered?

On Oct. 16 Pope John Paul II marked his 20th year as Bishop of Rome. Last May he surpassed Pius XII (1939-1958) as the 12th longest reigning pope in history. (There have been 262 in all, although numbers vary slightly from list to list.) Pius XII had been in office 19 years, seven months, and one week.

If the present pope lives just one more year and two months beyond his 20th anniversary, he will also surpass in length of service Clement XI (1700-1721), Leo III (795-816), Sylvester I (314-335), Urban VI (1623-1644), and Leo the Great (440-461), thereby becoming the seventh longest reigning pope.

Moreover, should John Paul II live still another year beyond that, he would surpass Alexander III (1159-1181) and become the sixth longest reigning pontiff.

It would require a bit more longevity, however, to gain entrance into the ranks of the top five of longest reigning popes. Pius VII (1800-1823) was in office for 23 years, four months, and two weeks (plus a few days). Hadrian I (772-795) was in the Chair of Peter for 23 years, 10 months, and just over two weeks.

Pius VI (1775-1799) was in office for 24 years, six months, and one week (two weeks, according to the Vatican's official directory, the *Annuario Pontificio*, which



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

marks the beginning of pontificates by election rather than episcopal consecration).

Leo XIII (1878-1903) was pope for 25 years and five months. To equal Leo's reign, John Paul II would have to remain pope five more years. He would be 83 by then.

The longest reigning pope in history was Pius IX (1846-1878), whose pontificate lasted for 31 years, seven months, and three weeks. John Paul II would have to live at least until his 90th birthday to equal Pius IX's reign. But given the present state of the pope's health and his obvious physical disabilities, one trusts that even his most partisan admirers would not wish that for either himself or the church.

Such partisans can be recognized for their inability or refusal to recognize and

concede any deficiencies whatever in John Paul II's 20-year pontificate. They speak of him already as John Paul "the Great" (only two popes have been accorded that title: Leo I and Gregory I). The more fervent refer to him, even during his lifetime, as "Saint" John Paul II.

The current pope may indeed be accorded the purely honorary title of "the Great" at some future time by the judgment of historians and/or by popular acclaim — and one day he may be added officially to the list of saints. But even "great" and "saintly" popes have had their deficiencies. Therefore, such expectations should not put an end to legitimate arguments about the pluses and minuses of this, or any other, pontificate.

History will justly praise this pope for his "foreign policy," that is, for the bridges he has built to the wider political and religious worlds. One thinks, for example, of his crucial role in the hastened collapse of the Soviet empire and of his remarkable outreach to non-Christians.

But history will also judge him more critically for his excessively hard-line approach toward the internal management of the church, particularly his active discouragement of theological and scholarly inquiry that does not happen to follow the current Vatican line in every detail, and

for his appointment of a disturbingly monochromatic array of bishops.

This pontificate's "domestic policy," unlike its "foreign policy," seems to have been driven more by ideology and the requirements of institutional loyalty than by a spirit of pastoral accommodation and a willingness to dialogue with friend and foe alike.

Indeed, if this pontificate approached its critics within the church with the same inclusive attitude that it has manifested toward the erstwhile enemies of the church beyond its borders, its "domestic" record would be far more positive than it is.

Conversely, if this pontificate had conducted its "foreign affairs" with the same inflexibility and proclivity to censoriousness that it has employed in its handling of the church's "domestic affairs," it would not have established such an enviable record of accomplishment in interfaith and political matters.

Liberal partisans don't want to hear any of the good this pontificate has accomplished. Conservative partisans don't want to hear any of the bad.

But partisanship has never offered a smooth or sure path to truth.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

Saints accompany us in our pursuit of sanctity

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12. (R1) Revelation 7:2-4, 9-14. (R2) 1 John 3:13.

Sunday, the feast of All Saints, pre-empted the 31st Sunday of the Year.

The feast of All Saints probably originated in Ireland, spread to England and Europe, and finally to Rome.

The idea goes back to A.D. 270, to a festival honoring all the martyrs of the church. In 609 Pope Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon to Our Lady as Queen of Martyrs. On this occasion a large quantity of martyrs' bones were removed from the catacombs and buried there. The feast was celebrated then on May 13.

The Pantheon is one of the best preserved ancient edifices in Rome. It was built to all the pagan gods (hence the name "pantheon") in 27 B.C. to commemorate Augustus Caesar's victory at Actium over Antony and Cleopatra.

When Michelangelo saw the magnificent dome of the Pantheon, he felt that it was not fitting for a pagan temple to tower over all of Rome's Christian churches. So he erected the great dome of St. Peter's, modeled after the Pantheon's dome and surpassing it in height and grandeur.

It is believed that the Irish extended the feast of all the martyrs to embrace all



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

saints: virgins and confessors. In reparation for iconoclasm, Pope Gregory IV (827-44) universalized the feast of All Saints and changed the date of its celebration from May 13 to Nov. 1.

Iconoclasm was a heresy condemning the veneration of holy images and praying to the saints. The heresy sprang from the violent opposition of Jews and Moslems to images. Perhaps to ingratiate himself to these powerful neighbors and remove an obstacle to their conversion, Leo the Isaurian (717-741) banned images and icons and the relics of the saints.

Widespread persecution resulted. Monks fled to Rome with the relics of saints and begged Pope Hadrian I to intervene. He called the Second Council of Nicea in 787. The council condemned

iconoclasm and reaffirmed the church's tradition of praying to the saints and venerating their images and relics.

Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Mater Redemptoris*, initiating the Marian Year of 1987, stated that the encyclical commemorated, among other things, the 1,200th anniversary of the Nicene Council.

This controversy with iconoclasm led to the church's universalizing the feast of All Saints and the creation of the Papal States. When the Lombards invaded Italy in 756, the Holy Father turned to the West, to Pepin, instead of to the East because it was tainted with iconoclasm. Pepin defeated the Lombards and to safeguard Italy from future invasions, Pepin put civil power in the Pope's hands creating the Papal States.

The feast of All Saints is meant to teach us that sanctity is not the inaccessible preserve of the privileged few, those canonized; rather, it is the ordinary destiny of all Christians.

Sanctity means sanctifying your work, yourselves in your work, and others through your work. It means fulfilling your modest daily duties as best you can. You'll make mistakes — give in to impatience, anger, pride and even to serious sins of impurity. But you repent immediately and make use of the great sacrament of con-

fession to begin anew.

One of the distinguishing features of all the saints that they all had in common was to live charitably with all around them. By this will every man know you are my disciple (John 13:35).

In the pursuit of sanctity we are not alone. The stars studding the November night sky remind us of the many saints up above eager to help us with their prayers and example.

Father Shamon is the administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, November 2

Daniel 12:1-3; Revelation 21:1-5, 6-7; Matthew 25:1-13

Tuesday, November 3

Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 14:15-24

Wednesday, November 4

Philippians 2:12-18; Luke 14:25-33

Thursday, November 5

Philippians 3:3-8; Luke 15:1-10

Friday, November 6

Philippians 3:17-4:1; Luke 16:1-8

Saturday, November 7

Philippians 4:10-19; Luke 16:9-15

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