



Karol Cardinal Wojtyla with Bishop Freking

This Sunday we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus came upon the Apostles as a mighty wind and tongues of fire. They were utterly transformed.

We see it first in St. Peter, the “Rock” on whom Jesus had said he would build his Church. Yes, Peter – who in panic and weakness had denied Christ three times as his Passion began – now stands fearlessly before the stunned crowd in Jerusalem. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he proclaims that this Jesus whom they crucified has risen from the dead, and that they are called to repent and be baptized in his name, so that they too might receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:14-42).

This year we celebrate Pentecost in the context of the 150th Anniversary of our diocese. Special celebrations are being held this weekend in the deaneries of Wausau and Stevens Point, including (fittingly) four Confirmations celebrated by Bishop Callahan.

It is worth remembering that a powerful successor of St. Peter – Pope St. John Paul II – visited this very region in 1976 as Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Krakow, two short years before becoming Pope. Memories of that visit still burn bright, especially in the hearts of the large Polish population! Not only is it recorded in the official diocesan anniversary book, *Feed my Lambs* (pp. 387-388), but the future Pope John Paul II’s visit to Stevens Point is the subject of a wonderful book by author Philip Kosloski (*In the Footsteps of a Saint* – available at www.philipkosloski.com).

During his visit, Cardinal Wojtyla gave a lecture on Poland at UW-Stevens Point, visited with Bishop Frederick Freking and the Sisters of St. Joseph, and celebrated Mass in the packed gymnasium of the newly built Stevens Point Area Senior High School.

One part of the future Pope’s visit stood out – a trip to the family farm of Maynard and Mary Jane Zdroik of

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More than Just SUNDAY

Pentecost, Pope John Paul II, a Potato Farm and the “Salt of the Earth”

Rosholt (both since deceased), with whom he would form a lasting friendship. The Polish Cardinal delighted in observing the potato harvest, touring the barns and enjoying lunch with their family and friends. Also present was Bishop Freking, who said at the time, “He walked down the cow barns, got full of silage, and it didn’t bother him one bit.”

Mary Jane Zdroik later recalled that she and Maynard had an appointment to visit Cardinal Wojtyla in Poland in 1978 but were told when they arrived that he was in Rome because he had been named Pope that day! Any disappointment was relieved by a new invitation. “He wanted us to come and visit him in Rome,” she said, “and we had a private audience with him at Castel Gandolfo” (the Pope’s summer residence in Italy). That was in 1980. In the years that followed, the Zdroiks exchanged many letters with Pope John Paul II, which they treasured and saved.

But back to that visit in Rosholt. To welcome Cardinal Wojtyla, the Zdroiks had revived an old Polish custom, presenting him with a loaf of bread and some salt. Mary Jane would later recall that it represented “the bread of life and the salt of the earth. We offered it as an honor to him.”

“Salt of the earth”: that aptly described Maynard and Mary Jane Zdroik, as well as so many of the faithful of their day – whether Polish or otherwise! And that is what Jesus has called us all to be – the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Mt. 5:13-16). But whether in first century Jerusalem, 20th century Stevens Point or today, we can only do that by God’s grace.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love!

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