

Pope names saints on his birthday

Also thanks people for their birthday wishes

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Surrounded by tens of thousands of well-wishers, Pope John Paul II celebrated his 83rd birthday by proclaiming four new saints during a festive liturgy in St. Peter's Square.

The pope downplayed his own celebration and focused on the saints, saying they demonstrated how living the Gospel can produce "abundant fruits of justice and holiness."

He smiled afterward as the crowd broke into "Happy Birthday" and his Polish compatriots sang "Sto Lat," wishing the pope 100 years of life.

For the first time, the Vatican published the pope's e-mail address so people around the world could send him birthday wishes at *John_Paul_II@vatican.va*, which was accessed by a button on the Vatican's home page, *www.vatican.va*.

The pope added, "I ask everyone to keep praying so that God helps me to faithfully carry out the mission he entrusted to me."

The pope's voice was strong as he pronounced a solemn canonization decree for the new saints and presided over a two-hour liturgy.

He looked better than he did a year ago, when he had difficulty speaking and breathing during public events. But his leg strength has declined; he celebrated Mass seated on a wheeled chair with a hydraulic lift, allowing him to be visible behind the altar.

On the eve of his birthday, a leading Vatican official acknowledged publicly what many have long assumed: that the pope suffers from Parkinson's disease.

"If we want to look for the secret weapon that has allowed him to beat the years and Parkinson's, we must look to prayer," Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re told the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*. "He places himself in the hands of God and feels God and the Madonna by his side on the path of life."

The new saints, one man and three women, all founded religious orders:

- St. Jozef Sebastian Pelczar, a Polish bishop, founded the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the pope's home Archdiocese of Krakow. Known for his deep piety, academic talents and pastoral zeal, he aided the wounded on the front lines of World War I during a Russian invasion. He died in 1924.

In his sermon, the pope quoted from the saint's writings, saying the



Reuters/CNS

Pope John Paul II waves to some 50,000 people gathered in St. Peter's Square May 18 to celebrate the canonization of four new saints and his 83rd birthday. The pontiff canonized the founders of four religious orders and thanked everyone who had sent him birthday greetings.

path to perfection is open to all people regardless of their condition of life or their age.

"God considers not external things but the soul and demands only that which we can give," the saint wrote.

- St. Urszula Ledochowska, the Polish founder of the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Agony, ministered in Russia in the early 20th century until she was expelled by the communists. Her branch of the Ursuline Sisters focused on educational services to the lonely and abandoned, and the pope called her "an apostle of new evangelization" in her own age. She died in Rome in 1939.

- St. Maria de Mattias, the Italian founder of the Adorers of the Blood of Christ, began at a young age to preach Gospel lessons to local women and children in southern Italy in the early 1800s. Her message was that social reform begins in the heart and that the human being is transformed by the encounter with Christ. She died in Rome in 1866.

- St. Virginia Centurione Bracelli, the 17th-century Italian founder of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Refuge on Mount Calvary, took up the religious life at age 20 after the death of her husband, a gambler who led a dissolute life. She shared her family's wealth with the poor and formed a network of programs aimed at helping the sick, the disadvantaged and the unemployed. She died in 1651.

The Mass began with a birthday greeting by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, dean of the College of Cardinals, expressing gratitude for all the pope does and wishing him many more years.

Cardinal Ratzinger said the pope, in proclaiming four saints, gave the world a gift on his birthday and that the lives of those canonized reflect what could be called the theme of this pontificate: believing and loving.

"Tirelessly, you show us the face of Christ, the face of the merciful God. Tirelessly, you help us overcome the forces of hatred and the prejudices which separate and help us tear down the walls intended to separate us," Cardinal Ratzinger said.

His words drew applause from the estimated 50,000 people, many of whom brought signs or banners bearing birthday greetings.

Among the crowd was Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski, whom the pope greeted afterward.

The pontiff also gave warm individual greetings to the five nuns who do the housecleaning, cooking and other work in his apartment at the Vatican. Members of the religious order founded by St. Pelczar, they were celebrating the day in a special way.

Before leaving the square, the pope offered a prayer to Mary, saying that on his birthday he wanted to entrust to her "my existence and the ministry which providence has called me to carry out."



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