

# CATHOLIC VOICE

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By Fiona van der Plaats

Outside the chapel of the Pope John Paul II Polish Catholic Centre in Narrabundah stands an oversized bust of its saintly patron.

The inscription under the bust is a quote from the homily for his funeral in 2005, delivered by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, his successor as Pope Benedict XVI: "We can be sure that our beloved Pope is standing today at the window of the Father's house, that he sees us and blesses us. Yes, bless us, Holy Father."

For the Polish Society of Christ's provincial superior Very Rev Przemyslaw S Karasiuk, known as Fr Sylvester, those words were especially meaningful as the priests prepared to celebrate the canonisation of their countryman Pope John Paul II.

The society took the lead in organising a thanksgiving Mass, celebrated by Archbishop Christopher Prowse at St Christopher's Cathedral on the day of the canonisation.

Although the society scheduled a six-day provincial retreat and Mass for its own community in the following week, it felt it was important to "share" its thanksgiving celebrations with both the Italian community (in honour of Pope John XXIII) and the general congregation.

"John Paul II is not only a saint for Polish people; he's a gift for the whole Church," Fr Sylvester said.

"Every canonisation does something to revitalise the Church ... and this one is not just about John Paul II but also John XXIII."

The earlier pope's sainthood was also marked by Australian National University's John XXIII College, which held a prayer service and dinner to honour the occasion.

Fr Sylvester said the canonisation of two popes strongly linked by Vatican II "reminds us about the changes it brought to the Church".

For Fr Sylvester and his Society of Christ brothers, there is no getting past their special connection to John Paul

## Church honours a 'man of prayer'



At the window of the Father's house... Pope John Paul II watches over Fr Sylvester and the Polish community.

II. The most valued treasure held at their centre is a relic of the Polish pope, provided by his private secretary Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz.

A collection of Vatican medals and coins to commemo-

rate every year of his papacy and other milestones is also on display.

Fr Sylvester saw Pope John Paul II a number of times and met him once, as part of a small group of priests, in 2000.

He remembers the powerful effect he had on crowds of people in general, but particularly the Poles as they fought for freedom from communist rule in the late 1980s. "He knew how to encourage people to not be

afraid; to be free but also to be responsible for their freedom," Fr Sylvester said. "When you met him, you felt he was a man of prayer, as well."

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