

Editorial

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I suppose what we all began to realise several weeks ago as being inevitable soon, has come to pass. Pope John Paul 11 has died. I feel sure he himself realised at least two weeks before his passing that his earthly life was ebbing to a close, that is almost certainly the reason for his refusal, for nearly the first time in his life, to take his physicians advice and go back into hospital, less than two weeks before his death. No, he was determined to spend his last days in his beloved Vatican, which had been his home for almost one third of his whole life, amongst his loyal friends and helpers, the high ranking Cardinals holding office in the administration of the Vatican who were always at the Pontiffs beck and call for advice and help, the priests and brothers, and the loyal Polish nuns who took care of his daily household needs, for, even a Pope needs to eat, drink and have tidy living quarters!

So who was this man who became such a revered and loved Spiritual Leader of eleven hundred million Catholics throughout the world! Karol Wojtyla, as we all know by now, was born in Poland in 1920 and by all accounts grew up like your average Polish kid during those uneasy years between the two World Wars. He loved amateur theatre and by the time he reached his mid-teens he was quite a good actor!

But, in Poland, as in most other countries economic conditions were quite tough during the 1930s and in his mid-teens young Karol had to leave school to go and work in a factory just to provide the basic needs for life. I think perhaps at this young age already there developed in him a strong sense of a better social justice for the working classes and the poor and sick. "There must be a better way for all to live", I'm sure went through

his keen young mind already then. This would explain his tenacious insistence in later years for social justice for all people and under democratic and free Governments, and, no more hunger anywhere in the World! It was almost certainly this conviction and his deep religious faith which gave him his great personal courage and bravery. That he had courage is indisputable! Remember the story that about the early 1940s, during the Nazi occupation of Poland, young Karol was walking home late one night after visiting a sick friend. If I remember correctly, he was already a 1st or 2nd year Seminarian, studying for the Priesthood, and on his way back to the Seminary. Cutting through a country lane to shorten his way, he came across a teenage girl hiding in fear under the roadside hedgerow. Suspecting the worst, he introduced himself almost in a whisper and told her not to be afraid. Then he asked if she was Jewish. The terrified girl nodded. Karol told her to trust him and he would take her to a safe hiding place from the Germans. The girl nodded again, but then whispered she could not walk any further because her feet were so terribly blistered. Karol told her to climb on his back and thus he carried her for several kilometres to a convent where he knew the nuns would hide her and she would be safe!

Almost fifty years later, on a visit to Jerusalem, this same girl was brought before the Pope at her request. Now an elderly lady whose hair was now as grey as the Popes', she wanted to thank him in person for saving her all those years ago, for, had they been caught by a German patrol on that fateful night, it is unlikely that either of them would have survived the concentration camps!! This is just one of the several stories of his personal courage.

After being elected the 263rd successor of the first Pope, St Peter, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla wasted no time in criticizing all dictatorships, concentrating his efforts particularly on communist-ruled European countries, especially his homeland, Poland! For, there can be little doubt that his sometimes almost vitriolic attacks on these regimes brought about a rapid collapse of them in an almost domino effect. On the one hand he could be such a rigid, uncompromising man and on the other he showed such enormous love and compassion for his fellow-humans!

Farewell Karol Wojtyla, brave Son and Patriot of Poland, Priest, Bishop, Cardinal and finally Pope John Paul 11. R.I.P.

Bye for now, hope to see as many of you as possible in Hamilton soon, Paul.

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