

## 'Our Lord is waiting' for pope

### At Mass, Catholics prepare to mourn John Paul II

Bill Osinski, Brian Feagans - Staff  
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When he was a 14-year-old in Poland, Janusz Zych cried tears of joy when he heard that a neighbor, a man from a nearby town, had been elected pope.

Now, the papacy and the life of that man, Karol Wotyla, are coming to their end --- and Zych's tears have a different tenor.

"It's very difficult for me. I get very emotional," said Zych, who now serves as priest to a community of Polish Catholics in metro Atlanta. About 100 members of that community came to a Mass and prayer service Friday night dedicated to Pope John Paul II. They started praying together at about 9 p.m. and were to finish at about 2 this morning, at the regular First Friday-First Saturday service at St. Marguerite D'Youville Catholic Church in Lawrenceville.

Zych said he knew that the man who helped inspire him to become a priest might not be alive at the end of the service.

"We know that the Holy Father is going to die, and we know that our Lord Jesus Christ is waiting for him," Zych said.

Zych said he is also confident that history will be more than kind to John Paul II. "He will be called a great pope," Zych said.

For many others at the service, the failing health of the pope was a deeply felt personal sorrow.

Ewa Janulewicz, of Alpharetta, brought a rosary blessed by the pope. She can still recall the moment when she met him.

"Just to touch his hand, it was like electricity," she said.

"Personally, I think he is one of the most important men in history," she said. "He completely changed the world."

Tomasz Wasowicz, of Stone Mountain, said he prayed that the Pope will be at peace. "If God decides that this is his time, then we have to be OK with that," he said.

Janusz Komor prepared to play the organ for the services, because the regular organist, his wife Wanda, is in Rome, praying with the pilgrims in St. Peter's Square.

The trip, which included four other members of the Polish congregation, was pre-planned, but he said he knew his wife was both happy and sad to be near the pope at this time.

As for himself, Komor said he would offer prayers of thanksgiving for the life of John Paul II. "I want to be thankful for all the years he gave us," Komor said.

Minutes later, Komor started playing the organ, and the soloist sang in doleful tones a hymn for the pope who had a deep devotion to Mary, the mother of Christ. It's title: "Serdeczna Matko" or "Dearest Mother."

Midday, about 100 people, a good bit more than usual, attended a noon Mass at St. Benedict in Duluth. Lorraine and Bill Kiernan were among those who came specifically to pray for the pope.

"We've been glued to the TV," Lorraine Kiernan said. "This is a sad day for us as

Catholics, but at the same time it's exciting."

Exciting, she said, because heaven awaits the pope, whom she and more than 200,000 other people saw on the campus of Florida International University two decades ago. "No one is more deserving," Kiernan said.

Father Randy Mattox echoed those dueling emotions as he delivered mass in the cavernous sanctuary aglow with light filtered through stained-glass windows.

The pope's resilience in the face of death is a reminder that life doesn't end at the last breath, Mattox said.

"Despite his condition and the severity of his illness, he's still alert," Mattox said. "That in itself is a sign."

Lisa and Jeff Spillane, of Suwanee, said they have found the pope's vitality in his later years inspiring.

"He is such a good example of how we should live our lives," said Lisa Spillane, who saw the pope at the Vatican in the summer of 1998.

After Mass, the Spillanes, Kiernans and several other couples discussed the possibility that the pope could die on Divine Mercy Sunday, observed on the Sunday after Easter. On that day Catholics recite a powerful prayer, or chaplet, that they believe brings great mercy at the hour of death.

The prayer was originally revealed through St. Maria Faustina Kowalksa in 1935. Kowalksa, the worshippers pointed out, was Polish, too.

The pope's condition was the talk during lunchtime at Kurpianka, a Polish grocery store in Suwanee. There, two Polish-Jewish customers discussed what they think will be the legacy of John Paul II.

One of the men, Adam Pomeranz, said that more than any previous pope, John Paul II helped improve understanding between Catholics and Jews, particularly by doing things like being the only pope to visit a synagogue and to make a personal prayer visit to the Wailing Wall, a Jewish holy place in Jerusalem.

"He was a very good pope for Jewish-Catholic relations," Pomeranz said.

Irena Baker, a native of Poland and owner of the grocery, said the pope's declining health has been preoccupying her thoughts and those of her customers in recent days. "All the Polish people are down," she said.

As she mopped the floor after the lunch hour, there were news reports, later denied by the Vatican, that the pope had died. She stopped mopping and went to a book rack in the store and started thumbing through a picture book of John Paul's papacy. She leaves the book in the rack for her patrons to read.

She said John Paul II will be remembered for the way he made friends of people in all nations and of all faiths.

"He loved the people in every country he visited," she said. "He made lots of change for the good for the Polish people, for everybody. He was a great guy."