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# Be Not Afraid

WISDOM FROM

John Paul II



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## Wisdom from John Paul II

Compiled and with a foreword by Marianne Lorraine Trouvé, FSP



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*For Catherine Sparks—the best teacher I ever had,  
whose example inspired me  
to open the doors of my heart to Christ.*





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## Foreword

**D**o you remember when Pope John Paul II was elected? I was a novice doing door-to-door evangelization in Bayonne, New Jersey, with a sister of Polish descent. When we found out that the new Pope was Polish, she just about danced for joy! The day of his death, more than twenty-six years later, is also seared in my memory. I was having lunch with some other sisters, and someone came over to tell us the Pope had just died. We stopped a moment to pray, and then spoke about how this great Pope had affected our lives.

Up to that point, I had lived my entire life as a professed sister with John Paul as Pope. During those twenty-six years, amazing things had happened, things that had previously seemed impossible. The Berlin Wall came tumbling

down. The Solidarity movement in Poland started something that could not be stopped, and freedom finally came to Eastern Europe as the Iron Curtain was shattered.

In the Church, John Paul II brought a new spirit of hope. The Pope navigated a difficult course in the confusion of those post-Vatican II years. He traveled all over the world, bringing the Gospel to all peoples. I saw him twice in New York—in the Bronx at Yankee Stadium in 1979 and at Aqueduct Park, in Queens, in 1995. He radiated enthusiasm and love. He treated each person with great warmth and respect, seeing the image of God in each one.

In my work during the following years as an editor at Pauline Books & Media, I became more familiar with the Pope's writings. I am especially grateful that I was able to collaborate in the publication of several volumes of his works, in particular his masterful catechesis on the theology of the body: *Man and Woman He Created Them*. At first few people were paying attention to his general audiences on this subject. But slowly these ideas became better known and subsequently had a great impact on many people. John Paul's approach to the human person continues to resonate deeply with people today. He offers a unique view of man, woman, marriage, and the family.

That unique view was first seen when he stepped out onto the balcony to bless the crowd after his election. He stayed a long time, singing hymns in Italian, as if to assure

the crowd that the first non-Italian pope in centuries would not be a stranger to them. And how many of us can still remember his final appearance at the window, just three days before he died, to bless the crowd. Frail, elderly, and showing the effects of his Parkinson's disease, he still radiated the power of his great faith. Like a father, he had spent himself to seek people out, to bring them the love of God the Father. His last words were, "*I sought you out, and now you come to me. Thank you!*"



Born in 1920 to a devout Catholic family, Karol Wojtyła's life was marked by deep joys and intense sufferings. He lost his mother, Emilia, a month before he turned nine. His older brother, Edmund, died when Karol was twelve. As a young man he saw his world crumble when World War II broke out as the Nazis swept into Poland. Shortly after, in 1941, his beloved father died. Although Karol had felt drawn toward a career in acting, during the war he worked in a chemical plant and became a clandestine seminarian. He followed his call to the priesthood and was ordained in 1946.

As a priest he carried out an effective pastoral ministry, continued higher studies, and taught at the Catholic University of Lublin. He enjoyed working with young

people, and in dialogue with them he developed his ideas about the importance of marriage and family life. In 1958 he was ordained a bishop and fearlessly confronted the communist authorities in Poland. He took part in the Second Vatican Council and implemented the Council's reforms at home.

He was elected Pope on October 16, 1978, the first non-Italian Bishop of Rome in 455 years. From that moment he focused on leading the Church into the third Christian millennium. To that end, he traveled the world to proclaim Jesus Christ to all people, making a tremendous impact on hearts and minds and drawing large crowds everywhere he went. In his first encyclical, *Redeemer of Man*, John Paul said that the Church was in the time of a great Advent, preparing for the jubilee of the year 2000. He later stated in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, "In fact, preparing for the *Year 2000 has become as it were a hermeneutical key of my Pontificate*" (no. 23).

During his long pontificate, he developed the teachings of Vatican II in his fourteen encyclicals and countless other writings. The collection of his teachings known as the "theology of the body" has revitalized Catholic teaching, especially in the area of marriage and the family. He inspired young people through the World Youth Days that he inaugurated and by his constant encouragement. John Paul also made great efforts in the field of ecumenism. He



desired the unity of East and West, hoping that the Church would breathe with both lungs, as he put it. He also promoted efforts to foster a greater understanding between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people.

John Paul was a great Marian pope. His personal devotion to Mary had taken root in him from his earliest years. As a young man working in a chemical plant, he would carry a copy of Saint Louis de Montfort's *True Devotion to Mary* and read it in his spare time. His motto, *Totus tuus*—I am all yours—reflects his consecration to Mary. During his papacy he wrote a major Marian encyclical, *Mother of the Redeemer*, and instituted the luminous mysteries of the Rosary.

Perhaps John Paul's greatest witness was the one he gave in the last years of his life, as his health declined due to the effects of Parkinson's disease. As he lay dying the world kept vigil with him, until the Lord came for him on April 2, 2005, the evening before Divine Mercy Sunday. The great crowds that flocked to Rome to pay him homage gave a beautiful testimony to the love that he received because he had first loved us so much.



In *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, John Paul made this remarkable statement: “*Original sin attempts . . . to abolish*

*fatherhood*, destroying its rays which permeate the created world, placing in doubt the truth about God who is Love and leaving man only with a sense of the master-slave relationship.” With this observation he was diagnosing the spiritual ills of the modern world. Original sin, and all sin after that, tries to do away with the fatherhood of God. Sin deceives us into thinking that God is a severe taskmaster, that we are nothing but slaves. We think that if we enter into a relationship with him we will end up being hoodwinked. Can we really trust God? If I turn my life over to the Lord, will I somehow end up losing my freedom? These questions haunt people today.

John Paul was very aware of this, and much of his life and papacy can be seen in the light of those important questions. He had explored this theme in a play he wrote as a young man, *The Radiation of Fatherhood*. In his philosophical work at Lublin, he had studied in depth the question of human freedom. What makes human persons unique? How do our actions make us more free, or less? Love brings us happiness, but what is authentic love? Can we evade our responsibilities in love and still find freedom and happiness?

As a pastor, he had a keen understanding not only of human sin and frailty, but also of the greatness of our call to love God and neighbor. He preached Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of the human race, as our way back to our

loving Father. John Paul often urged people not to be afraid of God, because he is a Father full of merciful love, always ready to forgive. The Pope stressed divine mercy because he saw it as his mission from God. On November 22, 1981, at the Shrine of Merciful Love in Collevaleza, Italy—his first public visitation after being shot—Pope John Paul II stated, “A year ago I published the encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*. This made me come to the Sanctuary of Merciful Love today. By my presence I wish to reconfirm, in a way, the message of that encyclical. I wish to read it again and deliver it again. Right from the beginning of my ministry in Saint Peter’s See in Rome, I considered this message my special task. Providence has assigned it to me in the present situation of man, the Church, and the world. It could be said that precisely this situation assigned that message to me as my task before God.” Later he canonized Saint Faustina, the apostle of Divine Mercy, and established Divine Mercy Sunday as a liturgical celebration for the universal Church.

In his encyclical on the Eucharist, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, he summarizes the program for his pontificate: “To contemplate the face of Christ, and to contemplate it with Mary, is the ‘program’ which I have set before the Church at the dawn of the third millennium, summoning her to put out into the deep on the sea of history with the enthusiasm of the new evangelization” (no. 6). If original sin

had sought to abolish fatherhood, Mary's fiat did just the opposite as she gave birth to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

During his long pontificate John Paul produced a vast amount of writings. The excerpts in this book were chosen to reflect some of these great themes: the mystery of human sin, the challenge to return to God with love, to find the face of the Father reflected on the face of Jesus Christ. I believe that in his own way, John Paul strove to show to the world a true spiritual fatherhood. He was intensely interested in people, and the time he took to speak to others when meeting them would often frustrate the papal "handlers" who tried to keep him on schedule. When he died, the spontaneous outpouring of affection, the millions of mourners who crowded the streets of Rome, gave eloquent testimony to the love of his great heart, the heart of a shepherd who still urges us today, "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!"



## I

# God the Father Seeks Us

**I**n *Jesus Christ* God not only speaks to man but also *seeks him out*. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man. Jesus speaks of this search as the finding of a lost sheep (cf. Lk 15:1–7). It is a search which *begins in the heart of God* and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son. God therefore goes in search of man who *is his special possession* in a way unlike any other creature. Man is God's possession by

virtue of a choice made in love: God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart.

*Why does God seek man out?* Because man has turned away from him, hiding himself as Adam did among the trees of the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen 3:8–10). *Man allowed himself to be led astray* by the enemy of God (cf. Gen 3:13). Satan deceived man, persuading him that he too was a god, that he, like God, was capable of knowing good and evil, ruling the world according to his own will without having to take into account the divine will (cf. Gen 3:5). Going in search of man through his Son, God wishes to persuade man to abandon the paths of evil which lead him farther and farther afield. “Making him abandon” those paths means making man understand that he is taking the wrong path; it means *overcoming the evil* which is everywhere found in human history. *Overcoming evil: this is the meaning of the Redemption.* This is brought about in the sacrifice of Christ, by which man redeems the debt of sin and is reconciled to God. The Son of God became man, taking a body and soul in the womb of the Virgin, precisely for this reason: to become the perfect redeeming sacrifice. The religion of the Incarnation is the *religion* of the world’s *Redemption* through the sacrifice of Christ, wherein lies victory over evil, over sin, and over death itself. Accepting death on the Cross, Christ at the same time reveals and

gives life, because he rises again and death no longer has power over him.

The religion which originates in the mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation is the religion of “*dwelling in the heart of God,*” of sharing in God’s very life. Saint Paul speaks of this in the passage already quoted: “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:6). Man cries out like Christ himself, who turned to God “with loud cries and tears” (Heb 5:7), especially in Gethsemane and on the Cross; man cries out to God just as Christ cried out to him, and thus he bears witness that he shares in Christ’s sonship through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, whom the Father has sent in the name of the Son, enables man to share in the inmost life of God. He also enables man *to be a son, in the likeness of Christ*, and an heir of all that belongs to the Son (cf. Gal 4:7). In this consists the religion of “dwelling in the inmost life of God,” which begins with the Incarnation of the Son of God. The Holy Spirit, who searches the depths of God (cf. 1 Cor 2:10), leads us, all mankind, into these depths by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ.

— Excerpt from Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*,  
nos. 7–8, November 10, 1994