

Happy Easter

Pope greets Holy Week pilgrims



Reuters/CNS

A Vatican security officer stands guard as Pope John Paul II enters St. Peter's Square Palm Sunday.

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Pope John Paul II opened Holy Week with a colorful Mass on Palm Sunday, leading a procession through St. Peter's Square in front of some 100,000 Holy Year pilgrims.

So many pilgrims were expected for Easter celebrations, that the Vatican decided to hold the April 22 evening Easter vigil Mass in St. Peter's Square. Mass is set to begin at 8 p.m. with the blessing of fire and a procession with the Easter candle.

In the Palm Sunday procession, preceded by lay people, bishops and cardinals dressed in brilliant red vestments, the pope rode on a white jeep through the packed square April 16 as faithful from all over the world waved palm fronds and olive branches in remembrance of Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem a week before his death.

Among those at the head of the procession were groups of young people — including five from the United States — who squinted in the sunshine as the 79-year-old pontiff prayed at the start of the liturgy.

"You young people who have conquered evil ... follow the Lord, do not be afraid to be saints, and with the olive and palm branches you hold in your hands, proclaim him the Lord and Liberator of all," the pope said.

During the two-hour liturgy, which included the reading of the Gospel account of Christ's Passion, the pope said he was convinced that young people today are thirsting for truth and peace, and will find it in Christ.

"Follow him! He does not promise illusory happiness. On the contrary, he invites you to follow his demanding example, so you can reach authentic human and spiritu-

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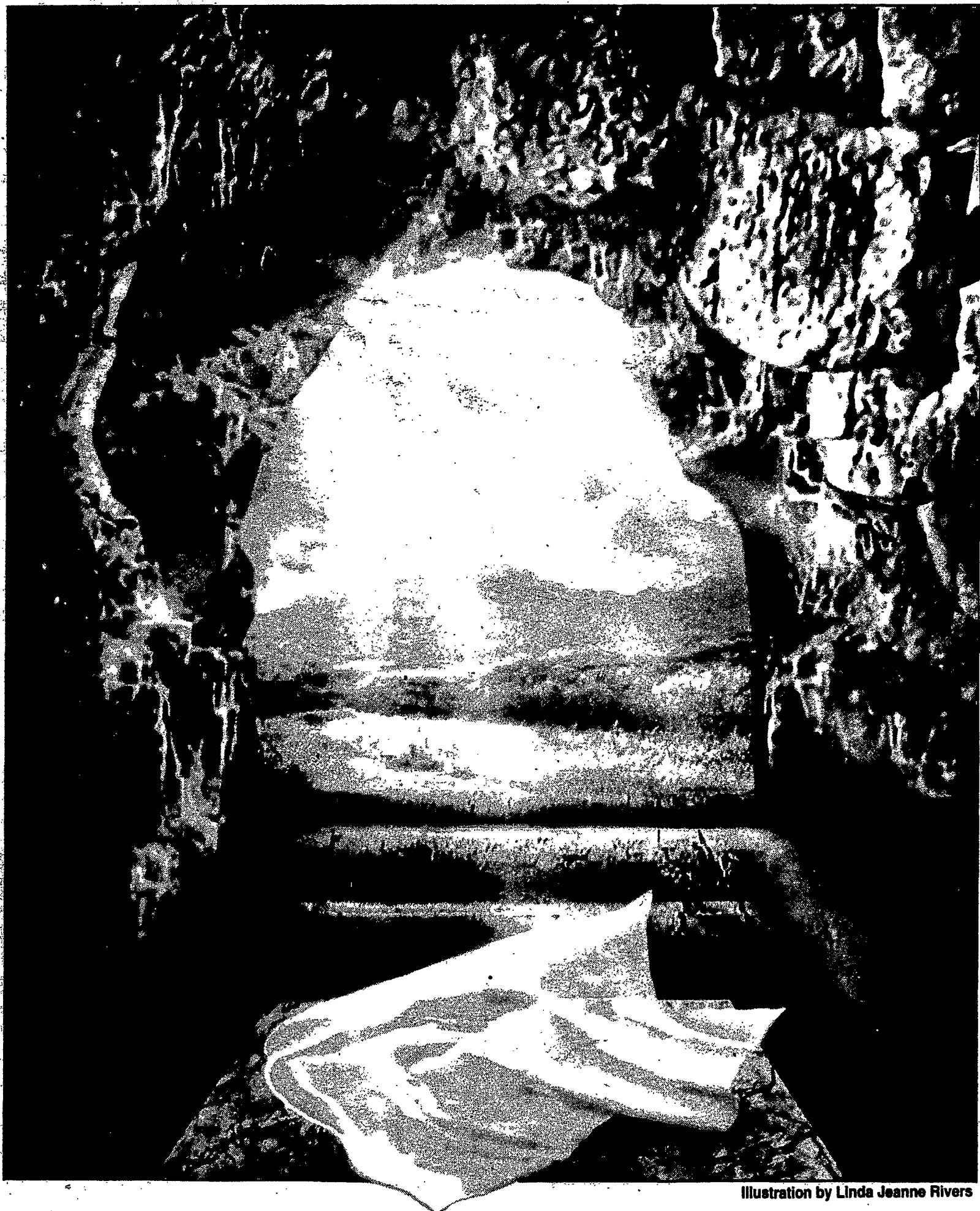


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