

Polish city unveils giant St. John Paul II mural in centenary year

A Polish city has unveiled a giant mural of St. John Paul II in honor of the birth centenary of the pope whose feast day is celebrated Oct. 22.

City authorities in Stalowa Wola, southeastern Poland, commissioned the portrait, which is 30 feet wide and 100 feet high, to mark the anniversary year, which is being commemorated by events in Rome and Poland.

The image, on the side of an apartment building on the city's John Paul II Avenue, depicts the pope who led the Church from 1978 to 2005 leaning on his crozier while praying. The mural was officially blessed Oct. 18 by Bishop Edward Frankowski, a retired auxiliary bishop of Sandomierz.

At the base of the portrait are words that the Polish pope spoke about the city: "I embrace with my heart Stalowa Wola, a city symbolic of the great faith of working people."

The city held a competition to design the mural. The winner, Piotr Topczyłko, was selected by a jury ahead of six other candidates.

Lucjusz Nadberezny, the mayor of Stalowa Wola, shared a video on Twitter Oct. 16, the 42nd anniversary of John Paul II's election as pope, showing how the mural was created.

The city secured the agreement of both the housing cooperative that manages the building and residents.

While John Paul II never visited the city as pope, he expressed his admiration for its inhabitants, applauding their determination to build the Church of Our Lady, Queen of Poland, despite opposition from the communist authorities.

He consecrated the church in 1973, when he was archbishop of Kraków. Later, as pope, he gave the church the status of a minor basilica.

Local media quoted the city's mayor as saying: "Just as in this mural St. John Paul II is leaning against the cross, let this image be a support for us. Our pope, with his life, like the Moses of our time, opened the hearts of others, so let us also be kind, warm, and loving to one another. Then we will fulfill the life and teachings of St. John Paul II."

Meanwhile, in an interview marking the Polish pope's feast day, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki recalled his encounters with St. John Paul II.

The president of the Polish bishops' conference said that the pope was an

“extremely brave” man who “could talk with anyone.”

“It seems to me that a focal point was his reverence for the Eucharist. The Holy Father restored the Corpus Christi processions in Rome. He led the processions from St. John in Lateran to the Basilica of St. Mary Major,” he recalled.

“Back then, when he was able to walk, and later when he could no longer walk, it was extremely edifying to watch his behavior and see how he revered the Eucharist. Now, I think that the whole Church needs that today.”