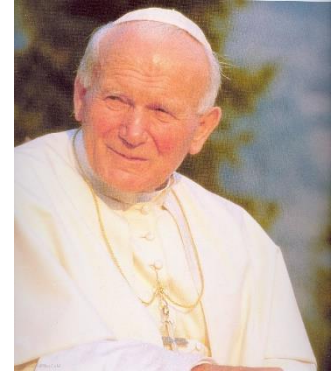


John Paul II was born just after the end of World War I. Even though peace treaties were signed, the suffering caused by this war continued in countries around the world. During his youth, World War II began and Germany's Nazi army invaded Poland.



Karol Wojtyla was born in Wadowice, Poland on May 18, 1920. He was a good student and athlete and developed his talent as an actor. His mother died when he was nine, and his only brother died four years later. These sorrows brought him even closer to his father, whose deep faith inspired him. When Karol decided to become a priest, he had to study in secret because his country was under the rule of Germany's Nazi government. At the age of 38, he was the youngest man to be appointed bishop in Poland's history.

In 1978, he was elected pope and took the name of John Paul II. His early experiences in Poland during wartime made him a strong supporter of human rights and social justice. He played an important role in helping to end the long rule of Soviet communism in Russia and in Eastern Europe, including his native country of Poland. Pope John Paul II called for solidarity among all people of the world. He travelled more than any pope in history and visited 129 countries. In addition to his native Polish, he was fluent in many languages: Italian, French, German, English, Spanish, Portuguese, Ancient Greek, and Latin. Everywhere he went, he preached the mission of peace and reconciliation, and the importance of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world.

As pope, he established World Youth Day as a way to strengthen the faith of young people. He travelled to cities hosting these celebrations and spoke to young people about the love and joy of following Jesus.

In 1981, John Paul II was shot by a Turkish gunman while greeting pilgrims in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican. He recovered and later visited the shooter in prison, forgiving him for the act of violence that nearly took his life. John Paul II died in 2005 after serving as pope for 26 years, one of the longest reigns in history. On April 27, 2014 Pope Francis canonized Pope John Paul II as a saint of the Church.

Saint John Paul II inspired people throughout the world with his deep faith, and his passion for social justice. He helped to bring the Church into the modern world. He reached out to those in deepest need. He reminds us of what it means to love Christ through a deep commitment to our faith and to taking care of those who are poor or oppressed.