

# SAINT JOHN PAUL II'S 1979 VISIT TO WASHINGTON

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“I do not hesitate to proclaim before you and before the world that all human life – from the moment of conception and through all subsequent stages – is sacred, because human life is created in the image and likeness of God. Nothing surpasses the greatness or dignity of a human person.

Human life is not just an idea or an abstraction; human life is the concrete reality of a being that lives, that acts, that grows and develops; human life is the concrete reality of a being that is capable of love, and of service to humanity.”

*Excerpt from Saint John Paul II's homily during his Oct. 7, 1979 Mass on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.*

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- In October 1979, one year after his election to the papacy, Saint John Paul II made his first pastoral visit to the United States, which he concluded with a two-day visit to Washington, D.C. The first-ever papal visit to the nation's capital came after the pontiff earlier visited Boston; New York; Philadelphia; Des Moines, Iowa; and Chicago.
- In his week-long trip to the United States, the pope delivered more than 70 speeches, addressing farmers in Iowa, youth in Boston, seminarians in Philadelphia and diplomats at the United Nations. He prayed in small chapels and greeted 80,000 cheering people at Yankee Stadium.
- The highlight of Saint John Paul II's visit to Washington came when he celebrated Mass on the National Mall for 175,000 people on Oct. 7.
- In Washington, Saint John Paul II received a key to the city and became the first pope to visit the White House, where he was welcomed by President Jimmy Carter.
- Also during his visit to Washington, Saint John Paul II celebrated a Mass for clergy at the Cathedral of Saint Matthew the Apostle; met with women religious at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception; addressed Catholic educators at The Catholic University of America; prayed with ecumenical leaders at Trinity College's Notre Dame Chapel; and visited the Vatican embassy (the Apostolic Nunciature) and the Organization of American States. Crowds of thousands squeezed along the sidewalks of nearly every stop the pope made.
- The official announcement for the papal visit did not come until late July, so local Catholic officials only had two months to plan for the complex event, which they pulled off with the help of an army of volunteers.
- An exhibit on the pope's life at the Saint John Paul II National Shrine in Washington highlights his visit to Washington, with video highlights of his homily at the National Mall Mass.

*The Saint John Paul II National Shrine is located at 3900 Harewood Road, N.E. For more information, go to [jp2shrine.org](http://jp2shrine.org).*