

COLUMNISTS

Histories tell of John Paul II's predecessors

The recent release of a CD of papal words and songs, culled from this pope's 20-year-long reign, underscores once again the extraordinary impact John Paul II has had, not only on the Catholic Church but on the world scene as well. To be sure, few of the 261 other popes could match his achievement, because no more than a handful of them — starting with Pius XII — had access to television and the means of global travel.

John Paul II has stimulated an intense interest in the papal office. In 1997 alone several books on the papacy, including my own *Lives of the Popes* (HarperSanFrancisco), appeared within just a few months.

With his election in October 1978, Karol Wojtyla, then cardinal-archbishop of Krakow, Poland, became the first non-Italian pope since Hadrian VI, a Dutchman, who was elected in 1522, in the teeth of the religious hurricane known as the Protestant Reformation.

There have been at least 45 other non-Italian popes. Sixteen were French, 11 Greek, six Syrian, five German, two Spanish, two African (and a third who might have been African), one Portuguese (who was also the only medical doctor elected), one English (Hadrian IV in 1154), and one Dalmatian (Dalmatia was a Roman province in present-day Croatia).



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

Contrary to popular impression, six popes, not one, have resigned from office: Pontian in 235, Silverius in 537, John XVI-II in 1009, Benedict IX in 1045, Celestine V in 1294, and Gregory XII in 1415.

Two popes have actually succeeded their fathers as pope (married priests were common in the church's first millennium): Innocent I immediately succeeded his father Anastasius I in 401, and Silverius (536-37) also succeeded his father Hormisdas (514-23), but not immediately. An illegitimate son, John XI, succeeded his father Sergius III in 931, 30 years after his father's death. Two popes immediately succeeded their brothers: Paul I succeeded Stephen II in 757, and John XIX succeeded Benedict VIII in 1024.

The first pope to take a name different from his baptismal name was John II in

533, because his birth-name was that of a pagan god, Mercury. The last pope to take his own name was Marcellus II in 1555. Two popes changed their names upon election because their baptismal name was Peter. The first pope to take a double name was John Paul I in 1978.

Four laymen have been elected to the papacy: Leo VIII (963), Benedict VIII (1012), John XIX (1024), and Benedict IX (1032).

The last held the office three times: 1032-44 (deposed and later restored), 1045 (resigned in favor of his godfather), and 1047-48 (expelled by the emperor). Largely because of Benedict IX, sources differ on the number of popes there have been. Is he to be counted three times or once?

Only five of the 123 second millennium popes have been canonized. By contrast, more than half of the first millennium popes were proclaimed as saints. The key words here are "canonized" and "proclaimed." There was no formal process of canonization in the first millennium. The last pope canonized was Pius X (1903-14).

The first person elected Bishop of Rome while bishop of another diocese was Marinus I in 882. His election was in direct violation of the prohibition laid down by the First Council of Nicaea in 325 that no bishop was ever to be transferred from

one diocese to another. Although that prohibition has never formally been rescinded, popes are now routinely elected from the ranks of bishops of other dioceses.

But that wasn't the only solemn rule breached by popes. Eight popes retained their former dioceses or abbeys after being elected Bishop of Rome, in direct violation of the prohibition against pluralism, holding two or more benefices (income-producing ecclesiastical offices) at once.

While it is true that 10 popes were murdered or died of brutal treatment in prison, no pope suffered a greater indignity than Formosus (891-96), whose body was exhumed, vested in full pontificals, and placed on trial for alleged offenses committed while he was pope, including his having been the bishop of another diocese before election. Formosus was found guilty, all his ordinations were declared invalid, three fingers from his hand that blessed and signed documents were cut off, and his body was thrown into the Tiber River (but later re-buried).

People today who deplore what they call "pope-bashing" have little idea of how high the bar for that has been set, thanks to poor Formosus.

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

Divine Mercy should inspire our trust

2nd Sunday of Easter: (R3) John 20:19-31. (R1) Acts 2:42-47. (R2) 1 Peter 1:3-9.

Our Lord asked Blessed Mary Faustina to work and pray toward establishing a feast of Divine Mercy on the Sunday after Easter. Jesus promised that people who go to confession within eight days before or after "Mercy Sunday" and receive holy Communion within that same time period will receive forgiveness not only for their sins but also for the temporal punishment due to them. He also made it clear that he expects us to imitate his mercy also by being merciful toward others in our words, actions and prayers.

Jesus' promise should inspire us with a greater reverence for the sacraments of reconciliation and holy Eucharist, and with a greater trust in his mercy.

It is significant that Jesus chose this Sunday for the feast of Divine Mercy, for the Gospel of this Sunday is about the institution of the sacrament of reconciliation. Like the Apostles on that first Easter Sunday and like the doubting Thomas, all of us need God's forgiveness. How sad it is that we do not avail ourselves of this sacrament at least monthly.

It is interesting too, that a chief charac-



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

ter in the Gospel this Sunday is the Apostle, "doubting Thomas." So many doubt the great power of the sacrament of reconciliation, else why would they neglect it?

As for Thomas, perhaps all most people know about him is that he was a "doubter" — the man who tried to throw the monkey wrench into the engine of Easter joy. We don't know a lot about Thomas, but the Gospels show us a man of clearheaded intellect and great courage.

When Jesus heard that his friend Lazarus was quite sick, a dilemma presented itself. Lazarus' home was in Bethany, two miles from Jerusalem. The religious authorities in Judea threatened the life of Jesus, because he had made him-

self equal to God (John 10:30). Jesus and his disciples knew the next time he set foot in Jerusalem he would be killed. But Jesus was determined to go. It was Thomas who spoke up and said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with Him" (John 11:16). Thomas was no coward.

After the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples, "Do not let your hearts be troubled... In my Father's house... I go to prepare a place for you. Where I am going you know the way." Thomas said, "Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" (John 14:1-5). Thomas was not uncommitted. He was intellectually honest. Thomas didn't want to make a mistake, be misled.

So, when the other Apostles told him that they had seen the risen Lord, Thomas blurted out, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." Thomas was not being difficult. He was being consistent with his own character. He was a cautious man, a man of integrity, a man who did not plunge in without all the facts. He was a man, however, who when he did plunge in, gave his all. When Christ appeared and

presented incontrovertible evidence, he declared with a strong and solemn voice, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus told Thomas there is a better way of coming to faith, "Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." From that moment on faith would come from hearing, hearing the word of God, and through personal testimony of those who have believed.

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

Daily Readings

- Monday, April 12**
Acts 4:23-31; John 3:1-8
- Tuesday, April 13**
Acts 4:32-37; John 3:7-15
- Wednesday, April 14**
Acts 5:17-26; John 3:16-21
- Thursday, April 15**
Acts 5:27-33; John 3:31-36
- Friday, April 16**
Acts 5:34-42; John 6:1-15
- Saturday, April 17**
Acts 6:1-7; John 6:16-21

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