

# COLUMNISTS

## Pope moves up the top 10 list

As of this week, Pope John Paul II has been in office for 21 years and two months. He was elected Oct. 16, 1978.

Less than three weeks ago, on Nov. 29, he replaced Leo the Great as the seventh-longest reigning pope in history.

Since last fall, John Paul II has moved steadily from 12th place on the list of lengthiest pontificates (having recently overtaken Pius XII, who served for 19 years, seven months, and one week) to seventh. In the past 12 months he has surpassed Clement XI (1700-21), Leo III (795-816), Sylvester I (314-35), Urban VI II (1623-44), and Leo the Great (440-61).

To move up to sixth on the list, the present pope would have to remain in office at least another nine months. The sixth-longest reign is that of Alexander III (1159-81), who served as bishop of Rome for 21 years, 11 months and 13 days.

The Vatican's official directory begins Alexander III's pontificate 13 days earlier, however. In those years, papal terms began on the day of election, even if the person elected were not yet a bishop. But since a pope is a pope only because he is the bishop of Rome, his pontificate does not begin—at least from a theological



BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

essays in theology

point of view — until he has been consecrated a bishop.

Today the church's canon law is consistent with its theology. If a person who is not yet a bishop is elected pope, he is immediately ordained a bishop. The last non-bishop elected pope was Gregory XVI, a Camaldolese monk, in 1831.

It is a matter of interest that, although not yet a bishop (he had twice declined appointment), Gregory was a member of the College of Cardinals and prefect of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Moreover, he had been a candidate for the papacy in the previous conclave of 1829, receiving 21 votes.

One needs not belong to the College

of Cardinals to be eligible for pope. Only cardinals under 80, however, can participate in the election of a new pope.

The last non-cardinal to have been elected pope was Urban VI in 1378, a most unfortunate choice because his personality and temperament helped ignite the Great Western Schism that lasted until 1417. All during that period there were at least two opposing claimants to the papacy, and, after 1409, three.

Back to the list. If John Paul II should eventually surpass Alexander III in length of service, the next pope above him would be Pius VII (1800-23), who was bishop of Rome for 23 years, four months, and just over two weeks. John Paul II would have to remain in office for another two years, two months, and two weeks to move into fifth place on the list.

The fourth-longest reigning pope was Hadrian I (772-795), who was in office for 23 years, 10 months and just over two weeks. John Paul II would have to go another two years, eight months, and two weeks to move to fourth place.

The third-longest pontificate was that of yet another Pius, Pius VI (1775-99), who was in the Chair of Peter for 24

years, six months, and one week. In order to move to third on the list of longest-reigning popes, John Paul II would have to continue in office for another three years, four months and one week.

The second-longest pontificate was that of Leo XIII (1878-1903) — 25 years and five months. John Paul II would have to remain in office for another four years and three months, bringing us to March 2004 when he would be two months shy of his 84th birthday.

Reaching the No. 1 spot on the list of longest pontificates would be a truly remarkable feat. Pius IX (1846-78) was pope for 31 years, seven months and three weeks. In order to pass him, John Paul II would have to remain in office for another 10 years, five months and three weeks. He would be 90 years old by then.

One cannot fathom the mind and will of God, but from a purely human standpoint it would appear Pius IX's record will not fall this time around — and probably never, given the possibility that term limits will eventually be established.

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

## Christmas stories of faith and caring

**4th Sunday of Advent (Dec. 19):** (R3) Luke 1:26-38. (R1) 2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16. (R2) Romans 16:25-27.

FBI agents conducted a raid of a psychiatric hospital in San Diego that was under investigation for medical insurance fraud. After hours of reviewing thousands of medical records, the dozens of agents were quite hungry. The agent in charge called a nearby pizza parlor with delivery service to order a quick dinner for his colleagues. Here was the conversation taped at the hospital.

Agent: Hello, I would like to order 19 large pizzas and 67 cans of soda.

Pizza Man: Where would you like them delivered?

Agent: We're over at the psychiatric hospital.

Pizza Man: The psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's right. I'm an FBI agent.

Pizza Man: You're an FBI agent?

Agent: That's correct. Just about everybody here is.

Pizza Man: And you're at the psychiatric hospital?

Agent: That's correct. And make sure you don't go through the front doors. We have them locked. You will have to go around to the back, to the service entrance to deliver the pizzas.

Pizza Man: And everyone at the psychiatric hospital is an FBI agent?

Agent: That's right. We've been here all day and we're starving.



BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

a word for sunday

Pizza Man: How are you going to pay for all this?

Agent: I have my checkbook right here. Can you remember to bring the pizzas and sodas to the rear service entrance? We have the front doors locked.

Pizza Man: I don't think so. Click. Bzzz.

The feeling that the Pizza Man had must have been something like that which Mary experienced when an angel, Gabriel came to her and said, "Hail, full of grace. The Lord is with you. You've found favor with God. You will conceive and bear a son whom you will name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Bewildered, Mary asked, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you ... and the child to be born will be holy, he will be

called Son of God." Mary answered, "Be it done to me according to thy word." What faith!

In a newspaper story a while back, 8-year-old Mark Amado wrote a letter to Santa Claus. He laid it on the line, "My Mom needs help bad! I want clothes and food for us to last three months. Hope my Mom will have a job by then."

Tucson, Ariz., postal workers were jarred by his story and came up with a deluge of presents, from clothing and toys to food for Mark, his two older brothers and their mother, Abigail.

But there's more. Mark confided to Santa that he tried to be good at school but had to contend with classmates who ridiculed his ears, which stuck out at right angles. Dr. Boyd Burkhardt, plastic surgeon, was asked by his nurse and administrator if he would be willing to fix an 8-year-old boy's ears for nothing.

"Sure," Burkhardt said. And it was done. Mark's mother, was astounded by the response to Mark's letter, both by the postal workers and Dr. Burkhardt. "It was a Godsend," she said. "Things like this never happen to us..." But, it was Christmas! And Christmas is a time for miracles.

Two weeks before Christmas 1995, Doris Young, 41, an unemployed single mother living in Dallas, was sick with grief. Her son, Rayfus, had just died from sudden infant death syndrome; the fu-

neral director wouldn't bury him until she came up with the \$700 fee. A social worker called a dozen people. Then she remembered to call Sgt. Williams, who used to urge people to call if they ever needed anything.

As soon as he heard about Young's plight, he sent out an alert to patrol cars citywide. Within hours, Williams had collected the needed money from his fellow officers.

This is what Christmas is all about: to show what love is.

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

### Daily Readings

**Monday, December 20**

Isaiah 7:10-14; Luke 1:26-38

**Tuesday, December 21**

Songs of Songs 2:8-14 or

Zephaniah 3:14-18; Luke 1:39-45

**Wednesday, December 22**

1 Samuel 1:24-28; Luke 1:46-56

**Thursday, December 23**

Malachi 3:1-4, 23-24; Luke 1:57-66

**Friday, December 24**

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-12, 14, 16;

Luke 1:67-79

**Saturday, December 25**

Isaiah 52:7-10; Hebrews 1:1-6;

John 1:1-18 or 1:1-5, 9-14

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