

JUNE 2, 1979: John Paul II arrived in Poland for his first papal homecoming, and some 10 million Poles turned out to meet him as he toured the country. The rest watched the live TV coverage of his pilgrimage. The highpoint of the trip was the pope's farewell address in Warsaw, when he said: "Let your Spirit descend and renew the land....this land!" Those words instilled new hope in his countrymen. A year later, a strike wave erupted which would snowball into the Solidarity movement, the Soviet bloc's first free labor union. This is the first of his nine visits to his native land.

SEPTEMBER 29, 1979: The Polish-born Pontiff makes his first pilgrimage to the United States, drawing record crowds wherever the visits. In New York, he addresses the United Nations General Assembly, appealing for world-wide peace.

MAY 13, 1981: John Paul survives an assassination attempt in St Peter's Square, where he is shot in the abdomen and hand by a young Muslim Turk, Mehmet Ali Agca. His life is saved by prompt medical attention at Rome's Gemelli Clinic, but he will never fully regain his former robust state of health.

MAY 28, 1981: In Poland, Cardinal Wyszynski dies following a long and debilitating bout with cancer. He is succeeded as primate by Archbishop Józef Glemp.

MAY 12, 1982: On the first day of the Holy Father's visit to Fatima, Portugal, a deranged Spanish monk lunges at him with a bayonet, but the pope escapes unhurt.

MAY 28, 1982: In an attempt to prevent future assassination attempts, an enclosed bullet-proof vehicle known as the Popemobile makes its appearance for John Paul's visit to Great Britain.

DECEMBER 27, 1983: The pope meets and forgives his would-be assassin, Mehmet Ali Agca, in a Roman prison.

MARCH 1983: The pope visits a Nicaragua torn by civil strife between the communist Sandanista government and US-backed contra rebels. The regime buses in people for all over the country to heckle John Paul and drown out his sermons about "godless communism" with their revolutionary chants and songs.

AUGUST 16, 1983: The Polish Pontiff arrives in his homeland for his second papal pilgrimage and uplifts the spirits of his downtrodden countrymen following the regime's 1981 crackdown to crush Solidarity. The pope persuades communist strongman General Wojciech Jaruzelski to lift martial law, a move announced the following month.

APRIL 13, 1986: John Paul pays a visit to and prays at Rome's main Synagogue, the first pope since St Peter ever to cross the threshold of a Jewish temple.

OCTOBER 27, 1986: John Paul holds the first World Day of Prayer for Peace by inviting 160 Christian and non-Christian religious leaders from around the globe to Assisi, Italy

JUNE 8, 1987: The Holy Father arrives for this third pilgrimage to his homeland and takes part in a National Eucharistic Congress.

DECEMBER 1, 1989: Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev is received by the Pope at the Vatican. Their discussion includes the question of religious freedom in the USSR.

JANUARY 15, 1991: In separate letters to US President Bush and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, the pope seeks to avert a war in the Persian Gulf.

JUNE 1, 1991: During his first papal pilgrimage to free Poland, John Paul elaborates on the subject of freedom and expresses alarm at the "anything goes" interpretation of that concept. He urges people to guide themselves by the ethical concepts of Christianity and not use the notion of freedom as an excuse to violate the moral order.

JULY 15, 1992: The pope is hospitalized for 11 days in connection with a surgical procedure to remove a benign intestinal tumor.

APRIL 28, 1994: The Holy Father slips and falls at the Vatican, injuring his hip. Following hip-replacement surgery, he has to walk with a cane and appears visibly weakened by the experience.

MAY 30, 1994: In a letter to bishops, John Paul reaffirms the Church's opposition to the ordination of priestesses, saying that the Church "has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women." That statement predictably infuriates radical feminists.

MARCH 25, 1995: John Paul II issues an encyclical titled "Gospel of Life" containing his strongest denunciation of the "spreading culture of death" which includes abortion, euthanasia and experimentation on human embryos.

OCTOBER 20, 1994: The pope's autobiographical book "Crossing the Threshold of Hope" is published.

MAY 22, 1995: During an Apostolic Visit to the Czech Republic, the pope pays a brief several-hour visit to the neighboring Polish town of Skoczów, where he canonizes St John Sarkander.

OCTOBER 8, 1996: The Holy Father undergoes an appendectomy.

MAY 31, 1997: The Polish Pontiff makes another pilgrimage to his homeland, whose theme is "Christ yesterday, today and forever." It includes celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of St Adalbert's (Wojciech's) martyrdom. Although his age and infirmities have slowed him down, but he still displays much of his former verve and enthusiasm.

JANUARY 21, 1998: John Paul II brings hope to the religiously persecuted Catholics of Cuba during a six-day pilgrimage and meets communist leader Fidel Castro.

JUNE 5, 1999: Apparently fearing it may be his last, John Paul II begins what will be his longest pilgrimage to his homeland due to last until June 17. Health issues prevent him from celebrating mass at Kraków's grassy commons, but he manages to visit his hometown of Wadowice.

MARCH 20, 2000: Papa Wojtyla, as he is known in many places ("papa" means pope), arrives for a six-day pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He celebrates mass in Bethlehem and prays at Jerusalem's Wailing Wall, where he inserts a note asking God's forgiveness for Christian persecution of Jews.

MAY 13, 2000: On his third pilgrimage to Fatima, Portugal, John Paul beatifies two of the shepherd children who had visions of the Virgin Mary in 1917. The Vatican reveals that the Third Secret of Fatima foretold the 1981 attempt on the pope's life.

AUGUST 16, 2002: John Paul II manages to make his ninth and last trip to Poland. Its highpoint is the consecration of Kraków's Church of Divine Providence, a major religious center. The three-day visit to his homeland is also a nostalgic trip down memory lane for the aging and ailing Pontiff.

MARCH 2003: "Roman Triptych," John Paul's first book of poetry since becoming pope, is published; it is a three-part meditation on nature, life, and death.

MAY 17, 2003: The pope's trembling hand and slurred speech has been noticeable for quite some time, but now for the first time a senior Vatican official announces that the Pontiff suffers from Parkinson's disease.

AUGUST 15, 2004: The pope breathes heavily and gasps for air during an open-air mass in Lourdes, France, one of just two foreign pilgrimages in 2004.

FEBRUARY 1, 2005: The Holy Father is rushed to a Rome hospital with breathing problems, but released nine days later when his situation stabilizes.

FEBRUARY 25, 2005: The pope agrees to a tracheotomy after doctors assure him he will be able to address the faithful following the procedure. Catholics around the globe hold prayer vigils in his intention.

MARCH 21, 2005: Recovering from throat surgery John Paul II is unable to address the faithful from his balcony window. He presses his hand to his head and pounds the lectern in apparent frustration at not being able to respond to his congregation in St Peter's Square.

MARCH 25, 2005: For the first time in his 27-year papacy a dying 84-year-old John Paul passively participates in the Good Friday Way of the Cross around Rome's ancient Colosseum; he is shown watching the procession on a video link in his apartment while embracing a large crucifix.

MARCH 27, 2005: Although his doctors assured him he would be able to speak following his tracheotomy, John Paul, once known as the Great Communicator, is unable to utter the seven Latin words of an Easter Sunday blessing from his window overlooking St Peter's Square. Instead, he blesses the crowds with the Sign of the Cross made with an unsteady hand.

MARCH 31, 2005: The Holy Father's health continues to deteriorate. The medical team attending him at his Vatican apartment issues daily communiqués on his condition to the media.

APRIL 2, 2005: For days, thousands of worshipers have been witnessing the dying pope's agony and taking part in prayer vigils below his apartment. At exactly 9:37 PM, the pope's personal physician Dr Renato Buzzonetti announces the death of John Paul II. It turns out that the pope did not want any exceptional methods to keep him artificially alive and said: "Let me go to the Home of the Father."

APRIL 8, 2005: Numerous heads of state and other foreign dignitaries as well as some 3,000,000 worshipers attend the papal funeral in St Peter's Square. Two billion viewers across the globe watch the live televised proceedings. The remains of John Paul II are laid to rest in the crypts of St Peter's Basilica. During the funeral banners and chants of "Santo subito" (immediate sainthood) go up.

MAY 13, 2005: The beatification process of John Paul II is officially launched when his successor, German-born Benedict XVI, waives the five-year waiting period normally required after a candidate's death.

MAY 28, 2006: During his visit to Poland, Pope Benedict XVI encourages prayers for the early canonization of his predecessor and expresses the hope it will occur "in the near future".

DECEMBER 19, 2009: John Paul II is proclaimed venerable by his successor Benedict XVI – the initial pre-beatification stage in a candidate's road to sainthood.

MAY 1, 2011: Following several years of investigation into the life and work of John Paul II as well as the validation of a cure attributed to his intervention, the late Pontiff is beatified and given the title of Blessed. The ceremony is attended by 87 international delegations, including 22 world leaders. Beatification is the penultimate step leading to Catholic sainthood.

APRIL 27, 2014: The "fast-track" canonization of a man many have called "John Paul the Great" has been set for Mercy Sunday, a feast day introduced by the Polish-born Pontiff. He will be co-canonized with Pope John XXIII.