

IRANIAN WOMAN RECEIVES PEACE PRIZE

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — Iranian human rights and pro-democracy activist Shirin Ebadi, whose work has focused on protecting the rights of women and children, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2003.

Ebadi, Iran's first woman judge before the Islamic revolution forced her to resign, prevailed in a field of 165 candidates, including Pope John Paul II.

The Nobel committee chose Ebadi, 56, a Muslim who has supported recent protests against the current Iranian regime. The selection was seen as sending a political message to current Iranian leaders as they debate the future political path of the country.

BISHOPS URGE ACTION TO PROTECT WOMEN

PARIS (CNS) — French bishops have appealed for action to protect women after reports of increased domestic violence.

A statement by the bishops' social commission was issued to coincide with a report, "Violence Against Women," compiled by researchers from church-backed women's groups. It said the issue had reached "the heart of topicality" after the Aug. 1 death of actress Marie Trintignant after she suffered severe head injuries. Her boyfriend was being held in Lithuania on suspicion of manslaughter.

The bishops criticized the government for pardoning perpetrators of domestic violence, while strictly punishing those charged with cruelty to animals.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Sun., Oct. 19: Isaiah 53:10-11; Psalms 33:4-5, 18-20, 22; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45 or 10:42-45.

Mon., Oct. 20: Romans 4:20-25 (Ps) Luke 1:69-75; Luke 12:13-21.

Tue., Oct. 21: Romans 5:12, 15B, 17-19, 20B-21; Psalms 40:7-10, 17; Luke 12:35-38.

Wed., Oct. 22: Romans 6:12-18; Psalms 124:1-8; Luke 12:39-48.

Thu., Oct. 23: Romans 6:19-23; Psalms 1:1-4, 6; Luke 12:49-53.

Fri., Oct. 24: Romans 7:18-25A; Psalms 119:60, 68, 76-77; Luke 12:54-59.

Sat., Oct. 25: Romans 8:1-11; Psalms 24:1-6; Luke 13:1-9.

Pontiff begins celebrations

Thanks young people for encouragement

John Thavis/CNS

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II opened a week of celebrations for his 25th anniversary by thanking young people for their special enthusiasm over the years.

The pope, speaking at a noon blessing at the Vatican Oct. 12, expressed his gratitude to all Catholics for their prayers as he approached the anniversary of his election as pope Oct. 16, 1978.

The 83-year-old pontiff spoke in a weak voice and appeared short of breath during the brief appearance at his apartment window above St. Peter's Square. It was difficult to understand much of his Italian-language talk.

As the pope made his remarks, the first of thousands of cardinals, bishops, dignitaries and pilgrims were arriving for anniversary celebrations in Rome.

"I want to thank all those who want to join me in prayer, at the same time thanking God for his continual and providential assistance," the pope said. He sneezed, and the crowd in the square burst into long applause.

The pope said he well remembered the days of his election, but that his thoughts were also on the church's future.

"I look out at young people, with whom I've established a preferential dialogue from the beginning of my Petrine ministry," he said.

Recalling his first Angelus talk in 1978, he said he remembered telling young people, "You are the future of the world, you are the hope of the church, you are my hope."

"I have to recognize that the response of young people has been truly encouraging. Today I would like to thank them for always being close to me during these years, and I'd like them to know that I continue to count on them," he said.

The pope had a regular weekend schedule of meetings ahead of the anniversary events.

He met Oct. 11 with East Timorese President Xanana Gusmao, looking alert as they posed for photos afterward and thanking the president in English for his visit.

Afterward, he addressed a group of 3,000 Sardinian pilgrims. He delivered only part of his prepared text, but in a relatively clear voice.

On Oct. 11 Vatican spokesman Joaquin Navarro-Valls denied an Italian press report that the pope



Michael Okoniewski/CNS

Pope John Paul II waves to the crowd gathered at Giants Stadium in New Jersey in October 1995. A week of celebrations to mark the 25th anniversary of his election began at the Vatican on Oct. 12.

was undergoing dialysis treatment. The report, citing unnamed sources, said the pope was receiving dialysis to prevent potential kidney problems caused by medication for his neurological illness, believed to be Parkinson's disease.

"None of that is true," Navarro-Valls said, calling it irresponsible journalism.

The pontiff also met Oct. 11 with Archbishop Claudio Gugerotti, papal nuncio in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, for talks about the situation there. The Vatican's relations with Georgia suffered a recent setback when the government backed out of a church-state agreement at the last minute.

On Oct. 13, the pope met with Uruguayan President Jorge Ibanez for 15 minutes and later greeted members of his entourage.

"I have to say I found him doing well, very attentive. He asked me a number of questions about Uruguay, and he remembered well the two dates — in 1987 and 1988 — when he visited Uruguay. He even remembered who was president then," Ibanez told Vatican Radio.

"He asked me about the general situation of the country and about the social and economic situation. When I told him that the government was opposed to any legislation facilitating legal abortion, he offered a reflection on that theme," he said.

The city of Rome honored the pope in a special assembly of the City Council Oct. 13, highlighting the Polish-born pontiff's especially close relationship with Rome's faithful. The pope has visited more parishes and churches in Rome than any of his predecessors.