

Polish pilgrims mark anniversary of attempt to assassinate St. John Paul II

An elderly man stood alone in St. Peter's Square May 13, using his wooden rosary beads to pray by a simple plaque marking the place where St. **John Paul** II was shot exactly 40 years earlier.

The man soon was joined by members of "Polska w Sercu" (Polish at Heart), a group of Polish Catholics who have lived for years in Rome but have not forgotten their homeland or their beloved pope.

Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, who served for more than three decades as personal secretary to the late pope, arrived to process with the group to the plaque where someone already had placed two red roses. They added a bouquet of gerbera daisies – red and white– the colours of the Polish flag.

Cardinal Dziwisz had begun marking the anniversary of the May 13, 1981, assassination attempt by concelebrating Mass with Cardinal Konrad Krajewski and dozens of Polish priests at the tomb of St. **John Paul** in St. Peter's Basilica.



St. John Paul II is assisted by aides after being shot in St. Peter's Square May 13, 1981. The Polish pope, who was shot at the start of his weekly general audience by Mehmet Ali Agca, was convinced that he owed his life to Our Lady of Fatima. Catholic News Service

Remembering how Mehmet Ali Agca shot and “almost mortally wounded” St. **John Paul**, “I still can feel his body slip as if paralysed and fall into my arms,” Cardinal Dziwisz said in his homily.

“I see his blood dripping onto his white pontifical cassock, staining my hands and clothes. I also hear a continual, fainter and fainter, repetition of the invocation, ‘O Mary, O my Mother!’”

“How difficult it is to forget the bang of the would-be assassin’s gunshots, which in a single moment could have put an end to this extraordinary pontificate,” the cardinal said, thanking the medical personnel who saved his life and the people all over the world who prayed for his recovery.

“Today, 40 years after that event, and 16 years” after his death, “I think with fear of what it would have been like if we had lost him in St. Peter’s Square back then,” he said.

“How poor and different the world and our homeland, Poland, would have been without his witness of faith and doctrine, without his indications and his warnings in the face of the dangers and turmoil that can threaten us in today’s world.”

Noting the day’s feast of Our Lady of Fatima and St. **John Paul**’s conviction that she saved his life, Cardinal Dziwisz also turned to Our Lady of Fatima with “a trusting prayer for the world fighting against the coronavirus pandemic,” for a greater commitment to keeping the Ten Commandments and following the beatitudes “and, finally, for fidelity to the teachings and mission left to us by St. John Paul II the Great.”
