

Peter Robinson:

Arturo Mari was introduced to John Paul II when he was a priest, not even a bishop, at the Second Vatican Council. Arturo was his photographer throughout his papacy.

For that matter, Arturo Mari served as photographer to Pius the 12th, John the 23rd, Paul the 6th, John Paul I, John Paul II, and Benedict the 16th before retiring in 2007. How can it be that this man was a photographer beginning with Pius the 12th, and yet as you can see, he's not 200 years old. Arturo began at the age of 16. Arturo, welcome. Tell us about the young man you met during the Second Vatican Council, the young Pole. How were you introduced to him and what impression did he make on you?

Arturo Mari:

First of all, I would like to thank you for the invitation. It is an honor to be here in front of you all. The only thing that I would like to point out when I tell some of the issues, my voice can go down a little bit, it's just because as I tell you these things, I relive them, and these are very moving moments. So I thank you.

In 1962, at the Ecumenical Council number two, Vatican Council Two, I had the good fortune to meet Monsignor Karol Wojtyla. To be exact, Cardinal Bushinsky introduced him to me, who was the primate of Poland. And here, a friendship starts, and it lasted until 2004. I started this friendship because I was very curious to know what this Iron Curtain was. This country that was beautiful, is communist.

I am from Rome. I was born in Rome close to the St. Peter's Basilica. I was passionate about this. And so this is what started my friendship with Monsignor Wojtyla. And even in this, he was a man, and then he was the priest. He was very precise, very delicate, but very firm.

So, we went on throughout the years until on October 16, 1978, when the door of the Sistine Chapel opened after the Conclave, and he was right in front of me, dressed in white. The emotion was incredible, but the best thing was the gesture that he did toward me. He looks at me and he does that [gestures]. Look at me. He was a very simple person.

My history with him, you have to keep in mind that he kept me like a son, and I considered him my father. And so, we have started a pontificate. The most beautiful thing that I will tell you about is not so much the life in the Vatican -- which is, yes, interesting -- the Pope, the hearings, the audiences, the heads of states, like your President Reagan.

At this point, I would like to say that the Holy Father had a very good start with President Reagan. He was a man of a deep culture, a simple man, but his culture was incredible and his will was very strong. And then that affectionate relationship explodes into collaboration. I want to use this word collaboration because the [...] Holy Father made it so that he had a group of men, of persons, who loved liberty and peace.

And really, [President Reagan and John Paul II] worked a lot until the beautiful day of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then, it was no longer President Reagan, but it was George Bush senior, who was very affectionate with John Paul II. He loved the Pope. And this affection happens in the confidences of President Reagan, as George Bush, with his humility, also enacted them. And they were two persons who have continued to guide the world in peace and freedom.

Peter Robinson: How did the Pope respond when he learned that the Berlin Wall had fallen?

Arturo Mari: Only in one way. He retired in the chapel where there's still a picture of the Madonna of Częstochowa, and he stayed in there for a long time in prayer, hours in prayer. This was only the way to thank God, as he thanked on behalf of people. He just prayed and had people in his heart. This was the reality.

At this point, I would like to show in various situations the humility of John Paul II, his charity, his piety. There are some things that not even I thought could happen. This is one of the many that stays in my heart. I am referring to the trip to Zaire in Congo -- Kinshasa, the capital.

On that morning, the Holy Father had the official visit at the most important hospital of Kinshasa. So, we arrived at the hospital. I want to point out that we are talking about Africa. We arrived. He goes into the first department. He takes his red mantle off, and just as a simple priest, he goes toward the first bed. There was a child who was about three years old, and he was all curled up. We didn't even know if he was alive or not. He started to caress him, look at him, and the parents of this kid came, and obviously they are not Catholic. It doesn't even exist. There was simply the humanity, the respect of life. And the parents are talking with the Pope, and he was there for a long time. He comforted them and gave financial help also.

And then he goes to the second bed, and here the story is a little bit stronger. There was a child who was about 1 ½ years old, and you can only see a head, a huge belly, and let's say the legs, if you want to call them that way. And the Holy Father touches him, and he didn't give any sign of life. So just like a father, he picks him up in his arms. He gets a handkerchief because his face was a little bit dirty. There were some flies. He cleans him and puts his handkerchief away and just rocks him a little bit in his arms, and he starts to sing a lullaby.

And simultaneously with his index finger, he starts to tickle the child's chin and mouth. And after a minute or so, there were the first symptoms. This little child opens his eyes – and he had huge eyes, beautiful eyes, black eyes – and he starts to look at him. The Holy Father kept tickling him. And he shows his tongue; he is hungry. The mother came near, and she saw this scene. She starts hugging the Pope and crying hysterically. She is seeing her child, who is smiling, in the Pope's arms. And so, he hugs her and starts talking with her. Her husband came also, who obviously goes to his wife and starts crying, and both are comforted by the Pope.

But the beautiful thing is that from under the bed, there are another five children who are the brothers of this child, and they're seeing that their little brother who was very ill, is starting to smile. So they try to play with the Pope, pulling on his garments this way and that. Obviously, his vestment was no longer white, as you can imagine. And these were beautiful moments. The Holy Father, he also gave a huge help. He left the situation, and the scene was wonderful. It was very human.

These are living people. We went on in this department. We end the visit, and as we are exiting, [I reflect on] this beautiful moment that I could never imagine. We arrive at the door. I was used to looking at him in his eyes. He spoke with his eyes. "What is happening?" I am wondering. He turns toward his left and there were two nuns, nurses dressed in brown, all wet and dirty. The Pope looks at them, goes to them, and kneels in front of them. He takes their hands, kisses them, and says, "In the name of God, I bless you. Thank you, thank you." This was John Paul II. Thank you.

Peter Robinson: Arturo, what did the Pope say to your wife?

Arturo Mari: Actually, it's the first time that somebody asked me this question. My wife met the Holy Father three times. He spoke with her three times, and we have a son who is a priest. And the most beautiful thing is that I don't know what the Holy Father told my wife. Three times, I asked her what happened. "It's not your problem," she says. "That is the answer that I can give you."

I say this because you have to know that my life with him started at 6:20 in the morning. I entered in his apartment because the first ceremony was at 7:00 with the mass, and then it continued with the audiences. Normally, I worked until 8:30, 9:00 at night, [sometimes] 10:00. And with Reagan, when we were working for many things, I was staying there even until midnight, or 3:00 in the morning, all in one swoop.

So, what he said to my wife, I don't know. Her answer is, "It's not your business. It's not your problem." And the third thing I should say that I am lucky that I have such a wife who endured me for all these years. She is from South America. She has a different perspective of life. She is very Catholic. We have a son who is a priest, as I said, and I thank God for all of this. Thank you.

Peter Robinson: Arturo, you knew a saint. You have a son who's a priest. Do you mind if when I get to the pearly gates I just say, "Look, I knew Arturo." That's how I'm going to get to heaven. We have only a couple of minutes left. You knew him well. Now we have a generation coming up that cannot even remember him. Anyone in their teens simply has no memory of him. What do we need to grasp? If you can bring it down to a few sentences, what do we need to hold onto about this man?

Arturo Mari:

I think that we can remember that the truth is he was a saint during his life because what I witnessed, even at a distance, you would think that it's not possible. It's hard to explain. He was a saint during his life. I would like to remember him always as the man of humility, of charity, and of piety. You all know that the Holy Father wrote 14 encyclicals, and you know what the encyclicals are. They are the official laws of the Pope which he issues.

I would say that he did not only do these 14 encyclicals, he made 15. And the fifteenth, I called the encyclical of suffering, because it was an incredible teaching in his humility. We saw him suffer as he did. You know how many times during the audiences the people were waiting for him? He couldn't say no. And I would say, "Be strong." He looked at me with a smile, but you could see his suffering. And this should be a warning for everybody. Understand what the suffering is. This is all I can say about remembering him.

Peter Robinson:

I want you to know that Arturo has authored a book on his time with the Pope called *See You in Paradise*, published in 2007. If you're like me, your next move is going to be to go to Amazon and order Arturo's book. Ladies and gentlemen, Arturo Mari.

Arturo Mari:

Thank you so much, and God bless you.