

**St. John Paul  
the Great**  
October 22



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1920–2005 • Poland

Karol Wojtyła was a young man when the Nazis took over his home country of Poland during World War II. The Nazis closed the Polish universities and seminaries to destroy Polish identity. The Polish people needed to cling to hope during these dark days. Karol helped to start a secret theater company, which put on plays to inspire the Polish people, give them hope, and remind them who they were. More importantly, he entered the seminary in secret to study for the priesthood.

At the end of World War II, the seminaries opened again. Now a priest, Karol served as a chaplain for Krakow University and would take students out hiking and kayaking, where they would bless God in the air and the sunlight. Later, Karol became a professor; then, the archbishop of Krakow in Poland; and soon after, a cardinal.

In 1978, a new pope had been elected: John Paul I. But only thirty-three days after his election, the pope died of a heart attack. The cardinals gathered once again to select a new pope. This time they chose Karol Wojtyła, and he became pope, taking the name John Paul II in honor of the pope who had just passed away.

Pope John Paul II traveled more than any other pope in history. From country to country, he drew in large crowds. He would tell the crowds, "Be not afraid!" and invited them to welcome Jesus into their hearts. Often, he had a special message for the young people, whom he especially loved. He started World Youth Day, which is a gathering of young people from all over the world to celebrate Jesus together. The pope also wrote many important works, most especially on the importance of love and marriage.

Near the end of his life, John Paul II became very sick with Parkinson's disease. The disease made him shake, and he was very weak. But he would still go out to preach to crowds of people and bless them with the Sign of the Cross with his trembling hand. He offered his suffering to Jesus until he died a holy death.

St. John Paul the Great, help me not to be afraid to welcome Jesus into my heart!