

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



The Death of Pope John Paul I

At first, it was almost impossible to accept or believe the interruption on the news station. The matter of fact announcement seemed to be a robot connection of syllables and vowels uttered in almost disbelief by the announcer. Pope John Paul I had died. This incredible man, an unknown person to many people throughout the world 34 days previously, had experienced the ultimate reality of the human condition. And once again, the machinery was set in motion to repeat the events we had witnessed in August - the burial of a Pope and the election of a new Holy Father.

By the time this appears in print, we will have once again lived through the funeral services of John Paul I and we will be on the eve of the conclave that will determine the selection of a new leader for the Roman Catholic faith community throughout the world. With the miracle of modern communications, these events do not remain distant from us, but rather they affect our very being. We become onlookers to and participants in major events of our time.

And because of our involvement, we ask the normal questions – Why? What does it mean? What is God saying to us? These are questions shared by all of us because they are questions that come from the depth of our existence as human beings. These same questions occur in all our lives as we share in the cycle of human life – birth, growth, and death.

More than anything else, during his short reign as Pope John Paul I, the Holy Father communicated a sense of love for life. His infectious smile captivated a world and his response to life situations made so much sense in a world that was anxious to witness the relationship between religion and human experience. In his short reign, Pope John Paul I was a pastor and a teacher. Even in his death, he continued to teach by reminding us that death will also be our destiny, but it leads to the fullness of life which Jesus promises to those who believe in him. May God reward Pope John Paul I and lead him to his eternal reward. May the Holy Spirit guide the Cardinal electors in the selection of a new Holy Father.