**POLAND, RUSSIA AND OUR LADY OF CZESTOCHOWA**

**Introduction**

During the summer of 1978, I had occasion to travel with my wife and two children through Eastern Europe. In Poland, we made a visit to the famous shrine of the "Black Madonna" at Czestochowa. I also read during this trip a biography of the well-known Polish Franciscan priest, Father Maximilian Kolbe. The spiritual vitality of the Church in Eastern Europe amazed me. I had originally made the trip as a form of symbolic support for the Church behind the Iron Curtain, but found that it was that Church which had given spiritual support to me.

Soon after our return to our home in the Seattle area, Pope John Paul I died. I can remember hoping that his successor would be chosen from Africa or Poland because of the vitality of the Church in those areas. The election of Cardinal Wojtyla, therefore, came as a great joy to me.

During the next three years, I followed the many events involving Pope John Paul II and Poland. I noticed how frequently these events were interspersed with references to Our Lady of Czestochowa. However, it was not until July 1981, when I was asked to give a short talk on my trip to Eastern Europe, that I had occasion to reflect upon these events.

In considering these events, I was struck by a web of interrelationships between seemingly independent occurrences. Some of the strands of the web led to the subject of Russia which caused me to dust off and read a book on Fatima which I had not read for 20 years. This was followed by reading books on Polish and Russian history as well as attempting to obtain reliable information on the history of the "Black Madonna." My study of these and related subjects has continued to the present time.

For organizational purposes, I listed the results of my research in chronological form. The chronology which follows is the result of annual revisions and enlarge­ments of the original done in 1982. As a retired lawyer, I have tried to be careful with the accuracy of the facts listed in the chronology. I have annotated each of the chronology’s date entries to show the source of the information given. I have noted coincidences and parallel events without drawing final conclusions from them. I leave to the reader to decide whether these events form a pattern with a definite direction and purpose.

Now, more than thirty years after I began this research project, I wonder if these past events, especially those relating to Poland, Russia, and the Mother of God, have particular relevance to what is occurring in Eastern Europe today. In August 2012, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church and the president of the Catholic bishops’ conference of Poland signed a *Joint Message to the Russian and Polish Peoples*. The Message urged the reconciliation of the peoples of these two great nations and entrusted this task to the Mother of God. Prior to the signing, the Polish bishops gave the Patriarch a beautiful copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Let us pray that with the assistance of the Mother of God her Russian and Polish children will be reconciled and in the process her Orthodox and Catholic children will be reconciled as well.

Peter Anderson

**Chronology of Events**

**? A.D.**

According to legend, an icon of Our Lady is painted by St. Luke.

**c. 99 A.D.**

There is an ancient account that Pope St. Clement I, the third successor to St. Peter, died in exile in what is now Ukraine. Because of his apostolic successes in Rome, he had been banished by Trajan to work as slave labor in the quarries of the Crimea bordering the Black Sea.

**c. 438 A.D.**

According to tradition, the icon painted by St. Luke is brought to Constantinople in this year by Empress Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius II. The painting becomes the most venerated icon in Constantinople and becomes the palladium of the city. The icon is named the "Hodegetria," which means in Greek one “who shows the way.” The icon shows the Christ Child on the left arm of Mary, and Mary’s right hand pointing towards the Christ Child. The Hodegetria becomes the model for other ancient icons of Our Lady. Legends arise that these icons, patterned after the Hodegetria, were also painted by St. Luke.

**626 A.D.**

The Hodegetria is credited with saving Constantinople from an attack by the Avars.

**c. 655 A.D.**

Pope St. Martin I dies in the Crimea where he had been exiled by the Byzantine Emperor Constans II. He is the last pope in history, to the present day, to be venerated as a martyr. He is considered a saint by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

**860-885 A.D.**

Saints Cyril and Methodius, two brothers from Thessalonica, undertake their mission to convert the Slavic peoples. Prior to their mission, they translated the New Testament and liturgical books into the Slavic language used in the vicinity of Thessalonica. This language formed the basis of "Church Slavonic" which is today the liturgical language of the Slavic Byzantine churches including the Russian Orthodox Church. St. Cyril also devised a new alphabet. The Cyrillic alphabet, which is named after him, is the alphabet used in Russia.

During a trip to the Crimea, St. Cyril discovered the relics of St. Clement and later presented some of the relics to Pope Hadrian II in Rome. The Pope blessed the work of the brothers among the Slavic peoples. Their missionary work took place primarily in the Balkans and in Moravia. In 1980, Saints Cyril and Methodius, who are revered by both the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, were named by Pope John Paul II as patron saints of Europe.

**963 A.D.**

St. Athanasius the Athonite establishes a monastery dedicated to the Mother of God on the Mt. Athos peninsula in Greece. In subsequent years, there will be over one hundred monasteries on the Mt. Athos peninsula, all dedicated to the Mother of God. Mt. Athos will be and is today the center of Orthodox monasticism.

The third monastery established on Mt. Athos is founded by Georgians from the Caucasus region. This monastery is called Iveron, which is the ancient name for Georgia.

An ancient icon of the Mother of God is brought to the Iveron monastery shortly after its founding. According to legend, the icon was hovering over the waves of the Aegean Sea and was retrieved by a Georgian monk who miraculously walked upon the waters. The icon is patterned after the Hodegetria and is reputably painted by St. Luke. Known as the Iveron icon of the Mother of God, it became one of the most venerated possessions of Mt. Athos.

**966 A.D.**

King Mieszko of Poland is baptized. Christianity is brought to Poland from the West, and the Latin rite predominates. The conversion of Poland is dated from the above year.

**988 A.D.**

According to one account, the icon which in later centuries will become known as Our Lady of Czestochowa is brought from Constantinople to Kiev in approximately this year. It is given as a wedding gift by the famous Byzantine Emperor Basil II to his sister Anna, who was marrying Prince Vladimir of Kiev. This ancient icon is also patterned after the Hodegetria and is reputably painted by St. Luke on a wooden tablet made by St. Joseph.

Vladimir of Kiev was the pagan ruler of Kievan Rus, a medieval state which covered large portions of what are now Ukraine, Belarus, and European Russia. Although known for his brutality and excesses, Vladimir underwent a dramatic conversion to Christianity and completely transformed his life. In 988, he causes the people of Kiev to be baptized in the Dnieper River. He is now venerated as a saint by both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches and is considered the individual most responsible for the original conversion of the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian peoples. If the account is true that the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa was given to Anna, the Czestochowa icon would have been present with St. Vladimir when he caused the “Baptism of Rus.”

The Baptism of Rus occurs after the demise of iconoclasm in Byzantium and during a resurgence of the veneration of icons. For future centuries, holy icons will remain a focal point of the piety of the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Russian peoples. Their spirituality will also involve an intense devotion to the Theotokos, the Mother of God. St. Vladimir adopts the Slavonic liturgy used in the Balkans and follows the Byzantine rite.

In 988, St. Vladimir also brings to Kiev the portion of the relics of Pope St. Clement I which had been left by St. Cyril in the Crimea. The relics of the pope are later placed in the Church of the Assumption (Tithe Church) in Kiev and become the first holy relics of the Church in Rus.

**1028**

St. Anthony of Kiev, a monk at Mt. Athos, is told by his abbot to return to his own land. His abbot predicts, "You will be a father of many monks." St. Anthony establishes in Kiev the famous Monastery of the Caves, dedicated to the Assumption, from which monasticism will rapidly spread to many other locations in Kievan Rus.

**1054**

Michael Cerularius, Patriarch of Constantinople, attacks the Latin Church's position on several issues and closes the Latin rite churches in Constantinople. After the Patriarch refuses to continue negotiations with the papal legates, he is excommunicated by them. The Patriarch thereafter increases his attacks against the Latin Church. The schism between the Eastern and Western Churches begins. However, for a number of centuries thereafter, it is not entirely clear whether or not the Church in Rus had also broken from Rome.

**1240**

Led by Batu, a grandson of Genghis Khan, the Tatars invade Rus in 1238. Kiev is destroyed by the Tatars in 1240, and almost the entire population of the city is massacred. Divided into independent principalities, Rus will be subject to the Tatar yoke. At the time of its destruction, Kiev is ruled by a governor appointed by Prince Daniel of Galicia, one of the princes of Rus.

**1241**

The Tatars also invade Poland. Prince Henry the Pious, given courage by his mother, St. Hedwig, confronts the Tatars at the battle of Legnica in 1241. Although the Poles are defeated and Prince Henry dies in the battle, the Tatars abandon their westward expansion. Poland is subject to subsequent invasions by the Tatars, but it is spared the Tatar yoke. Although German by birth, St. Hedwig will be considered one of Poland's great saints.

**1245**

Alarmed by the Tatar invasion of Rus, Poland, and Hungary, Pope Innocent IV dispatches two Franciscan friars, John of Plano Carpini and Benedict of Poland, to carry a letter from the Pope to the Great Khan in Mongolia. Traveling through Kiev and across Asia, the two Franciscans reach the court of Kuyuk Khan. They deliver to the Great Khan the Pope's message urging the Tatars to desist from the slaughter of Christians. On their return trip from Mongolia, the two Franciscans are hospitably received in Rus by Prince Daniel of Galicia, who after consultation with his bishops expresses the wish to "hold the Pope for their special lord and father." As a result, Prince Daniel is crowned with a papal royal crown by the Apostolic Legate Opizo in 1253.

**1270**

In 1259, Prince Daniel founds the city of Lviv, located in the western principalities of Rus and named after his son Leo. According to ancient chronicles from the city of Lviv, the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, which had been venerated in the castles of the princes of Rus since the time of Vladimir, is brought to the city in 1270. Leo exposes the icon for public veneration, and copies are made and sent to various churches in Rus. The icon is then hidden for many years by the Basilian monks in their monastery in Lviv.

**September 8, 1380**

After the destruction of Kiev, the northern principalities of Rus increase in importance. The northern city of Moscow becomes the center around which the future nation of Russia will form. On the above date, Prince Dimitri of Moscow, a descendant of the princes of Rus, defies the Tatars and defeats them at the famous battle of Kulikovo. As was true in Poland in 1241, a saint is also involved in this important battle against the Tatars. Prince Dimitri engages the Tatars at Kulikovo only after being encouraged and assured by St. Sergius that God would be with him.

St. Sergius is probably the greatest and most venerated Russian saint and is recognized as a saint by both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches. In 1337, he had founded the Trinity Monastery, located 70 kilometers northeast of Moscow. He had a great devotion to the Mother of God. After praying before one of her icons, St. Sergius had a vision of the Mother of God accompanied by St. Peter and St. John. She promised him that she would never leave the Trinity Monastery and would provide it with all necessities. This vision occurred shortly before the death of St. Sergius in 1392.

**1382**

Lviv becomes a part of Poland. According to the Lviv chronicles, the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa is discovered in this year by Prince Ladislaus of Opole, the regent of Poland. He removes the icon from Lviv causing the faithful of the Byzantine rite great sadness. Prince Ladislaus stops first at Belz and then brings the icon to a newly formed monastery at Czestochowa in Poland. The monastery is located on a hilltop known as Jasna Gora, which in Polish means "Mountain of Light." Because of the monastery, the icon will also be referred to as Our Lady of Jasna Gora.

Although Christianity came to Poland from the West, the Czestochowa icon came to Poland from the East. The icon is venerated not only by Poles but also by Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians and represents a bridge between Western and Eastern spirituality.

A few weeks after the arrival of the icon in Poland, Louis I, King of Hungary and Poland, dies. His daughter, Jadwiga, receives the Polish crown in 1384. She becomes devoted to Our Lady of Czestochowa and is later nationally venerated as a saint. In 1997, Jadwiga will be canonized by Pope John Paul II.

**1386**

Jadwiga marries Ladislaus Jagiello, the Grand Duke of Lithuania. Together they become the rulers of a united Poland and Lithuania. He is baptized a Catholic, returns to Lithuania, and causes its conversion from paganism to Christianity. Although Lithuania was the last European nation to accept Christianity, it has maintained its Catholic faith to the present time.

**August 26, 1395**

Tamerlane commences a military campaign in Russia and marches towards Moscow. Grand Prince Vasili of Moscow orders that the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God be brought from the city of that name to Moscow. According to legend, this ancient icon was also painted by St. Luke. On August 26, 1395, a procession bearing the icon arrives in Moscow and is met by the populace of the city. On the same day, Tamerlane ends his campaign, does not attack Moscow, and retreats. According to the Russians, Tamerlane's retreat is caused by a terrifying dream that he had of a Lady leading an innumerable host to protect Moscow. August 26 is thereafter set aside for the eternal commemoration of the salvation of Moscow. By coincidence, August 26 is also the feast day of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**July 15, 1410**

Poland had been plagued by continuing hostilities with the Teutonic Knights, the rulers of Prussia. At the famous battle of Grunwald-Tannenberg, the armies of Poland and Lithuania under Jagiello confront the armies of the Teutonic Knights. Singing Poland's oldest hymn, "Bogurodzica Dziewica"--"God's Virgin Mother," the forces of Jagiello defeat the Teutonic Knights, and the power of the Knights is substantially curtailed. The battle occurs on July 15, the feast day of St. Vladimir.

**1430**

By this time, the shrine at Czestochowa had become famous due to miracles attributed to the icon and was visited by thousands of pilgrims from Poland and neighboring countries. During Holy Week of this year, robbers plunder the shrine, and the icon is severely damaged. Artists summoned by King Jagiello attempt to restore the icon, but the damage is so extensive that the image has to be completely recopied over the original wooden tablet. Scars are painted on the face of the icon by the artists as a reminder of the desecration.

**1439**

Representatives of the Eastern and Western Churches meet at the Council of Florence. The delegation from the Eastern Church includes the Byzantine Emperor, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and Isidore, Metropolitan of Kiev and All Rus. A union of the two Churches is effectuated under which the primacy of the pope is acknowledged and the equal validity of the Latin and Byzantine rites is recognized.

Isidore returns to Russia and promulgates the Union of Florence in Moscow. However, Grand Prince Vasily II of Moscow rejects the Union and imprisons Isidore for heresy. The Union fails to take root in Russia.

**1443-1444**

To fulfill an obligation undertaken at Florence, Pope Eugenius IV calls a crusade for the purpose of driving the Turks from the Balkans and saving Constantinople. The only monarch to answer the call is Jagiello's son, Ladislaus III, who had succeeded his father as king of Poland and who had recently become king of Hungary as well. After spectacular successes against the Turks, the twenty-year-old king is defeated by the Turks and is killed at the battle of Varna in Bulgaria on November 10, 1444. With his defeat, the last real hope for Constantinople is extinguished.

**1453**

Constantinople is surrounded and besieged by the Turks. Following the Union of Florence, Constantinople had been sharply divided between proponents and opponents of the Union. However, in the final desperate days of the siege, differences are forgotten, and all join together on the evening of May 28 for a common liturgy at the Church of Hagia Sophia. Those present include Isidore who had escaped from Russia and had been appointed the papal legate to Constantinople. On the next day, May 29, Constantinople falls. The Hodegetria icon disappears, presumably destroyed. The Byzantine Empire ends and so does the Union of Florence. The conquering sultan appoints an opponent to the Union as Patriarch of Constantinople. A theory thereafter becomes prevalent in Russia that the fall demonstrated divine disapproval of the Union and that Moscow was now the "Third Rome", successor to fallen Rome and Constantinople as the guardian of the true faith.

**March 4, 1484**

After the death of Ladislaus III at Varna, the Polish throne passes to his brother, Casimir IV. The second son of Casimir IV, also named Casimir, lives a life of great sanctity and devotion to Mary. Foregoing his father's military pursuits, he dies at the age of 26 on the above date in Lithuania. He is soon canonized, and St. Casimir becomes the patron saint of Lithuania.

Under his father King Casimir IV and his successor, Poland's territorial control is expanded so that by 1498 it reaches from the Baltic to the Black Sea and as close as 90 kilometers from Moscow. The next century will be considered Poland's "golden" years.

**July 8, 1579**

In the Russian city of Kazan, the Mother of God appears to a ten-year-old girl named Matrona after a terrible fire which destroyed half of the city. The little girl is told by the Mother of God that an icon is buried under the ruins of a nearby burned house. An icon is in fact discovered there, and the icon is then carried in procession to the neighboring church. Two blind men, Josif and Nikita, who are standing near the icon, have their sight miraculously restored. A convent dedicated to the Mother of God is subsequently built at the location where the buried icon had been discovered, and Matrona becomes a nun at this convent. The priest of the neighboring church, to which the icon had been first carried, later becomes the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church.

Like the Czestochowa and Iveron icons, the Kazan icon is based on the Hodegetria model, but has the distinguishing feature of the Christ child standing rather than sitting at the side of the Virgin.

**1596**

With the assistance of King Sigismund of Poland, a union is formed between the Catholic Church and Orthodox bishops in the Polish and Lithuanian territories. Under this union, patterned after Florence, the Orthodox recognize the primacy of the pope but maintain their Byzantine liturgy. The union is formalized at Brest, and the signers include the Metropolitan of Kiev. There is little popular enthusiasm for the Union of Brest until the cause has such martyrs as St. Josaphat of Polotsk and St. Andrew Bobola. Thereafter, the movement will gain increasing acceptance so that 150 years after the Union, many Ukrainians and Belarusians will be Byzantine Catholics.

**1605 - 1613**

In Russian history, this period is called the "time of troubles." After the death of Boris Godunov in 1605, Russia falls into a state of anarchy. Polish troops enter Russia in support of a pretender to the tsarist throne. Beginning in September 1608, the Poles with up to 30,000 troops lay siege to the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius, and the monks invoke the promised protection of the Mother of God. Although the siege continues for 16 months, the Poles never succeed in capturing the monastery.

The Poles do occupy Moscow from 1610 to 1612. However, the monks of the Trinity Monastery send messages to the other cities of Russia calling for the liberation of Moscow. An army of volunteers is organized under the leadership of Kuzma Minin and Prince Dmitri Pozharsky. The army brings with it from Kazan a copy of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God. Invoking the assistance of the Mother of God through prayers to her icon, the army marches to Moscow where the Poles are expelled from the city.

Michael Romanov is selected as the new tsar and after his coronation makes a pilgrimage to Trinity Monastery. He founds the Romanov dynasty which will rule Russia until 1917. Many of the subsequent tsars will have a great veneration for St. Sergius and will also make pilgrimages to the monastery.

**1630**

In thanksgiving to the Mother of God for the liberation of Moscow, the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God is constructed on Red Square, near St. Basil’s Cathedral, to house the icon which accompanied the victorious army of Minin and Pozharsky.

**October 13, 1648**

The monks of Mt. Athos make an identical copy of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God for the Russian Church, and this copy is welcomed by the faithful of Moscow upon its arrival in the city on October 13, 1648. Thereafter, this date is established on the Russian liturgical calendar as the feast of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God. The Iveron icon is soon regarded as the guardian of Moscow and becomes one of the most venerated icons in Russia. Like the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, this icon also has the unusual feature of a wound on the right cheek of the virgin.

**1655**

In Polish history, this period of time is called "the deluge." The Poles are faced with threats from the Turks, the Russians, and the Swedes. In 1648, the Cossacks in Ukraine revolt and six years later place themselves under the protection of the tsar with the result that Poland loses eastern Ukraine including Kiev. In 1655, the Swedes invade Poland and occupy almost the entire demoralized country. The Swedes besiege the monastery at Czestochowa. However, the events relating to the siege of the Trinity Monastery in Russia are now repeated in Poland. Invoking the aid of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the monks withstand a siege of 40 days and are victorious. The victory has an electrifying effect on the Polish people, a general insurrection occurs, and the Swedes are subsequently driven from Poland. Poland is able to continue its existence as an independent nation.

**1656**

Inspired by the seemingly miraculous victory of the previous year, Poland's King Jan Kazimierz proclaims Mary to be the "Queen of Poland." The proclamation occurs in the cathedral at Lviv, the city from which the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa was removed three centuries earlier. The proclamation is witnessed by St. Andrew Bobola, who one year later will be tortured and beheaded in the cause of union with the Orthodox. The feast day of Mary, Queen of Poland, is now observed on May 3, which is also the birthday of St. Sergius.

**1683**

The Turks besiege Vienna, and Christianity in Western Europe is threatened. King Jan III Sobieski of Poland leads a Polish army to relieve the city. On his way, he stops at Czestochowa and prays before the icon for a miracle. Before the famous battle of Kahlenberg outside Vienna, he tells his soldiers to go into battle with the prayer, "In the name of Mary, Lord God, help." The Polish cavalry in the final decisive engagement is victorious, the siege is lifted, and the Turks retreat. King Sobieski returns to Czestochowa to give thanks.

**1772 - 1795**

In the 18th century, Poland undergoes a period of decline and increasing foreign domination. After a resurgence of nationalistic spirit in Poland, Catherine the Great of Russia, Frederick the Great of Prussia, and Maria Theresa of Austria intervene in 1772 and annex significant portions of Poland to their respective countries in what is known as the First Partition. In a reaction to Poland adopting the liberal Constitution of May 3, 1791, Russia and Prussia annex additional portions of Poland. In 1794, Kosciuszko, a Polish hero in the American revolution, leads an uprising which liberates much of Poland. He is ultimately defeated by the Russians, and Russia, Prussia, and Austria engage in a third and final partition of what remains of Poland. Poland disappears from the map of Europe and will not emerge again until 1918.

In the aftermath of the partitions, Catherine the Great, who had earlier nationalized the monasteries of Russia, begins the suppression of the Catholic Byzantine rite. Kosciuszko dies. In his will, he directs that his land in America, granted to him by Congress, be sold and the proceeds used to purchase freedom for slaves in America.

**1812**

Napoleon and his Grand Army invade Russia. The French and Russian armies meet at Borodino, approximately 125 kilometers from Moscow. In what Napoleon would later describe as the "most terrible of all my battles," the French army losses 55,000 men and never recovers. Prior to the battle, the Russian Field Marshall Kutuzov prayed before the Kazan icon of the Mother of God. On the Russian Julian calendar, the fifteen-hour battle occurs on August 26, 1812, the feast day of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

The shattered French army advances to Moscow the next week. Napoleon waits in the Kremlin for five weeks expecting the tsar to sue for peace. However, Tsar Alexander I remains in St. Petersburg and stubbornly and out of religious conviction refuses to negotiate. With winter approaching, Napoleon is forced to retreat and his army is decimated by the Russians and the Russian winter. The Grand Army entered Russia with a force of 700,000 men, and six months later the army leaves Russia with only 100,000 men remaining.

**1813**

The next year, Tsar Alexander I receives a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa from the shrine at Jasna Gora. He has a beautiful riza or cover, with many precious jewels, made for the Czestochowa icon. The tsar has the icon placed in a prominent location, surrounded by many burning lamps, in the newly constructed Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in St. Petersburg. March 6 is thereafter established as a feast day on the Russian Orthodox calendar in honor of the Czestochowa icon, and it remains a feast day of the Russian Orthodox Church today.

The Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in St. Petersburg had been built in 1801-1811 under the orders of Tsar Paul I who had directed that its design be modeled after St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. In 1813, the remains of Field Marshall Kutuzov, who had prayed before the Kazan icon before the battle of Borodino, are transferred to the Cathedral.

In 1932, the communists will close the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, and the beautiful copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa will disappear. The communists will convert the Cathedral into a museum of atheism. The museum will also contain the offices of the largest journal of militant atheism in the Soviet Union.

**1830 - 1863**

Although no longer a political entity, Poland preserves its national identity and faith. After the Congress of Vienna in 1814, Russia holds 82 percent of the former Polish land. In 1830 and 1863, insurrections occur in Poland. After months of fighting, each is crushed by Tsar Nicholas I and Tsar Alexander II respectively. Repressive measures are taken by Russia including further suppression of the Catholic Byzantine rite.

**1833**

St. Seraphim of Sarov, who with the possible exception of St. Sergius is Russia's most popular saint, dies. His body is found in a kneeling position before an icon of Our Lady. During his life, it is said that he had several visitations by Our Lady. On one visitation, she was accompanied by Pope St. Clement I, who is especially venerated by the Russian Church as possibly its first local saint.

In the next century, the village of Sarov, which was the site of these visitations by Our Lady, will be converted by the communists into "Arzamas-16", a super-secret Soviet nuclear research center. It is at this center that the Soviets will do most of their work in developing the atomic and hydrogen bombs. The rooms of St. Seraphim’s monastery will become the offices of the nuclear scientists.

**1858**

Apparitions of Our Lady occur in Lourdes, France. The Lady identifies herself as the Immaculate Conception. During this general period, other apparitions are also reported in France. Some, such as the apparitions to St. Catherine Laboure and at LaSalette, contain grim warnings for the future.

**June 29, 1904**

The Kazan icon venerated for centuries at the Mother of God Convent in Kazan is stolen. Although the thief is later apprehended by police, he tells them that he had stolen the icon only for its jeweled cover and that he had burnt the actual icon. In the stove of the thief’s home, police find pieces of gesso and metal icon attachments which are recognized by the sisters from the convent as having been affixed to the Kazan icon. This was probably the original Kazan icon discovered by Matrona, although there is a possibility that the original icon was taken to Moscow in 1612 by Minin and Pozharsky and a copy was left in Kazan.

**1914**

World War I begins. In the ensuing war, more than 8 million die, many in France.

**May 13, 1917**

The first apparition of Our Lady occurs to three children at Fatima, Portugal. She asks them to say the rosary every day for world peace and for the end of the war.

**July 13, 1917**

Our Lady appears for the third time at Fatima and brings a message of penance and reparation. She tells the children that the war will end, but that if the world does not stop offending God, he will punish the world by war, hunger, and persecution of the Church and the Holy Father. She adds:

"To prevent this I come to ask the consecration of Russia to my Immaculate Heart and the Communion of reparation on the first Saturdays. If they listen to my requests, Russia will be converted and there will be peace. If not, she will scatter her errors throughout the world, provoking wars and persecutions of the Church. The good will be martyred, the Holy Father will have much to suffer, various nations will be annihilated.

In the end my Immaculate Heart will triumph. The Holy Father will consecrate Russia to me, and it will be converted and a certain period of peace will be granted to the world."

Jacinta, one of the three children, is especially concerned about the future pope who will suffer.

**October 13, 1917**

On October 13, the final apparition occurs at Fatima, and a crowd of approximately 70,000 sees the sun "dancing" in the sky. October 13 is also the feast day of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God.

Three days later, a Polish Franciscan priest, Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe, and six other Franciscans meet in Rome. Although probably unaware of the events at Fatima, they consecrate themselves to Mary the Immaculate and found a Marian organization known as *Militia Immaculatae*. When Father Kolbe was a boy, his first signs of unusual piety had been long hours of prayer before a small shrine to Our Lady of Czestochowa which was in his family home. He had decided to enter the Franciscan Order after his father and mother had traveled to Czestochowa and made a vow of perpetual chastity at the shrine.

**November 7, 1917**

The Bolsheviks under Lenin seize Petrograd (St. Petersburg) and take control of the Russian government. Measures are thereafter taken to eliminate religion in what had previously been known as "Holy Russia."

**September 1918**

A Moscow newspaper reports that the famous copy of the Kazan icon, brought by Minin and Pozharsky to Moscow in 1612 and venerated for centuries in the Kazan Cathedral on Red Square, has been “stolen.”

**November 1918**

World War I ends. Poland declares its independence, and the Polish Republic is created. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, which had been part of the Russian Empire, also become independent nations.

**1920**

The Bolshevik government converts the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius into a museum.

**August 1920**

In the year following creation of the Polish Republic, Russia and Poland become engaged in a war originating from a dispute over their borders. By August 1920, the Russian armies are approaching Warsaw with designs of capturing Warsaw and continuing their westward march with the hope of causing a revolution in Germany. A great religious fervor arises in Poland, and prayers are offered to Our Lady of Czestochowa throughout Poland. In the battle of Warsaw by the Vistula River, the Poles win a surprising and decisive victory, and the Russians are routed. Thereafter, the Russians abandon military expansion into Europe for many years. Poles refer to this victory as the "miracle of the Vistula."

During the battle of Warsaw, the diplomatic corps had left the city. Only the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop Achille Ratti, remained. Prior to his recent arrival in Poland, Archbishop Ratti had been the librarian of the Vatican library. His first act in Poland had been a pilgrimage to Czestochowa. While in Poland, Archbishop Ratti also served as the papal delegate to Russia and sought to intercede with the Soviet government to spare the lives of the Russian imperial family.

**February 6, 1922**

Less than 18 months after the battle of Warsaw, Achille Ratti is elected pope and chooses the name Pius XI. As pope, he has an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa placed over the main altar of the chapel at Castel Gandolfo, the papal summer residence, and has frescoes of the Polish events of 1655-56 and 1920 painted on the walls of the chapel. In 1923, he issues an encyclical honoring St. Josaphat of Polotsk.

**Easter 1923**

After a trial which attracts worldwide attention, the Bolsheviks convict and sentence many of the leading Catholic bishops and priests in Russia. Monsignor Constantine Budkiewicz, pastor of St. Catherine’s Church in St. Petersburg, is sentenced to death and is shot during the early morning hours of Easter 1923. Archbishop Cieplak, the administrator of the archdiocese which covers much of Russia, is sentenced to ten years of solitary confinement.

After one year imprisonment, Archbishop Cieplak is released and exiled. He receives a hero’s welcome in Warsaw and then travels to Czestochowa to thank the Black Madonna for his release. In Rome, he is greeted by Pope Pius XI in an emotional encounter in which both men are moved to tears.

**1929**

In 1929, Pope Pius XI founds the Collegium Russicum in Rome for the purpose of training priests in the Catholic Byzantine rite for Russia. In 1930, he directs that the Leonine Prayers recited at the foot of the altar at the conclusion of most Masses be said for the conversion of Russia. Three years thereafter, Pius XI proclaims a special Holy Year to observe the 1900th anniversary of the Redemption.

**1936**

The communists raze the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God located on Red Square in Moscow. For many decades thereafter, the site will remain a vacant lot across the street from the GUM department store.

**February 1937**

The work of Franciscan Father Kolbe flourishes in Poland. Over 750 Franciscan priests and brothers join him in the work of *Militia Immaculatae* which includes a Marian periodical with a circulation of over one million. He establishes the “City of Immaculata” near Warsaw and a friary in Nagasaki, Japan. In February 1937, he tells a large audience in Rome that he did "not believe the day to be far off, or a mere dream when the statue of the Immaculata will be enthroned by her Knights in the very heart of Moscow." However, he confides to a close friend, Father Pignalberi, "that first we must pass through a trial of blood."

**August 23, 1939**

Germany and the Soviet Union execute a secret pact under which the three Baltic states fall under Soviet control. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia subsequently become part of the Soviet Union.

**September 1, 1939**

World War II begins with the invasion of Poland by Germany. Estimates of the number that died in the war range from 35 to 60 million. Poland is occupied by Germany for approximately five years. In 1940, Hans Frank, the German governor-general of Poland, wrote to himself the following warning in his personal diary which was later produced at his Nürnberg trial: "When all the lights went out for Poland, there was always present the Holy Virgin of Czestochowa and the Church. You must never forget it." During the War, Pope Pius XII states: “Poland has not perished nor will it perish because Poland believes, Poland prays, Poland has Jasna Gora.”

**August 14, 1941**

Father Kolbe dies a martyr's death in the starvation bunker at Auschwitz. He substitutes himself for a young Polish officer who had been selected for execution and was despondent over his wife and children. On the feast of the Assumption, Father Kolbe's body is incinerated in the ovens at Auschwitz.

**October 1941**

As the Nazi forces approach Moscow, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Metropolitan Sergius, is evacuated to the Volga city of Ulyanovsk, the birthplace of Lenin. There he establishes his new home in a former Catholic rectory and church, because all Orthodox churches in the city had been previously destroyed. The former Catholic church, which becomes his cathedral, is dedicated by him to the Kazan icon of the Mother of God -- the icon that had been instrumental in the liberation of Moscow in 1612.

**1942**

Many are attracted to Padre Pio, a Capuchin priest in San Giovanni Rotondo, Italy, who has the stigmata on his hands, feet, and side. During this year, he tells a friend and several visitors that "the negative materialism of the Soviets will never succeed in satisfying the mysticism which is part of the Russian soul. Russia will return to religion and to God."

**October 31, 1942**

Pope Pius XII, whose episcopal ordination occurred on the same day and year as the initial Fatima apparition, solemnly consecrates the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Russia is not expressly mentioned, but there is a reference to the land where “there was not a house that did not honor your venerable icon, though now perhaps hidden and put away for better days.”

In an interview several years later, Lucia, the only survivor of the three children who witnessed the Fatima apparitions, states: "What Our Lady wants is that the Pope and all the bishops in the world shall consecrate Russia to her Immaculate Heart on one special day. If this is done, she will convert Russia and there will be peace. If it is not done, the errors of Russia will spread through every country of the world."

**August 9, 1945**

An atomic bomb is dropped on Nagasaki. Man now has the ability to annihilate nations as indicated by the Fatima message of July 13, 1917. The Nagasaki friary founded by Father Kolbe is screened from the blast by a hill and is not destroyed. On August 14, Japan announces its surrender, and World War II ends. The war that started in Father Kolbe's homeland of Poland now ends near his friary in Nagasaki. The end of the war occurs exactly on the fourth anniversary of Father Kolbe’s martyrdom.

**1945 - 1946**

Russian troops occupy Poland. As the result of Yalta, eastern Poland, including the city of Lviv, becomes a part of the Soviet Union. The Communists attempt to destroy completely the Catholic Byzantine rite in that area. In 1946, a synod, held in Lviv and organized by the Soviet government, proclaims the Union of Brest, made in 1596, to be null and void. Thereafter, the Catholic Byzantine rite is outlawed by the Soviet government. Joseph Slipyj, Archbishop of Lviv, remains loyal to the Catholic Byzantine rite and will spend 18 years in prison in Siberia.

**Easter 1946**

Perhaps as a concession due to the war effort of Russian Orthodox believers, the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius at Zagorsk is allowed to reopen. After a period of over 25 years, the liturgy is again celebrated in the Assumption Cathedral at the Monastery. Although the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God is placed by the Soviet government in the Tretyakov Museum in Moscow, a copy of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God remains venerated in the Resurrection Church in Moscow's Sokolniki district.

**May 13, 1946**

Over 700,000 pilgrims gather at Fatima for the crowning of Our Lady of Fatima.

**September 8, 1946**

Over 700,000 pilgrims gather at the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa to consecrate Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

**1947**

Karol Wojtyla, a young Polish priest studying in Rome, visits Padre Pio. According to several elderly priests in Krakow, Wojtyla told them that Padre Pio had suddenly embraced him and said, "You will become pope, but I also see blood and violence on you." Wojtyla had jokingly told the Krakow priests, "Since I haven't the slightest chance of becoming pope, I have no need to worry about the rest." This story has been "verified" by the Italian Capuchin magazine, *Notiziario Cappuccino*, in interviews with the Krakow priests.

**November 16, 1948**

Stefan Wyszynski is named by Pope Pius XII to be Primate of Poland. The nominating bull is signed by the Pope on the feast of Our Lady of Ausros Vartai, the most revered Marian icon in Lithuania. Archbishop Wyszynski's mother had been devoted to this icon while his father was devoted to Our Lady of Czestochowa. As a child, pictures of both icons hung above his bed. After his ordination, he had said his first Mass at the Czestochowa shrine.

**November 1, 1950**

On this date, Pope Pius XII declares the Assumption a dogma of faith. On October 13, 1951 at the closing of the Extended Holy Year at Fatima, Cardinal Tedeschini, who was the papal representative at the closing ceremony, claims that Pius XII had personally witnessed four repetitions of the Fatima "miracle of the sun" in the Vatican gardens. These occurred on the day the Assumption dogma was declared, on the two days prior to the declaration, and on the seventh day after the declaration. Many years later, in November 2008, personal notes of the Pope describing in detail these four occasions are made public in a Vatican exhibit relating to the Pope. These notes include the statement, “I have seen the ‘miracle of the sun,’ this is the pure truth.”

Prior to the Soviet Revolution, there were hundreds of monasteries in Russia. These monasteries had historically played a leading role in Russian spirituality. Of the small number allowed to remain open in the Soviet Union, almost all were dedicated to the Assumption or had their principal church named after the Assumption.

**July 7, 1952**

In an apostolic letter *Sacro Vergente Anno*, Pope Pius XII writes to the Russian people and expressly entrusts and consecrates "in a very special way to the Immaculate Heart of Mary all the peoples of Russia." The letter is issued on July 7, the day then observed as the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius. However, it is not a collegial consecration with all of the bishops of the world.

**1953**

The Communist government in Poland begins a campaign to limit and restrict the Church. When this is boldly challenged by Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, he is arrested and interned by the government. During his third year of internment, he composes vows dedicating Poland anew to Mary. These vows, later known as the Jasna Gora vows, were composed by the Cardinal on May 16, 1956, the feast of St. Andrew Bobola, the Jesuit saint who had worked among the Orthodox.

**1956**

In observation of the 300th anniversary of King Jan Kazimierz's proclamation of Mary as Queen of Poland, 1956 is designated as "Polish Marian Year." In this year the vows made by King Jan Kazimierz in 1656 are renewed at Czestochowa. Many significant events take place in Poland during the Marian year. The "bread and freedom" riots occur in Poznan. The government is shaken, and Gomulka is elected First Secretary. The collectivization of agriculture is revoked. Nearly one million pilgrims gather at the Jasna Gora monastery on the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa to recite the vows composed by Cardinal Wyszynski. Two months later, the Cardinal is released from internment. He travels to Czestochowa to give thanks.

**1956 - 1965**

Poland participates in a nine-year "Great Novena" in preparation of the Millennium of Polish Christianity to be observed in 1966. A different spiritual theme is stressed for each of the nine years.

**September 28, 1958**

Karol Wojtyla is consecrated a bishop in Krakow by Archbishop Eugeniusz Baziak, the former Latin-rite Metropolitan of Lviv who had been forced by the Soviets to leave his see. The apostolic mandate authorizing the consecration is the very last historic act of Pope Pius XII before his death. On the evening after his consecration, Bishop Wojtyla travels with a group of his closest friends to Czestochowa. The next morning he celebrates Mass before the miraculous image.

**November 28, 1962**

Karol Wojtyla, who is now Auxiliary Bishop of Krakow, writes a letter to Padre Pio requesting his prayers for Professor Wanda Poltawska, a friend who was diagnosed as having throat cancer. On the above date, ten days after receipt of the letter by Padre Pio, Wojtyla writes to Padre Pio that the woman had been suddenly cured just before her scheduled surgery.

**August 15, 1963**

On the feast of the Assumption, Cardinal Wyszynski, at the invitation of Bishop Wojtyla, crowns a statue of Our Lady in the Polish town of Ludzmierz. As Cardinal Wyszynski places a papal crown on the head of Our Lady, a scepter held in her hand inexplicably drops and is instantly caught by Wojtyla before it reaches the ground.

Four years later, Wojtyla, now a cardinal, visits the same town on the same feast day. In a reception for the cardinal, a little girl reads a poem which ends with an expectation that he will become pope. Although this evokes general laughter, Wojtyla does not laugh but bends down and kisses the little girl on the forehead.

**November 21, 1964**

Cardinal Wyszynski urges the Second Vatican Council to confer on Mary the title, Mother of the Church. Although he is unsuccessful with the Council, he does persuade Pope Paul VI. In his closing address at the end of the third session of the Council, the Pope proclaims "the Most Blessed Mary Mother of the Church." At the same time, the Pope recalls the earlier consecration of the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and announces that he will send a golden rose, a traditional sign of papal favor, to the Fatima shrine.

**1964 – 1965**

An icon, believed by some to be the famous Kazan icon stolen in 1918 from the cathedral on Red Square, is exhibited at the New York World’s Fair by the Russian Orthodox Church in America as part of a campaign to raise funds to purchase the icon from a private collector in England. The campaign is headed by the highly regarded Russian Orthodox Archbishop of San Francisco, John Shakhovskoy. However, the campaign is unsuccessful.

In 1970, this copy of the Kazan icon is sold by its owner in England to the Blue Army, an American Catholic organization which is headquartered in Washington, New Jersey and which is devoted to spreading the message of Fatima. Subsequently, the Blue Army places the icon in its Byzantine chapel in Fatima, Portugal, where it will remain for many years.

**December 4, 1965**

On this day, a message concerning the forthcoming Millennium celebrations in Poland is read to the council fathers attending the Second Vatican Council, and each is given a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Three days later, a joint declaration is read both at St. Peter's Basilica and at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul. In the declaration, Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras I lift the excommunications which the churches of East and West had imposed on each other in 1054.

**1966**

The Millennium of Christianity in Poland is celebrated. The celebration culminates at Czestochowa on May 3 at which time Poland is placed in the hands of Mary for the next thousand years. Pope Paul VI, whose first diplomatic assignment as a young priest was to Poland in 1923, seeks to attend, but is denied a visa by the Polish government.

After the May 3 celebration, a copy of the Czestochowa icon is taken to various Polish cities as part of the continued Millennium celebration. However, on September 2, the icon is seized by the militia and returned to Czestochowa. Militia guards are thereafter posted at the Jasna Gora monastery to prevent a recommencement of the tour of the icon. The guards, who remain for years, become known as "the Swedes," an allusion to the Swedish siege of the monastery in 1655. Although the icon is forcefully returned to Czestochowa, the frame without the icon continues its pilgrimage to the parishes of Poland as an eloquent symbol of the lack of religious freedom.

**December 1970**

Workers at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdansk strike and other strikes follow. At least 45 workers die. The government is again shaken, and Gomulka is replaced by Gierek.

**October 17, 1971**

Father Kolbe is beatified by Pope Paul VI at St. Peter's Basilica. On the following day, Cardinal Wyszynski meets with Pope Paul VI. Appealing to the spiritual presence of Father Kolbe, the Cardinal urges the Pope "to dedicate the Universal Church and all humanity into the maternal hands of Mary, Mother of the Church--this time together with all the bishops of the world."

**October 5, 1974**

In an audience with Pope Paul VI, Cardinal Wyszynski presents a further appeal, this time in the form of a letter from the Polish Episcopate. In this letter, the Polish bishops request that the Holy Father, together with all of the bishops of the world, collegially consecrate the human race "to the maternal Heart of Mary, Mother of the Church." The Pope is told that in support of this appeal, a great campaign of prayer had been mobilized in Poland, especially in the form of pilgrimages to Czestochowa and all-night vigils at the shrine. Through the Cardinal, the Polish bishops implore the Pope to make the collegial consecration at the end of Holy Year 1975.

**December 14, 1975**

At a special Mass in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, it is announced that a commission is being established to prepare for unification talks between Orthodox and Catholics. During the Mass, Pope Paul VI, in a dramatic and unplanned gesture, kneels and kisses the foot of the astounded Metropolitan Meliton of Chalcedon, the Orthodox bishop who had come to Rome to make the joint announcement with the Pope.

A few days later, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios hails this “spontaneous symbolic act” by the Pope as “an act without precedence in the history of the Church.” He also states: “By this expressive sign our beloved brother the most venerable Pope of Rome…has shown to the Church and the world what a bishop, and above all the first bishop of Christendom, can be, namely a force for reconciliation and for the unification of the Church and the world.”

**June 7, 1976**

Holy Year 1975 passes and no collegial consecration is made. Thereafter, on this date, the Polish bishops themselves consecrate to the Mother of God all nations and peoples including their brothers and sisters who are close to them by faith, by language and by the destinies they share in history. In May, 1976, Ukrainian Cardinal Joseph Slipyj, the archbishop of Lviv who had spent 18 years in a Siberian prison before being exiled to Rome, had presented a petition to the Pope requesting the consecration of Russia, with all of the bishops of the world, to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

**1976**

In anticipation of the 600th anniversary of the arrival of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Poland to be celebrated in 1982, the Polish bishops announce a six year jubilee of prayer in gratitude to Mary.

**April 15, 1978**

The Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith lifts the prohibitions imposed in 1959 on the Divine Mercy devotions advocated by Sister Faustina Kowalska. Sister Faustina, who died in Poland in 1938, claimed that Christ had appeared to her on numerous occasions. One of the messages conveyed was that a painting should be made of the merciful Christ as seen in the apparitions. The painting was completed when Sister Faustina was in a convent in Vilnius, now the capital of Lithuania, and was first exposed to the public in the chapel containing the icon of Our Lady of Ausros Vartai. This first public exhibition of the painting occurred during a triduum being conducted in the chapel to observe the closing of the special Holy Year of Redemption proclaimed by Pope Pius XI.

Sister Faustina also received in her apparitions of Christ an apocalyptical message relating to Poland: "I bear a special love for Poland, and if she will be obedient to My will, I will exalt her in might and holiness. From her will come forth the spark that will prepare the world for My final coming." It is reported that Cardinal Wojtyla, Archbishop of Krakow, was the individual who was most influential in obtaining the lifting of the prohibition. In 1965, Wojtyla had signed a decree initiating the beatification process for Sister Faustina.

**August 26, 1978**

Pope Paul VI dies on the feast of the Transfiguration. He is succeeded by Pope John Paul whose pontificate lasts only 33 days. Perhaps as a foreshadowing of a later pope who would bear the same name, the very short pontificate of John Paul had begun on August 26, the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**September 5, 1978**

Nikodim, Metropolitan of Leningrad and Novgorod, leads a Russian Orthodox delegation to the inauguration of Pope John Paul. While meeting with the Pope in the Pope's private study, Metropolitan Nikodim collapses and dies from a heart attack at the age of 48. A few minutes before his death, the Metropolitan had a fifteen-minute confidential conversation with the Pope in which Cardinal Willebrands and the translator, Father Miguel Arranz SJ, were also present. The substance of this conversation has never been disclosed. However, two days after the death of the Metropolitan, the Pope in an address to the clergy of the diocese of Rome departed from his prepared text and talked about the death of the Metropolitan. The Pope said: “Two days ago, Metropolitan Nikodim of Leningrad died in my arms. I was answering his address. I assure you that in my life I have never heard such fine words for the Church as those spoken by him. I cannot repeat them; they remain a secret.” The death of the Metropolitan had a great emotional effect on the Pope. According to his private secretary, Monsignor John Magee, the Pope could not sleep for several nights following the death of Metropolitan Nikodim.

Metropolitan Nikodim had been very open to ecumenism and the Catholic Church in particular. He had been a Russian Orthodox observer at the Second Vatican Council. In 1969, he had written a 656-page dissertation on the subject of “John XXIII, Bringer of Christian Unity.” In May 1975, he had made a private pilgrimage to Fatima. Of the clergy in the Russian Orthodox Church today, those who are open to ecumenism are often those who had been influenced by Nikodim. For those sympathetic to better relations with the Catholic Church, Nikodim’s death in the presence of the Pope could be viewed as providential. For those opposed, it could be viewed as divine displeasure for his openness to Catholicism.

Less than three weeks later, the new Pope, just like Nikodim, suddenly and unexpectedly dies of an apparent heart attack on the evening of September 28, 1978. While the first day of Pope John Paul’s pontificate was the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the last day of his pontificate is exactly the 20th anniversary of Karol Wojtyla’s episcopal ordination, which had occurred on September 28, 1958.

**October 13, 1978**

On October 3, 1978, Cardinal Wojtyla arrives in Rome to attend the funeral of Pope John Paul and to participate in the conclave to elect a new pope. During the days before the conclave, Wojtyla spends much of his time with his best friend in Rome, Polish Bishop Andrzej Maria Deskur, who is the president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. On the morning of Friday, October 13, Wojtyla is shocked to hear that the 54-year old Deskur had suffered a massive stroke and had been rushed to the Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome. Deskur is stricken on the Fatima feast day of the miracle of the sun. Less than three years later, Wojtyla himself will be stricken on the other major Fatima feast day, May 13.

Immediately before the conclave, Wojtyla makes a pilgrimage alone to the Marian shrine of Mentorella, located on a mountain 55 kilometers southeast of Rome. It had been Deskur who had first introduced Wojtyla to this shrine many years before. The shrine, which contains an ancient wooden carving of the Madonna with the child Jesus on her arm, had become a favorite place of prayer for Wojtyla. On leaving the shrine, the cardinal experiences car trouble. Abandoning his car, he hikes down the mountain road to the village of Capranica Prenestina where he is able to hitchhike a ride to Palestrina and then to Rome to attend the conclave.

**October 16, 1978**

Following the death of Pope John Paul I, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla is elected pope and chooses the name John Paul II. As the first non-Italian pope in 455 years and the first Slavic pope in the history of the Church, his election comes as a great surprise. The date of his election presents two coincidences. It falls on the feast of St. Hedwig, the Polish saint who gave courage to her son to stop the westward Tatar expansion. It also falls on the 61st anniversary of the day on which another Pole, Friar Maximilian Kolbe, and six other Franciscans had met in Rome and consecrated themselves to Mary the Immaculate. Sharing Father Kolbe's devotion to Mary, Pope John Paul II had adopted as bishop and adopts as pope the motto "Totus Tuus," denoting total devotion to Our Lady.

Immediately after Cardinal Wojtyla's election, the cardinals approached him to pay him homage. Cardinal Wyszynski would later state: "When I approached John Paul II to pay my first homage, he and I almost simultaneously pronounced the name of Our Lady of Jasna Gora: this was her work. So we believed, and so we decidedly still believe." In his inaugural address, the new pope makes reference to both Our Lady of Czestochowa and Our Lady of Ausros Vartai. He gives his cardinal's hat as a votive offering to Our Lady of Ausros Vartai. The hat is later smuggled through Soviet customs to the shrine in Lithuania.

Under the German occupation of Poland, Wojtyla worked in a limestone quarry near Krakow. Wojtyla's most famous poem is entitled, "The Quarry." He thus shared the same manual labor as Pope St. Clement I who supposedly worked in the quarries of the Crimea.

As a young seminarian, Wojtyla had received a surprise visit from an unknown Russian soldier who wanted to know how he also could become a priest. This visit had a great effect on Wojtyla. He later wrote: "I personally learned a great truth from our encounter: that God can penetrate the minds of men in the most uncompromising situations, and in spite of systems and regimes which deny His existence."

**October 29, 1978**

As pope, the first trip of John Paul II outside the Vatican is to visit Bishop Deskur at the Gemelli Polyclinic. Deskur states, “My mission now is to support the Holy Father with my suffering.” The Pope will attach spiritual significance to the close timing between his own election as pope and the sufferings of Deskur. In later years, Deskur, who will subsequently be named a cardinal, will remain paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheel chair until his death in September 2011.

The Pope’s first visit outside of Rome is to take a helicopter to the mountain shrine of Mentorella on October 29, 1978. It is a private visit with no official photographers allowed. Here, the Pope prays before the statue of the Madonna, where he had prayed shortly before the conclave.

**March 3, 1979**

Pope John Paul II begins a practice of reciting the rosary on Vatican Radio on the first Saturday of every month. The observance of the first Saturdays was urged by Our Lady of Fatima in her message of July 13, 1917. The Pope will continue this practice until he dies on the first Saturday of April 2005.

**June 2-10, 1979**

Pope John Paul II returns to Poland. In Victory Square in Warsaw, he poses the question "why, precisely in 1978, after so many centuries of a well-established tradition in this field, a son of the Polish nation, of the land of Poland, was called to the chair of St. Peter." He responds: "Have we not the right…to think that Poland has become nowadays the land of a particularly responsible witness?" In his homily at Gniezno, he asks, "Is it not Christ's will, is it not what the Holy Spirit disposes, that this Polish Pope, this Slav Pope, should at this precise moment manifest the spiritual unity of Christian Europe?" He refers in the same homily to the Christianization of the Slavs including "the Baptism of Russia at Kiev in 988."

The Pope's longest stay in Poland is at the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa. At the shrine, he states: "The call of a son of the Polish nation to the Chair of Peter involves an evident strong connection with this holy place, with this shrine of great hope; so many times I have whispered 'Totus Tuus' in prayer before this image." As a sign of his affection, he gives to the shrine a golden rose. The Pope also travels to Auschwitz and prays at the starvation bunker where Father Kolbe died. The Pope returns to Rome, but his trip to Poland has a far-reaching effect on the spirit of the Polish people.

**November 1979**

In a visit of great ecumenical significance, Pope John Paul II journeys to Istanbul and meets with Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, honorary primate of the Orthodox Church. On November 30, the Pope is present for the Ecumenical Patriarch’s celebration of the feast of St. Andrew. St Andrew, the brother of St. Peter, is the patron saint of Constantinople and is also highly venerated in Russia where, according to legend, he visited prior to his death.

In addressing the Patriarch, the Pope refers to Poland's historic role as intermediary between East and West. As a gift to Dimitrios I, he presents a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. A joint international commission is thereafter established for the purpose of conducting a theological dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches.

**August 1980**

A strike by Polish workers begins at the Lenin Shipyard at Gdansk. A picture of Pope John Paul II is placed by strikers on the shipyard gate. This strike is followed by other strikes and the founding of Solidarity. Lech Walesa emerges as the leader of Solidarity. In signing a historic accord with the government on August 31, 1980, Walesa uses a giant souvenir pen which bears the Pope's image. Later, Walesa will give this pen to the Czestochowa shrine as a gift to Our Lady.

During the final days of the strike, a group of pilgrims from Gdansk had returned from Czestochowa and pinned on Walesa's lapel a small image of Our Lady of Czestochowa which had been blessed by Cardinal Wyszynski. In future years, Walesa will continue to wear this image on his lapel.

**December 16, 1980**

Following the founding of Solidarity, there is increasing concern of possible Soviet military intervention in Poland. On this date, the Pope writes a letter to Leonid Brezhnev tactfully, but firmly, urging respect for Polish sovereignty and referring to the terrible loss of life during the previous occupation of Poland by Germany.

**January 15, 1981**

An emotional meeting occurs in Rome between Pope John Paul II and Lech Walesa.

**February 1981**

Pope John Paul II visits Nagasaki on his trip to the Far East. He is appalled by the annihilating force of nuclear war. He visits the friary started by Father Kolbe at Nagasaki.

**May 13, 1981**

On May 13, 1981 at 5:17 p.m., Pope John Paul II is shot in St. Peter's Square. One of the bullets misses the Pope’s main abdominal artery by a fraction of a centimeter. He is subject to "blood and violence." The assassination attempt occurs on the anniversary date of the first apparition at Fatima and the day observed as the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. The critically injured Pope is rushed to the Gemelli Polyclinic in Rome. After he had left St. Peter’s Square, a group of Polish pilgrims place in the chair which he was to have used a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

At the Gemelli Polyclinic, Dr. Francesco Crucitti, one of its chief surgeons, operates on the Pope. The five-hour operation is successful in stopping the hemorrhaging and in repairing the great damage done by the bullet. In remarks later made to Father Stanislaw Dziwisz, the Pope’s personal secretary, Dr. Crucitti described how he had been at home that day. For some unknown reason, he had felt a great compulsion to go to the Polyclinic. Only while driving there had he heard on the radio the news of the assassination attempt.

The day before the assassination attempt, the Pope had visited the Vatican’s medical center with its director Dr. Renato Buzzonetti. Dr. Buzzonetti asked the Pope to bless the center’s new ambulance. The Pope did so and stated, “I also bless the first patient who will use this ambulance.” The next day the Pope becomes that first patient.

The next two months are a period of pain and suffering for the Pope caused in part by a cytomegalovirus infection contracted from a blood transfusion. In the Pope’s hospital room is placed a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa. In referring to the assassination attempt, the Pope will later say, “One hand fired, another guided the bullet.”

**May 17, 1981**

The Pope makes a short recording to be played at the time of the recitation of the Regina Caeli prayer on Sunday in St. Peter’s Square. In the recording, he prays “for that brother of ours who shot me, and whom I have sincerely pardoned.” He also repeats to Mary, “Totus tuus.”

**May 28, 1981**

Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, Primate of Poland and leader of the Church in Poland for many years, dies on the feast of the Ascension. In very poor health at the time of his ordination, he had begged Our Lady of Czestochowa for one year of life to practice his priesthood but had subsequently lived many. Before he dies, he places all of Poland under her protection. His body lies in state in Warsaw's Victory Square.

**June 7, 1981**

The 1,550th anniversary of the Council of Ephesus, at which Mary was declared the “Mother of God,” is celebrated on the feast of Pentecost in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Before the assassination attempt, the Pope had invited all of the Catholic bishops to attend this event. Delegations of bishops from every continent do. Unable to attend himself, the Pope records a message for the event entrusting the Church and the world to the Mother of God. He also asks her to embrace “those whose act of entrustment you too await in a particular way.”

**June 24, 1981**

On the feast of John the Baptist, several Croatian teenagers in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia report seeing an apparition of the Virgin Mary. The next day, June 25, 1981, she speaks to the teenagers, and the supposed apparitions thereafter continue on a daily basis. The Croatians are one of the Slavic peoples and were the first of the Slavic peoples to adopt Christianity. The village of Medjugorje is dominated by a very large cross which had been erected in 1933 on a neighboring hill to commemorate the special Holy Year of Redemption announced by Pope Piux XI. The lady of the apparitions will later say: "The cross was in God's plan when you built it."

In August, the lady identifies herself as the "Queen of Peace." She will request that June 25 be observed as a feast day of Our Lady, Queen of Peace.

**July 18, 1981**

During the Holy Father’s stay at the Gemelli Polyclinic, he requests documents relating to Fatima. On the above date, the “third secret” of Fatima is taken from the Archives of the Vatican’s Holy Office for the Pope to read. The “third secret” is part of the Fatima message of July 13, 1917. In 1944, Lucia wrote the “secret” on a piece of paper and placed it in a sealed envelope with instructions that it should not be opened until 1960. It was subsequently read by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI, but both popes decided not to reveal the message and returned it to the Archives of the Holy Office.

When Pope John Paul II leaves the Gemelli Polyclinic, he tells Slovak bishop Pavel Hnilica, “I have come to understand that the only way to save the world from war, to save it from atheism, is the conversion of Russia according to the message of Fatima.”

**October 7, 1981**

At his first general audience since his recovery, Pope John Paul II states: "Could I forget that the event in St. Peter's Square took place on the day and at the hour when the first appearance of the Mother of Christ . . . had been remembered for over 60 years at Fatima in Portugal?"

**October 1981**

The supposed apparitions at Medjugorje continue on a daily basis. Thousands have streamed to the location, and the area has experienced a great spiritual renewal and fervor. The Communist government attempts to suppress the matter, and people are imprisoned including several Franciscan priests.

On October 13, 1981, the anniversary date of the final apparition at Fatima, Associated Press carries the first widely published report on the Medjugorje apparitions. Also in October, the lady of the apparitions answers two questions posed by the teenagers concerning Poland and Eastern Europe. As to Poland, she states: "In a little while there will be great conflicts there, but the just will prevail." As to Eastern Europe, she states: "Russia is the people where God will be most glorified. The West has advanced civilization, but without God, as though it were its own creator."

**December 8, 1981**

The Pope celebrates the Feast of the Immaculate Conception at the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. In his sermon, he makes an express reference to the Russian peoples as "the peoples particularly dear to the Mother of God." On the same day, the Pope blesses a new mosaic icon of Mary Mother of the Church which he had placed high on the wall of the Apostolic Palace overlooking St. Peter’s Square, where the assassination attempt occurred.

**December 13, 1981**

Martial law is declared in Poland, and conflicts begin. At his general audience soon thereafter, the Pope entrusts Poland to Christ and to Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**February 16, 1982**

Lech Walesa, who has been in detention since December 13, is visited by his pastor. After the visit, the pastor reads a statement written by Walesa. In the statement, Walesa denies the authorship of any underground leaflets. He states, "My conception of the struggle is different and it will be explained by me on my release." However, he does give the name of his newly born daughter--"Maria Wiktoria"--that is, Mary Victory.

**February 17, 1982**

Ukrainian Cardinal Joseph Slipyj issues a pastoral letter to his people on the occasion of his 90th birthday. He praises the four million Ukrainian Catholics for their "courageous resistance to godless coercion" and encourages them to continue to withstand persecution.

**April 18, 1982**

Orthodox Easter is celebrated in Russia. Reports from Moscow indicate that many are unable to enter the overcrowded churches. For several years, a revival of religion has been noted in Russia. The heart of spiritual vitality in Russia is the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius. It has become a place of pilgrimage for thousands throughout Russia and also houses the Moscow Theological Academy and Seminary.

**May 12-13, 1982**

The Pope visits Fatima. Upon his arrival, he again remarks on the coincidence that the assassination attempt occurred on the Fatima feast day. He states: "But after the well-known attempt on my life a year ago in St. Peter's Square, on regaining consciousness, my thoughts turned immediately to this sanctuary to place in the heart of the Heavenly Mother my thanks for having saved me from danger. . . . And in the coincidence--and there are no mere coincidences in the plans of Divine Providence--I also saw an appeal and, who knows, a reminder of the message which came from here 65 years ago. . . ."

On May 13, he celebrates Mass before a crowd of approximately one million persons who had gathered at the shrine. Prior to the Mass, he had spoken privately with Lucia who had traveled from her convent for the Pope's visit. During the Mass, the Holy Father makes reference to the fact that Pope Pius XII had in 1942 and 1952 "consecrated the human race and especially the peoples of Russia to the Immaculate Heart of Mary." He renews this consecration, but does so "united with all the pastors of the Church in that particular bond whereby we constitute a body and a college."

Shortly after arriving at Fatima, the Pope is subject to an unsuccessful second assassination attempt.

**June 13, 1982**

Demonstrations occur in Poland in protest of martial law. These follow an emerging pattern of demonstrations on the 13th day of each month arising from the imposition of martial law on the 13th day of December. This bears some resemblance to the pattern of the Fatima apparitions which also occurred on the 13th day of successive months.

**July 21, 1982**

On the eve of Poland's National Day, General Jaruzelski in a speech before the Polish Parliament announces that it will not be possible for the Pope to return to Poland in August for the 600th anniversary of the Czestochowa shrine. In Rome, Archbishop Glemp states that the papal visit to Poland will take place sometime during the jubilee year which will follow the August 26 anniversary date.

**August 13, 1982**

Major protests begin in a number of Polish cities and continue on subsequent days. In Warsaw the rallying point had become a large cross of flowers formed by bypassers at the location in Victory Square where Cardinal Wyszynski's body laid in state. Over the course of weeks, the floral cross was repeatedly formed during the day and removed by police during the night. Finally, on August 20, authorities prevent all access to Victory Square by enclosing it with a six-foot fence. Floral crosses are subsequently formed in nearby Castle Square.

**August 26, 1982**

Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims gather at Czestochowa to celebrate the 600th anniversary of the shrine. In his homily, Archbishop Glemp calls upon the Polish government to release Walesa and the remaining internees and to set a date for the papal visit. During the ceremonies, an empty chair next to Glemp symbolizes the absence of the Pope. Pope John Paul II celebrates the feast in the chapel at Castel Gandolfo dedicated by Pope Pius XI to Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**October 5, 1982**

During a symposium of the European bishops, Pope John Paul II stresses that the hope of Europe lies in the unifying effect of Christianity. He specifically defines this Europe as extending "from the Atlantic to the Urals." He states that if the industrial revolution gave birth to movements which seem to be opposed to the Church, it will be by living, proclaiming and putting into effect the Gospel of justice, fraternity and work that we will restore to the workers' world a world that is human and Christian."

**October 8, 1982**

The Polish parliament enacts legislation which bans Solidarity.

**October 10, 1982**

The canonization ceremony of Father Maximilian Kolbe occurs in St. Peter's Square, and he is proclaimed a martyr saint. In his Angelus address following the canonization, the Holy Father refers to the outlawing of Solidarity as a "violation of the fundamental rights of man and of society." He states that the Apostolic See and the Church in Poland will "continue to defend the legitimate rights of working men," and he asks "all men of good will in the world to pray for the Polish nation."

**November 8-12, 1982**

Important events mark each day of this week. On Monday, General Jaruzelski and Archbishop Glemp meet, and an announcement is made that Pope John Paul II has been invited to visit Poland beginning June 18, 1983 for the Czestochowa jubilee. In an apparent reference to a Solidarity strike planned for November 10, both express a joint concern that there be no new strikes or violence this week. Two hours after the meeting with the Archbishop, Jaruzelski receives a letter from Walesa suggesting "a meeting and serious discussions of subjects of interest." On Tuesday, the minister of the interior meets with Walesa. On Wednesday, the day of the planned strike, Brezhnev dies. On Thursday, the Polish government announces that Walesa will be released from internment. On Friday, Yuri Andropov, former head of the KGB, is named to succeed Brezhnev as general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**November 30, 1982**

Walesa makes a pilgrimage to Czestochowa following his release from internment. He continues to wear on his lapel an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**December 20, 1982**

Italy's Defense Minister charges that Bulgaria was involved in the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II on May 13, 1981. This sparks speculation that Andropov, who then headed Russia's KGB, may also have been involved. The assassination attempt on the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima was probably the event that most motivated the Pope later to seek a collegial consecration of the world and Russia. If Andropov was involved in ordering the assassination, it may ironically have been the Kremlin itself which set in motion the chain of events leading to the consecration of Russia as urged by the message of Fatima.

**January 6, 1983**

In a surprise announcement, the Holy Father proclaims a special Holy Year of Redemption, similar to the one proclaimed by Pope Pius XI in 1933. On the above date, he signs the Bull of Indiction instituting the Jubilee Year which will be observed from March 25, 1983 to April 22, 1984, and which will commemorate the 1950th anniversary of the Redemption. The papal bull stresses reconciliation and the sacrament of penance. Various means for obtaining the indulgence connected with the Holy Year are described, but all include a prayer for the Pope's intention "in particular that the event of the Redemption may be proclaimed to all peoples, and that in every nation those who believe in Christ the Redeemer may be able freely to profess their faith."

**January 24, 1983**

*L’Osservatore Romano* describes a medal which will be issued by the Vatican to commemorate the fifth year of the Holy Father's pontificate. In the words of the official description, one side of the medal shows the Pope "with his countenance marked with suffering." On the reverse side is an image of Our Lady of Fatima.

**February 2, 1983**

In a consistory held on this date, Pope John Paul II creates eighteen new cardinals. The new cardinals include Archbishop Glemp, Primate of Poland, and Julijans Vaivods, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Riga. Vaivods becomes the first publicly named cardinal residing in the Soviet Union. From 1958 to 1960, Vaivods had been confined to a Soviet labor camp. In 1964, he was invited by Pope Paul VI to attend part of the Second Vatican Council. During that visit to Rome, he was ordained a bishop in Our Lady of Czestochowa chapel located in the Vatican crypt.

**February 5, 1983**

Although no Latvians were allowed to accompany Vaivods to the consistory except for his secretary, a group of Latvians living in the West joined him in Rome. On February 5, Cardinal Vaivods and this group are received in audience by Pope John Paul II. The Holy Father states that the Catholic community of Riga "is distinguished by a profound faith, by sincere attachment to the Apostolic See and, above all, by a deep devotion to Our Lady." He adds that these characteristics are also found in the other Catholic communities throughout the Soviet Union and "they are constantly on my mind." He prays that "Mary may always protect her Latvian children and the Catholics of all those regions."

With tears in his eyes, Cardinal Vaivods expresses his gratitude and refers to the role which Poland played in the "re-Catholicizing" of Latvia following the Reformation. For this, he thanks the Poles "in the person of Your Holiness." He remarks that he has a small picture of the Pope on his bedroom table and when things are going badly, he looks at the smiling face and thinks, "if the Holy Father can smile, that means that it is not going so badly for Catholics and for the Church in Russia." He asks, "Bless us, Holy Father, children of Mary."

**February 12, 1983**

The Holy Father receives in audience the members of the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Church including Cardinal Slipyj. Addressing them in Ukrainian, the Pope refers to their historic search for unity, and he makes specific reference to the Councils of Florence and Brest and to the great contributions of the Metropolitan of Kiev, Isidore, and St. Josaphat. He comments that for a thousand years, the Ukrainian Church has celebrated the liturgy "in the splendor of the Byzantine Rite" and that the Ukraine's "magnificent hymns ... glorify the Most Holy Mother of God." He then states, "It is now your sacred task, revered brothers, to continue to work intensely for the great cause of union, in such a way that the words and desire of our Lord Jesus Christ may be fulfilled, that there be but one flock under one shepherd."

The Pope expresses the hope that the approaching Jubilee Year of the Redemption may "serve as a better preparation for the thousandth anniversary of the baptism of the Rus Ukraine, which will be solemnly celebrated by you in five years." He acknowledges that "these times are not easy, neither for you nor your Church, especially in your homeland." However, "these afflictions and sufferings will be transformed into joy as the Beatitudes of Christ assure us."

**April 22, 1983**

The Pope receives in audience the Catholic bishops from the Lithuanian S.S.R. This represents the first occasion since the Soviet annexation of Lithuania in 1940 that the bishops were allowed to make their 5-year "ad limina" visit to Rome. On behalf of the Lithuanian bishops, Bishop Povilonis notes that the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir would be observed in 1984 and states: "We would so much desire that you, most Holy Father, be given the possibility of visiting our homeland also."

In addressing the Lithuanian bishops, the Holy Father states that the difficulties under which they labor had not escaped him and since becoming Pope, he has "followed with particular attention and paternal care the life of the Church in Lithuania." He praises Lithuania's devotion and love towards Mary and adds, "The love for the Mother of God overcomes everything."

**May 13, 1983**

On the second anniversary of the assassination attempt, the Pope formally blesses a new bronze statue of Our Lady of Fatima which had been given to him by an American sculptor. The statue is permanently placed in the Vatican gardens.

Earlier the same day, the Pope met with the Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignace IV Hazim. This meeting marked the first occasion in history that a holder of this important Orthodox office had come to Rome. He is told by the Pope that "the Catholic Church is prepared to do everything in its power so that the search for full unity may progress and reach its goal."

**June 16-23, 1983**

Pope John Paul II returns to Poland to celebrate the closing of the Czestochowa jubilee. In a televised meeting, he is greeted by a visibly trembling General Jaruzelski at the Belvedere Palace in Warsaw. As a gift, the Pope presents Jaruzelski with a portrait of John the Baptist, and Jaruzelski gives the Pope an armor breastplate used in the Polish defense of Vienna.

From Warsaw, the Pope travels to the City of Immaculata, founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe, and then to Czestochowa. On the evening of June 19, he presents "as a votive gift" to Our Lady of Czestochowa the part of his cassock which was pierced by the bullet during the assassination attempt on May 13, 1981. In so doing, he repeats the dying words of Cardinal Hlond, an earlier Primate of Poland, "Victory--when it comes--will come through Mary." The blood-stained white sash of the cassock is later permanently displayed in a glass case mounted above the altar to the left of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

A number of the Pope's Masses are attended by more than a million people. On the last day of the Pope's visit, he meets with Lech Walesa at an isolated location in the Tatra Mountains. At the Krakow airport before returning to Rome, John Paul II expresses the hope that under the protection of Our Lady of Czestochowa "good may be seen to be stronger than evil on Polish soil and may win the victory."

**July 5, 1983**

*The Los Angeles Times* reports that according to "well-placed Roman Catholic Church sources in Poland," the Vatican has initiated contacts with the Kremlin with respect to a possible visit by the Pope to Lithuania for the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir which will be observed in 1984.

In Lithuania, the Soviet authorities had earlier in the year arrested two very popular Catholic priests. In the face of Soviet harassment, over one hundred thousand Lithuanians sign petitions protesting the arrests. The two priests are subsequently sentenced to prison terms of six and seven years respectively in a Soviet labor camp. One of the priests had previously been imprisoned with Cardinal Slipyj.

**July 8, 1983**

Emanuela Orlandi, the 15-year old daughter of a Vatican employee, is supposedly abducted by kidnappers who demand the release of Mehmet Ali Agca, who had shot the Pope in 1981. On the above date, Agca is interrogated concerning the kidnapping. Upon completion of the interrogation, Agca tells reporters that the Soviet KGB was implicated in the papal assassination attempt. Emanuela Orlandi remains missing to the present time.

**August 14, 1983**

Pope John Paul II visits Lourdes, France to observe the feast of the Assumption. On August 14, which is now the new feast day of St. Maximilian Kolbe, he urges the crowd at Lourdes not to forget those who cannot freely express their faith. He refers not only to those in prisons and forced labor camps, but also to those who suffer "a kind of civil death."

**August 31, 1983**

On the third anniversary of the signing of the Solidarity accord, demonstrations occur in numerous Polish cities. While demonstrations are occurring in Poland on August 31, it is the early morning hours of September 1 on the Pacific Coast of the Soviet Union. During those early morning hours, a South Korean airliner, flight KAL 007, with 269 passengers on board is shot down by a Soviet fighter near Sakhalin Island. All passengers are lost.

**September 13, 1983**

On his pilgrimage to Austria, the Holy Father visits Kahlenberg to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the defense of Vienna in which King Jan III Sobieski of Poland played a decisive role. In St. Joseph's Church, where the King attended Mass before the battle, John Paul II dedicates a chapel to Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**September 29 - October 29, 1983**

The Synod of Bishops meets in Rome on the topic of reconciliation and penance. Four prelates are not allowed by their governments to attend. These include Cardinal Vaivods from Latvia, Bishop Povilonis from Lithuania, and a Catholic Byzantine priest from Czechoslovakia. Protest letters are sent by the Synod to the Soviet and Czech governments.

On October 16, 1983, the fifth anniversary of the pontificate of John Paul II, the Pope canonizes Leopold Mandic, a Croatian-born Capuchin friar, who until his death in 1942 had spent most of his life hearing confessions and who had offered his daily sacrifices for the cause of union between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. At the conclusion of the canonization Mass, the Pope with the bishops attending the Synod from throughout the world repeat verbatim the consecration of the world to the Mother of God which the Pope had made at Fatima on May 13, 1982. In the repetition of the collegial consecration, they consecrate in a "special way ... those individuals and nations which particularly need to be entrusted and consecrated."

**December 8, 1983**

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope John Paul II writes a letter to all of the bishops of the Church. He requests that on the feast of the Annunciation, all of them join him in reciting the act of consecration. However, unlike the acts of consecration made by the Pope at Fatima and by the group of bishops attending the Synod, this collegial act of consecration contemplates the active participation of all of the bishops of the world.

**December 10, 1983**

In Oslo, Norway, Danuta Walesa accepts on behalf of her husband the 1983 Nobel Peace Prize. Upon returning to Poland, she travels with her husband to Czestochowa. Before the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa, a special Mass is held at 6:00 a.m. on December 13, 1983, which marks to the hour the second anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland. At the Mass, Lech Walesa presents the gold Nobel Peace Prize medal to Our Lady as a votive gift. The medal is permanently left on display at the monastery as a possession of all the Polish people.

**December 27, 1983**

Pope John Paul II visits the Rebibbia prison outside of Rome and meets for over 20 minutes with Mehmet Ali Agca. Officials state that both men appeared moved by the meeting. During the meeting, the subject of Our Lady of Fatima is raised by Agca. After the meeting, the Pope states: "I spoke to him as I would speak to a brother whom I have forgiven and who enjoys my confidence." As a gift, the Pope gives Agca a rosary made of silver and mother of pearl.

**February 9, 1984**

Yuri Andropov dies after less than 15 months in office. He had come to power on the feast of St. Josaphat and is buried on the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

**February 26, 1984**

The Holy Father makes a pilgrimage to Bari, Italy where the relics of St. Nicholas are preserved. St. Nicholas, who lived in the fourth century, was the famous bishop of Myra in Asia Minor and is venerated by both the Eastern and Western Churches. At St. Nicholas Basilica, the Pope meets with the Orthodox Metropolitan of Myra, and in a gesture symbolizing the hoped for union between Catholics and Orthodox, both men mingle oils from East and West from which a single flame is lit. During his homily, the Pope also mentions the great love which St. Nicholas has received throughout the centuries from the Russian people.

**March 4, 1984**

Unable to visit Lithuania, the Holy Father invites representatives of the Episcopal Conferences of the various European nations to join him at St. Peter's Basilica to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the death of St. Casimir. At the Mass, he refers to their "spiritual pilgrimage" to Lithuania. He also stresses "the luminous, and often heroic, witness" given by so many Lithuanian priests.

**March 10-11, 1984**

Students from the Polish towns of Garwolin and Mietne protest a government order requiring the removal of crucifixes from their schools. On this weekend, many of the protesting students make a pilgrimage to the Czestochowa shrine where they are joined in a show of solidarity by Polish students from other cities. Subsequently, the Holy Father voices his support. The Polish bishop for the diocese where the towns are located begins a fast of bread and water, and many priests throughout Poland follow his example. Anxious to avoid an expanding "war of the crosses," Polish authorities agree to a compromise in which crucifixes are allowed in certain rooms of the schools.

**March 24-25, 1984**

The Holy Father together with all of the bishops of the world consecrates all peoples and nations to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of God and of the Church. In making the consecration, the Pope kneels before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima which had been brought from Portugal for this purpose. The Pope had spent the entire prior night awake in vigil before this statue. The Holy Father recites the consecration prayer but also adds the following words not found in the prepared text: "Enlighten especially the peoples whose consecration and entrustment by us you are awaiting." On the same day, Slovak bishop Pavel Hnilica, who had provided certain Fatima documents to the Pope during his convalescence in 1981, enters the Kremlin Cathedral of St. Michael the Archangel as a tourist and recites the consecration prayer in the heart of Moscow.

On the following day, Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios writes a letter to the Vatican praising the consecration as "a contribution to the creation of communion" between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

The collegial consecration also fulfills the great desire of Cardinal Wyszynski and the Polish bishops. Although the collegial consecration did not occur at the end of Holy Year 1975 as the Polish bishops had requested, it does occur at the end of a later Holy Year of Redemption specially called by a Polish bishop who had become pope. In an unexpected fashion, the prayers offered at Czestochowa ten years earlier for the collegial consecration at the end of the Holy Year are now seemingly answered.

**May 3, 1984**

On May 3, 1984, the feast of Mary Queen of Poland, the Holy Father, aboard an Alitalia airliner, passes near the Soviet island of Sakhalin on his flight from Alaska to South Korea to commence a Far East pilgrimage. While in the vicinity of the downing of KAL 007, he and others on the Alitalia airliner recite the Regina Caeli for the 269 passengers who died on the Korean Air Lines flight. As was true on the day that KAL 007 was destroyed, Solidarity demonstrations occur in Poland on this day as well. Later in the month, the Soviet press reports the death of General Semyon Romanov, the Soviet air defense chief, who is believed to have ordered the destruction of the Korean airliner.

On May 12, during his return flight to Rome from Thailand, the Pope is asked by a reporter whether he desired to visit the Soviet Union. "Of course, of course," he replied. "The people of Russia are my brothers also. Like the Polish people, they are also Slavs. I understand their language, and it is very similar to my own language." Asked if such a visit was possible, the Pope answered, "All is possible in the plans of Providence."

**May 13, 1984**

On the third anniversary of the assassination attempt, the Holy Father remarks to approximately 50,000 pilgrims in St. Peter's Square: "On this anniversary that is so significant for me, my thought goes to Fatima to renew to Mary the expression of my affection and beatitude for her motherly protection." On the same day, the Bishop of Leiria-Fatima announces that the Pope had given to the Fatima shrine the bullet which had struck him. The bullet is made a permanent part of the crown which is on the statue of Our Lady of Fatima.

The anniversary day of the assassination attempt is also marked by a massive explosion at the Soviet navy's ammunition depot at Severomorsk on the Kola Peninsula. *Jane's Defense Weekly* subsequently reports that the destruction caused by the blast "represents the greatest disaster to occur in the Soviet navy since World War II."

**June 19, 1984**

Antonio Albano, the Italian prosecutor who has headed the inquiry into the papal assassination attempt, announces upon the conclusion of his investigation that he is convinced that Bulgarians masterminded the attack upon the Pope. When asked whether there was Soviet involvement, he responds: "Do you think Bulgaria's decision to boycott the [Los Angeles] Olympic Games [in 1984] was made by Bulgaria alone?"

**August 26, 1984**

The solemn closing of the fifth centenary of the death of St. Casimir occurs in Lithuania. The closing occurs on the above date which is the feast of the translation of the relics of St. Casimir and which is also the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa. In the Pope's Angelus message at Castel Gandolfo on this day, he refers to the refusal of the Soviet government to allow him to visit Lithuania. However, he expresses the hope that "it will still be possible to carry out this missions and this ministry to our brothers in the faith."

**September 7, 1984**

On Friday, September 7, 1984, Cardinal Slipyj dies. On Saturday afternoon, the Holy Father visits the Ukrainian Church of Santa Sofia in Rome where after praying before Slipyj's bier, he kisses the face and the hands of the deceased Cardinal.

Eight days later, the Pope on his Canadian pilgrimage visits the Ukrainian Cathedral of Sts. Vladimir and Olga in Winnipeg where he blesses a statue of St. Vladimir. Greeting the Ukrainians "as a fellow Slav," he refers to the approaching millennium of Christianity in Ukraine. He praises Cardinal Slipyj as a "great man" who underwent sufferings and pain but "was not crushed."

**October 19, 1984**

Father Jerzy Popieluszko, a popular and outspoken supporter of the Solidarity movement, is kidnapped and murdered by three Polish Interior Ministry officers. Father Popieluszko had been ordained by Cardinal Wyszynski and shared his devotion to Our Lady of Czestochowa. Father Popieluszko had become famous for his "Mass for the Country" offered at his parish church on the last Sunday of each month following the imposition of martial law. The last such Mass at which he preached was held on Sunday, August 26, 1984, the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa. His last act before driving from Bydgoszcz to Warsaw, the drive on which he was murdered, was to send his mother a gift of a picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa against a black background. His funeral Mass is attended by a crowd of approximately 300,000, and he is buried with a badge of Our Lady of Czestochowa pinned to his cassock. Father Popielusko will subsequently be beatified by the Catholic Church in 2010.

**March 13, 1985**

After only 13 months in office, Konstantin Chernenko, the successor to Andropov, dies. His funeral occurs on March 13, 1985. He is the fifth key member of the Soviet Politburo to die since 1981. On the same day as Chernenko's funeral, an Italian court announces that the trial of the three Bulgarians and five Turks accused of plotting to kill the Pope will begin on May 27. Mikhail Gorbachev succeeds Chernenko as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.

**May 3, 1985**

On this day, a Soviet airliner flying from Tallinn to Lviv collides with a Soviet military plane in Ukraine. All are killed, including two major generals and other senior air force officers of the Carpathian military district. Lviv is the city where Poland's King Jan Kazimierz in 1656 declared Mary to be "Queen of Poland." The mid-air collision occurs on May 3, the feast of Mary Queen of Poland. On the same day one year before, Pope John Paul II had flown near the Soviet island of Sakhalin and prayed for the victims of KAL 007.

**May 27, 1985**

The trial of the three Bulgarians and five Turks accused of plotting to assassinate the Pope begins in Rome. The first two days of the trial are marked by bizarre outbursts by Agca. Claiming to be Jesus Christ reincarnate, Agca states that in "this generation the days are counted." He maintains that when the Pope had visited him in 1983, he had informed the Pope about religious visions which he had experienced in the Rome prison. Calling the shooting the "greatest tragedy of human history," Agca says that it is "tied to the third secret of the Madonna of Fatima." He calls on the Vatican to release the secret.

**June 2, 1985**

Pope John Paul II issues an encyclical epistle, *Slavorum Apostoli*, to commemorate the eleventh centenary of the evangelizing work of Saints Cyril and Methodius. He refers to the brothers as a "spiritual bridge between the Eastern and Western traditions" and "the patrons of the ecumenical endeavor of the sister Churches of East and West."

**July 7, 1985**

In what is perhaps the largest religious gathering in the history of Czechoslovakia, a crowd of 150,000 to 250,000 people gather in the village of Velehrad, the reputed burial site of St. Methodius, on the 1100th anniversary date of the Saint's death. The Pope is not permitted by the Czech government to attend but sends a golden rose as a sign of his favor. While waiting for the ceremonies to begin, the crowd continues to chant, "We want the Pope." Among the speakers to attract the most attention is Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia who was responsible for the ecumenical relations for the Russian Orthodox Church. Emphasizing the unity between Eastern and Western Christianity, he praises the various popes who popularized the veneration of Saints Cyril and Methodius.

**August 25, 1985**

In his Angelus address on this Sunday, the Holy Father voices "a prayer intention that is particularly close to my heart." He announces that the Church in Lithuania has begun a trennium in preparation for the 1987 celebration of the sixth centenary of the conversion of Lithuania to Christianity.

**September 9, 1985**

An American Catholic travels to Moscow to present to Patriarch Pimen, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa as a gift on the Patriarch's saint's name day. Before being introduced to the Patriarch, he meets with Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia. Instantly recognizing the icon, the Metropolitan states that the Czestochowa icon was intimately related to the Baptism of St. Vladimir and that the same image is venerated in his own cathedral in Minsk under the title of the Minsk icon of the Mother of God. Like the Czestochowa icon, the feast day of the Minsk icon is observed on August 26.

**October 1985**

The Ukrainian bishops residing outside of the Soviet Union meet in Rome for the fourth Synod of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. According to press reports, Cardinal Myroslav Ivan Lubachivsky, the successor of Cardinal Slipyj as Major Archbishop of Lviv, informs the synod that there are ten bishops, several hundred priests, and approximately one thousand sisters working in the outlawed and underground Church in Ukraine.

**October 13, 1985**

This anniversary date of the Fatima miracle of the sun is marked by several significant events. In Rome, the Holy Father officially closes the Jubilee Year of Saints Cyril and Methodius by celebrating Mass before Slavs of many nations. During his Angelus address later in the day, the Pope makes reference to a future jubilee. He refers to the spread of the Gospel through ancient Kiev to the extreme eastern regions of Europe and states: "The dear Christian peoples who today live in those regions, the Belarusians, the Russians, the Ukrainians, are preparing to celebrate in three years' time the great jubilee of their baptism."

On the evening of this Fatima anniversary date, the Soviet Union is struck by its worst earthquake since 1976. The earthquake, centered near Leninabad in Tadzhik S.S.R., causes substantial loss of life and property damage.

**December 1985**

Elena Bonner, the wife of Soviet nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov, holds a secret two-hour meeting with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. When she leaves the meeting, the crying Elena Bonner states: “He’s the most remarkable man I’ve ever met. He is all light.”

**December 2, 1985**

It is announced by Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia that the Moscow Patriarchate will participate in the publication of a book on the veneration of the Most Holy Virgin Mary by the Christians both in Poland and in the Soviet Union. The book will be dedicated to the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus.

**January 30, 1986**

The Holy Father invites to the Vatican and receives in audience the members of the Folk Choir of the Soviet State Academy "Pjatnjskjy" who are on tour in Italy. Speaking to them in Russian, the Pope states that their activity contributed to "an ever growing awareness of the great values which have deep roots in the spirit of the Russian people."

**February 10, 1986**

On his return flight to Italy from his pilgrimage in India, the Pope is asked by reporters if he would like to meet Gorbachev who was scheduled to visit Rome later in the year. Replying that such a meeting is possible, the Pope adds: "I receive everyone who called to be received. I received Gromyko three times and other leaders of the whole world."

**March 29, 1986**

On Saturday of Holy Week, a jury acquits "for lack of evidence" the three Bulgarians and three Turks who were accused of conspiring to kill the Pope in 1981. The verdict implies that the evidence was not sufficient to prove either the guilt or innocence of the defendants.

**April 26, 1986**

On the Saturday marking the beginning of Orthodox Holy Week, an explosion occurs at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant located approximately 130 kilometers north of Kiev. During the days that follow, the explosion develops into the world's worst nuclear accident, and over 100,000 people are evacuated from the surrounding areas in Ukraine and Belarus. In his Regina Caeli address on Orthodox Easter, the Holy Father remembers all those who are celebrating Easter that day and adds: "I am thinking with a special intensity of feeling of the peoples of Kiev and of Ukraine."

The English translation of the word "Chernobyl" is "wormwood," an Old World plant known for its bitter taste. Following the disaster, there is some discussion in the Soviet Union concerning the following passage from the eighth chapter of Revelation: "and there fell a great star burning as if it were a lamp . . . and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and many died of the waters, because they were made bitter." A panel of scientists later announces in Moscow that several hundred new wells have been dug in Ukraine in the event the river waters become contaminated due to radioactive runoff.

**May 13, 1986**

While the Soviet Union experienced a severe earthquake on October 13, 1985, the anniversary date of the Fatima miracle of the sun, the Soviet Union also experiences a very strong earthquake on May 13, 1986, which is the next Fatima anniversary day and the feast of Our Lady of Fatima. According to Tass, the epicenter of the earthquake is near Akhalkalaki in the Georgian S.S.R. There is loss of life and over one thousand buildings are damaged or destroyed.

**August 26, 1986**

Celebrating the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope stresses to a group of Polish pilgrims that the Solidarity accords are still valid and "were the expression of the spirit of the nation." Five days later, on the sixth anniversary date of the signing of the Solidarity accords, the Soviet Union experiences a major earthquake in the Moldavian S.S.R. More than 12,500 people lose their homes. One the same day, August 31, 1986, the Soviet cruise ship *Admiral Nahkimov* sinks after being rammed by a freighter in the Black Sea. The death toll from the collision reaches 398.

**September 21, 1986**

Approximately 80,000 persons attend a pro-Solidarity pilgrimage of working people at the Jasna Gora Monastery at Czestochowa. Those in attendance include Lech Walesa and Marianna Popieluszko, the mother of the murdered Father Popieluszko. In a speech to the pilgrims, Father Rufin Abramek, a Pauline monk at the monastery, expresses his hope that the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa will be allowed to be brought to the Soviet Union in 1988 to mark the millennium of the Baptism of St. Vladimir.

**October 27, 1986**

The Holy Father meets in Assisi with approximately 150 representatives of the world's religions for a day of prayer and fasting for peace. During the services, Archbishop Methodius, the delegate of the Ecumenical Patriarch, is continually at the Pope's side. Other Orthodox representatives include the Russian Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev.

Although Patriarch Pimen of Moscow does not attend the Assisi meeting, he, Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia, and others conduct a special prayer service for peace at the Patriarchal Cathedral in Moscow in support of the Assisi meeting. The prayer service in Moscow occurs on October 26, which on the Julian calendar used by the Russian Church for liturgical purposes, is October 13, the feast of the Iveron icon and the Fatima anniversary date.

**January 1, 1987**

On the feast of the Solemnity of the Mother of God, Pope John Paul II announces a special Marian Year, the second in the Church's history. The fourteen-month Marian Year is to extend from the feast of Pentecost, June 7, 1987, to next year's feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1988. The timing of the Marian Year exactly spans the two important religious celebrations in the Soviet Union -- the 600th anniversary of the Baptism of Lithuania to be observed in June 1987 and the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus to be observed in the summer of 1988.

**February 5, 1987**

Due in part to the loss of credibility in the eyes of Soviet citizens caused by such events as the delayed announcement of the Chernobyl disaster and the initial denials following the KAL 007 incident, the Soviet government under Gorbachev begins a new policy of "glasnost" or openness. Pursuant to this policy, the release of certain religious prisoners of conscience begins in the Soviet Union on this date.

**March 25, 1987**

On the feast of the Annunciation, Pope John Paul II issues an encyclical letter, *Redemptoris Mater*, in anticipation of the forthcoming Marian Year. In the encyclical, the Pope refers to the common love shared by Orthodox and Catholics for the Mother of God and the devotion shown her icons. Twice he mentions the approaching millennium of the Baptism of Rus which he describes as "lands of humble folk, of thinkers and of saints." Referring to Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, the Pope observes that the icons of the Mother of God are still venerated in those lands under various titles and "witness to the faith and spirit of prayer of that people, who sense the presence and protection of the Mother of God." He also states, "We would therefore like, especially during this Year, to join in prayer with all those who are celebrating the Millennium of this Baptism, both Orthodox and Catholics." During his general audience held on March 25, the Pope returns to this theme and adds: "The entire Church is invited to join in prayer with all those, Orthodox and Catholic, who are celebrating this anniversary."

**April 26, 1987**

On the first Sunday after Easter, an eleven-year old girl, Maria Kizyn, reports seeing the Mother of God, dressed in black, upon a balcony of an abandoned Ukrainian Catholic church in the Ukrainian village of Hrushiv, approximately 80 kilometers southwest of Lviv. Subsequently, many others report seeing the image, and crowds of peoples, as many as tens of thousands per day, converge on the village from locations as far as the Baltic states, Moscow, Soviet Georgia, and Central Asia. The prominent Soviet periodi­cal, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, observes that the first day of the apparitions, April 26, was the one-year anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. Later, on October 13, 1987, the apparitions are the subject of a front-page story by the *New York* *Times.*

**May 23, 1987**

The Holy Father visits the Italian town of San Giovanni Rotondo where Padre Pio lived most of his life and died. He refers to personal memories of his visit to Padre Pio and mentions a visit in 1947.

**June 7, 1987**

For the Marian Year, which begins on this date, the Pope composes a special prayer. The prayer includes the following appeal: "To you, Mother of Christians, we entrust in a special way the peoples who are celebrating, during this Marian Year, the sixth Centenary or the Millennium of their acceptance of the Gospel. Their long history is profoundly marked by devotion to you. Turn towards them your loving glance; give strength to those who are suffering for the faith."

**June 8-14, 1987**

On the day following the beginning of the Marian Year, John Paul II returns to Poland for his third visit since being elected pope. In Krakow, the Pope celebrates Mass in the Wawel Cathedral which contains the relics of Blessed Jadwiga, the Polish queen whose marriage to Jagiello resulted in the conversion of Lithuania to Christianity. He states that he desired to be here on the occasion of the Lithuanian jubilee because he had not been allowed to celebrate the jubilee in Lithuania. In praying to Blessed Jadwiga, he refers to a role that she will play in discerning "the designs of God regarding Poland, Lithuania, the Russian lands." Later, in Gdansk, the Pope tells a crowd of approximately one million that there "cannot be a program of struggle better than that of solidarity." Both the Krakow and Gdansk addresses evoke concern from the Polish government, and two senior Party officials fly to Czestochowa and hold an unscheduled meeting with the Pope at the Jasna Gora monastery.

In Warsaw, the Holy Father prays at the grave of the murdered Father Popieluszko. While meeting with ecumenical representatives in Warsaw, he refers to the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches which is meeting this same week in Bari, Italy, the site of the relics of St. Nicholas. He remarks that "this dialogue is the theme of my daily prayers."

**June 28, 1987**

On this day, the sixth centenary of the Baptism of Lithuania is celebrated at precisely the same hour both by the Lithuanian bishops at St. Peter and Paul's Church in Vilnius and by the Holy Father at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The Pope, joined by representatives of the various episcopal conferences of Europe, beatifies Archbishop Matulaitis, a Lithuanian who had been ordained in Russia and became bishop of Vilnius from 1918 to 1925. In anticipation of the celebration, the Holy Father had earlier issued a special apostolic letter describing the historic and present witness of Lithuania to the faith. In his Angelus address on June 28, the Pope describes the devotion of Lithuanians to Our Lady of Ausros Vartai to whom he refers as a sign of hope.

**August 4, 1987**

Encouraged by the Soviet policy of "glasnost," over 200 members of the outlawed Ukrainian Catholic Church sign a declaration announcing the intention of one part of the underground Church to practice its ministry openly. The signers include two bishops and 23 priests.

**August 18, 1987**

Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios travels to the Soviet Union to meet with Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and All Russia. It is the first visit to Moscow by an Ecumenical Patriarch since 1589. Two days later, Mother Teresa arrives in Moscow at the invitation of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet Peace Committee.

Mother Teresa was born on the feast day of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Skopje, a Yugoslav city where a majority of the Christians are Orthodox. Her ancestors were from Albania, a communist country where all religious observance was prohibited by the communists. During her visit to Moscow, Mother Teresa expressed the hope that some of her sisters may be able to work in the Soviet Union near Chernobyl.

**September 19, 1987**

In a farewell address to the Pope at the conclusion of the Pope's second pastoral visit to the United States, Vice-President Bush relates how he personally observed the widow of Brezhnev trace the sign of the cross on her deceased husband's chest as he laid in state during his Moscow funeral. It is also reported in *Time* magazine that Gorbachev's mother, Maria Panteleyevna, who lives in the village of Privolnoye, is a practicing member of the Russian Orthodox Church.

**September 20, 1987**

Approximately 100,000 persons, many carrying Solidarity banners, attend the annual workers' pilgrimage to the Czestochowa shrine. Although the workers cheer Lech Walesa, the greatest ovation occurs after the introduction of Father Algirdas Gutauskas, administrator of the Vilnius Archdiocese, who is greeted by waves of rhythmic applause. Father Gutauskas comments to the workers, "It would be good if Lithuanians could applaud as you do." Cardinal Gubinowicz of Wroclaw replies, "They will soon learn."

**October 17, 1987**

In a ceremony in Rome, Cardinal Glemp, primate of Poland, and Cardinal Lubachivsky, head of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, mutually pardon past wrongs between the Polish and Ukrainian peoples and embrace each other. The Polish primate extends an invitation to Cardinal Lubachivsky to come to Poland in 1988 to celebrate the Millennium of Rus before what he terms "our icon and your icon" -- the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Cardinal Lubachivsky immediately accepts the invitation.

**November 6, 1987**

Cardinal Lubachivsky makes a speech in Rome in which he extends "forgive­ness, reconciliation and love to the Russian nation and to the Moscow Patriarchate." He urges, "Forgive us, as we forgive you." He also states, "Mary, the Mother of God, is such a strong bond in our religious tradition that she will help us overcome all the obstacles on the road to unity for the salvation of our nations."

**December 3-7, 1987**

Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios visits Rome and Pope John Paul II. The Pope accords him honors unprecedented for any other visiting church leader to Rome. Standing with the Pope before the faithful in St. Peter's Square, the Ecumenical Patriarch prays for the intercession of the Mother of God "that the day of our full and complete union in the one faith and common celebration of the sacraments of the Church will come very soon."

**December 8, 1987**

On the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev sign a historic treaty eliminating middle-range nuclear missiles. On the same feast day, Pope John Paul II issues his message for the forthcoming World Day of Peace to be observed on January 1, the beginning of the millennium of the Baptism of Rus. The message is entitled "Religious Freedom: Condition for Peace."

**January 1, 1988**

In his homily on January 1, the Solemnity of the Mother of God, the Holy Father stresses that 1988 will mark the millennium of the Baptism of Rus. He states: "For some time now we have been praying to the Mother of God that she might be with us in a special way this year, during which we give thanks to the Holy Trinity for the Baptism which took place on the banks of the Dnieper, in Kiev, a thousand years ago. That Baptism opened the way for the bringing of the light of Christ to the many peoples and nations of Eastern Europe, allowing it then to shine even beyond the Urals, in a long pilgrimage of faith and Christian civilization."

**February 20, 1988**

The Soviet Red Army Choir performs for the Pope in the Apostolic Palace of the Vatican. The Pope is visibly moved by the performance which includes the singing of "Ave Maria."

**March 7, 1988**

A delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church visits the shrine at Czestochowa.

**March 22, 1988**

The Holy Father issues an apostolic letter, *Euntes in Mundum*, in which he extols the importance of the Baptism of Rus. The letter refers to the Russian Orthodox Church as a "Sister Church" and expresses the desire for perfect communion between the churches of East and West.

On the same day, the Vatican announces that the Pope will not participate in the Millennium celebrations which will occur in the Soviet Union in June. It is emphasized that any trip by the Holy Father to the Soviet Union must be pastoral in nature and must include visits to Catholics in Lithuania and Ukraine. A few days earlier, the Moscow Patriarchate had extended an invitation to the Vatican to send a delegation to the June celebrations, but the invitation had not included the Pope.

Shortly after Easter, the Holy Father issues an apostolic letter, *Magnum Baptismi* *Donum*, which is specifically addressed to Ukrainian Catholics on the occasion of the Millennium. He emphasizes that the Ukrainian Catholic Church should not be viewed as an obstacle to full communion with the Orthodox but rather as a means of promoting unity. He praises the Church and entrusts it to the Mother of God.

**April 29, 1988**

In an unprecedented meeting, Gorbachev tells Patriarch Pimen and other high officials of the Russian Orthodox Church that believers deserve "the full right to express their convictions with dignity." He promises "a new law on freedom of conscience."

**May 4, 1988**

It is announced that the Pope has personally selected a 16-member delegation, of which ten are cardinals, to represent the Vatican at the Millennium celebrations in the Soviet Union. The *New York Times* comments that "officials at the Vatican could not remember when such a large and high-ranking delegation was sent anywhere by a Pope in recent times." Among the delegates are Cardinal Glemp from Poland and Cardinal Vaivods from Latvia. The Pope expresses the hope that "the celebrations can become the dawn of a new day in the history of the Church of Christ."

**May 10, 1988**

In the greatest labor unrest since 1982, a series of strikes occur in Poland. Demanding recognition of Solidarity, workers at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk also strike. The Pope, on a plane flight to South America, tells reporters that the strikes are "justified to defend social, economic and political rights." On the above date, the Gdansk strike ends after a police blockade of the shipyard. The strikers leave the shipyard en masse carrying before them a cross, a picture of the Pope, and an icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**May 29, 1988**

Although the Pope's original hope to visit Lithuania and Ukraine during the Millennium year is not fulfilled, two important concessions do occur. On the above date, Lithuanian Bishop Vincentas Sladkevicius of Kaisiadorys, an outspoken critic of Soviet restrictions on religion, is named a cardinal. Six days later, it is announced in Moscow by the Orthodox Metropolitan of Kiev that discussions would begin on the status of the Ukrainian Catholic Church. These discussions will occur within the framework of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

**June 5-12, 1988**

The celebration of the Millennium by the Russian Orthodox Church occurs in Moscow and at the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius at Zagorsk. During the celebrations, a meeting occurs at the Sovietskaya Hotel in Moscow between Cardinals Casaroli and Willebrands from the Vatican delegation and eight members of the Ukrainian Catholic Church including two Ukrainian bishops. On June 13, Cardinal Casaroli meets with Gorbachev and gives him a three-page letter written in Russian from the Pope. Gorbachev immediately reads the letter and states that he will give the request due consideration.

**June 19-27, 1988**

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches meets at the New Valaam Monastery in Finland. The monastery had been established in 1940 by monks who were from the original Valaam Monastery near the Finnish-Soviet border and who had fled from Russia to Finland to escape the communists. The monks also brought with them a famous Russian icon, the Konevits icon of the Mother of God.

The New Valaam meeting is very successful, and the Commission adopts an agreed statement on holy orders with particular emphasis on apostolic succession. Cardinal Keeler, one of the participants, will later write: “It was an exciting meeting, with many of the members having already participated at the celebration of the millennium of the conversion of Rus earlier in Moscow. There was a spirit of elation, even euphoria.”

**July 9-10, 1988**

In Rome, the Holy Father celebrates the Millennium with Ukrainians from the Americas, Europe, and Australia. He states that as the Word of God was brought to Elizabeth by Mary, she similarly "brought God to the land of Rus, to the cities of Kiev and Lviv, to the other towns and villages." He expresses the hope that the celebration of the Millennium "be an incentive to the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church to rediscover in Ukraine the ancient historical bonds and to work with renewed effort for the cause of union."

On the same weekend, thousands of Ukrainian Catholics converge on the Ukrainian village of Hrushiv where apparitions of the Mother of God were reported the previous year. Although they are driven away from the village church, they gather nearby to celebrate the Millennium.

**August 15, 1988**

On the feast of the Assumption, the Pope closes the Marian Year with a Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. In his homily, he remarks that although the Marian Year was closing, the time for "turning the eyes" to Mary is not finished.

On the evening of the feast of the Assumption, a strike in support of Solidarity begins at the Manifest Lipcowy coal mine in Jastrzebie, Poland. During the subsequent days, the strike spreads to other coal mines, to the shipyards in Gdansk, and to other locations.

**August 26, 1988**

On the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, three important events occur. In Rome, the Pope states that "one group or one party cannot be sovereign at the expense of all the peoples and their rights." At Czestochowa, the Polish bishops ask the Polish government to put an end to "premeditated hypocrisy" and allow "union pluralism." In Warsaw on the evening of the feast day, Interior Minister Kiszczak appears on television and offers to arrange "round table" discussions between the government and different social groups including workers' representatives. On August 31, the eighth anniversary of the signing of the Solidarity accords, Lech Walesa and Bishop Dabrowski, secretary of the Polish bishops, meet with Kiszczak. After the meeting, it is announced that future discussions would include the question of the recognition of Solidarity. Walesa subsequently makes successful appeals to the strikers to end the strikes.

**August 28, 1988**

The Holy Father on this Sunday dedicates his Angelus address to Our Lady of Czestochowa. He comments that the icon was brought to Poland in 1382 from the East and that the icon has often been called "the sign of the unity of Christian east and west." He also states that the Czestochowa shrine has become "a reference point for social regeneration, such as Solidarity and other groups and movements of social renewal."

**September 5-7, 1988**

At the invitation of Orthodox Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk and Byelorussia, Cardinal Glemp visits the Soviet Republic of Byelorussia. As the Cardinal's car enters the Soviet Union, the 20-kilometer stretch of road from the Polish border to the Soviet city of Grodno is lined with kneeling people waiting for the Cardinal's blessing. Throughout Byelorussia, the Cardinal is greeted by unusually large crowds of both Catholics and Orthodox.

**September 10-11, 1988**

In response to Cardinal Glemp's invitation to Cardinal Lubachivsky, the Millennium of the Baptism of Rus is celebrated at the Czestochowa shrine. In the largest gathering of Ukrainians at any Millennium celebration, mutual forgiveness is again extended between the Polish and Ukrainian cardinals on behalf of their peoples. Prayers are offered to Our Lady of Czestochowa for "freedom to our people in Ukraine" and for "brotherhood with all peoples."

**September 29, 1988**

On a visit to the United States, Archpriest Vladimir Sorokin, rector of the Leningrad Theological Academy and Seminary of the Russian Orthodox Church, remarks that the Chernobyl disaster has been perhaps the main event that has spurred many in the Soviet Union to return to the Church. He states, "I think it is the will of God that perestroika, the Millennium and Chernobyl--all these things--came together."

**October 22-23, 1988**

The first convention of the Movement for the Support of Perestroika meets in Vilnius, Lithuania and passes startling resolutions calling for a more independent Lithuania. At the end of the first day, the government announces that the Vilnius Cathedral, which had been converted into an art museum in 1953, was being returned to the Catholic Church. That night, more than 200,000 Lithuanians march through the streets of Vilnius in a torchlight procession to the cathedral. The next morning four bishops and many priests concelebrate Mass at the front of the cathedral before thousands. The Mass is shown live on Lithuanian television.

**December 7, 1988**

More than 25,000 persons die in an earthquake which shakes the northwestern portion of the Armenian S.S.R. Mother Teresa subsequently travels to Armenia. In an unprecedented step, the Soviet Ministry of Health signs an agreement allowing her sisters from her order to work in Moscow and Armenia.

**December 25, 1988**

The Holy Father's Christmas message is broadcast for the first time in the Soviet Union. In the message, the Pope makes special reference to those suffering in Armenia.

Four days later, Bishop Julijonas Steponavicius receives permission from the Soviet government to end his 27-year exile in Zagare, Lithuania and to resume his position as apostolic administrator of the Vilnius Archdiocese.

**February 6, 1989**

Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner meet for 80 minutes with the Pope at the Vatican. In response to a question from Sakharov, the Pope gives him encouragement to be a candidate for the forthcoming Soviet elections for the Congress of People’s Deputies.

**March 10, 1989**

With the consent of the Soviet government, the Vatican is allowed to appoint bishops for all of the six dioceses of Lithuania.

**March 26, 1989**

On Easter Sunday, elections are held in the Soviet Union for a new Congress of People's Deputies. The elections result in a humiliating defeat for many Party officials and a victory for many proponents of change. Among those elected is Andrei Sakharov.

**April 5, 1989**

The "round table" discussions, which had been first suggested on the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, result in a final accord which is signed on April 5. The accord provides for the legalization of Solidarity and for free elections in June.

**April 19, 1989**

At his general audience, the Holy Father expresses thanks to Our Lady of Czestochowa and commends to her care Solidarity and the entire Polish nation. On the next day, he receives at the Vatican Lech Walesa who tells the Pope that Solidarity's roots "are inspired by the social doctrines of the Church."

**May 13, 1989**

On the feast of Our Lady of Fatima, Pope John Paul II approves a decree attesting to the heroic virtue of Jacinta and Francisco, two of the children to whom Our Lady appeared at Fatima. They are the first non-martyred children in the history of the Church to receive this honor.

**May 20, 1989**

The beatification process for Cardinal Wyszynski is initiated in Warsaw. Three days earlier, the Polish parliament had approved new laws recognizing the Roman Catholic Church as a legal entity and guaranteeing churches many rights previously denied.

**June 4, 1989**

Parliamentary elections in Poland result in a stunning victory for Solidarity candidates.

**July 5, 1989**

At a Paris news conference, Gorbachev admits that he had been baptized when he was a boy. He describes that as "quite normal." A year earlier, Gorbachev had told Cardinal Casaroli in Moscow that an icon had been hidden in his parents’ home behind a portrait of Lenin.

**July 25, 1989**

For the first time in over sixty years, the Soviet authorities allow the Vatican to appoint a Catholic bishop in Byelorussia. The new bishop, Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, entrusts himself to Our Lady of Ausros Vartai, who had greatly influenced his spiritual life. One of his earlier pastoral assignments had been to work at her shrine in Vilnius, Lithuania.

**August 23, 1989**

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi-Soviet pact which allowed the annexation of the Baltic states by the Soviet Union, approximately one million persons form a human chain from Vilnius, Lithuania to Tallinn, Estonia to give witness to the non-voluntary nature of the annexation. At the same time, church bells ring throughout the three Baltic republics. In many republics of the Soviet Union, movements demanding greater independence from Moscow arise.

**August 24, 1989**

Following the staggering defeat of the Communists in the Polish elections, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, a Solidarity advisor and Catholic journalist, is elected by the Polish parliament to be Prime Minister. He becomes the first non-Communist head of government in Eastern Europe in over forty years. When asked by a reporter if he considered himself to be a socialist or social democrat, Mazowiecki replies, "Simply put, I'm a Christian, a Catholic who follows the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which emanate from the instructions of Pope John Paul II." At the end of his first news conference, he telephones the Pope and Lech Walesa, both of whom receive much credit for this historic event. Two days later, Mazowiecki flies by helicopter to Czestochowa to be at the Marian shrine for the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

These occurrences in Poland become the first of a breathtaking chain of events which changes the political fabric of Eastern Europe in the span of only four months. Repressive communist regimes fall in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and Romania. Major changes occur in Hungary and Bulgaria. In subsequent comments to the diplomatic corps assigned to the Vatican, the Holy Father observes that the rally point for these great popular movements "has often been a church."

**September 20, 1989**

Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Alexy of Leningrad visits Seattle at the invitation of the Leningrad-Seattle Sister Churches Program. On this date, a luncheon meeting is held at the Space Needle Restaurant between the Metropolitan and Father Frederick Miller, executive director of the Blue Army. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the Kazan icon located at the Blue Army’s chapel in Fatima. During the luncheon meeting, the Metropolitan wears around his neck a panagia or medallion bearing the image of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God.

Metropolitan Alexy requests at the luncheon additional information concerning the Kazan icon at Fatima, and this information is subsequently sent to him. In a letter to a member of the Sister Churches Program, dated February 20, 1990, the Metropolitan will later express the hope that this icon will be returned to Russia and placed in the Kazan Cathedral in Leningrad. On June 18, 1990, the Seattle member of the Program who received this letter will write a letter to Archbishop Cassidy, the head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The Seattle member will include in his letter to Archbishop Cassidy a copy of the Alexy’s letter of February 20, 1990, and will suggest the possibility that the Pope himself return the icon to Leningrad.

**October 6, 1989**

John Paul II travels from Rome to South Korea to begin a Far Eastern pilgrimage. On the Pope's last flight to Korea five years earlier, he had prayed for the victims of KAL 007. On this flight to Korea, he flies over the entire length of the Soviet Union.

During the flight, the Pope is asked by a journalist about the changes in Marxist behavior toward religion in Russia. In answering the question, the Pope refers to the convergence of two causes – the enduring nature of religion in the Russian soul and the policy of perestroika initiated by Gorbachev. This, according to the Pope, is “a process that is a great consolation and a great hope.” Recalling the biblical expression, *Lux ex Oriente,* light from the East, the Pope explains that this hope is “that religious faith and life will come anew to us from Eastern Europe.” He adds, “The Russian people themselves have a religious tradition that is very deep, very strong.”

**November 2, 1989**

A Vatican delegation led by Cardinal Willebrands travels to Moscow and presents a letter from the Pope to Patriarch Pimen. A chalice from the Pope is also given to the Patriarch as a sign of the Pope's desire "to see the two Churches arrive at full communion."

**November 13, 1989**

Archbishop Kirill of Smolensk replaces Metropolitan Filaret of Minsk as head of external affairs for the Russian Orthodox Church. As a young priest, Archbishop Kirill had been the personal secretary to Metropolitan Nikodim who had died in the presence of Pope John Paul I. It was Nikodim who had originally encouraged Kirill to enter the seminary to become a priest. More recently, Archbishop Kirill served as head of the Russian Orthodox delegation on the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Among the most brilliant of the young Russian bishops, Archbishop Kirill shares with his former mentor Nikodim a strong interest in the cause of unity between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.

**November 26, 1989**

In Lviv, approximately 200,000 Ukrainian Catholics attend an outdoor Divine Liturgy in subfreezing weather and then march through the city in support of demands that the Ukrainian Catholic Church be legalized.

**December 1, 1989**

Gorbachev travels to the Vatican and meets with Pope John Paul II in the Pope's private library. The historic meeting, which lasts 70 minutes, is the first meeting between a pope and a head of the Soviet state. Departing from his prepared text, Gorbachev invites the Pope to visit the Soviet Union. The Pope later reports that Gorbachev "expressed gratitude for my prayers and said prayers symbolized the spiritual order and values which he greatly needed."

On the same day, the chairman of the Council for Religious Affairs for Ukraine announces that the government has granted the Ukrainian Catholic Church the same right to register its parishes as is granted to other denominations.

**February 14, 1990**

The Holy Father announces that he will give a series of spiritual meditations devoted to Our Lady of Czestochowa. These will occur during his weekly general audiences. He implies that the scope of these meditations will be broader than Poland, and for that reason he begins these meditations on the feast of Saints Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles of the Slavs.

**March 11, 1990**

During the late evening of this Sunday, a newly elected Lithuanian Parliament declares that "Lithuania is once again an independent state." Moscow subsequently imposes an embargo on fuel and other products flowing into Lithuania, and Lithuania receives worldwide publicity for its defiant stand.

**March 15, 1990**

The Vatican and the Soviet Union exchange ambassadors in an important step toward full diplomatic relations. The Vatican ambassador to the Soviet Union is Archbishop Francesco Colasuonno, considered one of the Vatican's most capable envoys and a specialist on Eastern Europe.

**April 13, 1990**

On Good Friday, Gorbachev delivers to Poland's President Jaruzelski documents indicating that Stalin's secret police were responsible for the massacre of 15,000 Polish officers at Katyn in 1940. The Soviet government describes the massacre as "one of the most horrifying Stalinist crimes" and expresses its deep regret. Lech Walesa refers to the apology as "an act of moral justice."

**April 22, 1990**

Pope John Paul II visits Czechoslovakia. Greeting the Pope, Czech President Vaclav Havel states: "I dare say that at this moment I am participating in a miracle: the man who six months ago was arrested as an enemy of the State stands here today as President of that State, and bids welcome to the first Pontiff in the history of the Catholic Church to set foot in this land."

On the above date, the Pope celebrates Mass in Velehrad at the tomb of St. Methodius, the shrine which the Czech government had prevented the Pope from visiting in July 1985. At the conclusion of the Mass, he announces a special assembly of European bishops to discern the path the Church should take in view of the historic changes in Eastern Europe. Invoking the protection of Mary, the Pope expresses the hope that all of Europe may once again be united in Christ.

**May 3, 1990**

Patriarch Pimen, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, dies in Moscow at the age of 79. His death occurs on the feast of Mary, Queen of Poland, and on the birthday of St. Sergius.

**June 7, 1990**

A council of the Russian Orthodox Church meets at the Trinity Monastery founded by St. Sergius and elects Metropolitan Alexy of Leningrad as successor to Patriarch Pimen. The new patriarch is also the head of the ecumenical Conference of European Churches and is a friend of Cardinal Martini of Milan and Cardinal Lustiger of Paris. He received his episcopal ordination in 1961 from Nikodim, the Russian Orthodox metropolitan who later died in the presence of Pope John Paul I. Pope John Paul II immediately sends the Patriarch a telegram in which he prays that God will "hasten the day when our Churches regain full communion."

During his next general audience, the Pope in his prayer to Our Lady of Czestochowa comments on the "great heroic witness" shown by the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian Christians in the "great test of faith" which preceded the millennium.

**August 19, 1990**

St. George Cathedral in Lviv is returned to the Ukrainian Catholic Church, and the first Ukrainian Catholic liturgy is celebrated in the cathedral since 1946. Approximately 300,000 persons crowd in and around the church for the liturgy. The cathedral was the site of the government-organized synod which had decreed in 1946 that the Union of Brest was void and that the Ukrainian Catholic Church no longer exists.

**October 1, 1990**

The Supreme Soviet enacts a "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations." The new law provides guarantees for religious freedom in the Soviet Union and repeals earlier repressive legislation. It is enacted on the feast day of St. Therese of Lisieux, the French Carmelite nun who had lived a short life of great sanctity and had offered her prayers and cloistered life for the missions. In 1927, Pope Pius XI had named her the heavenly patroness of the religious work for Russia.

**October 13, 1990**

On the evening of Saturday, October 13, a religious service is held in St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square for the first time since the Bolshevik Revolution. For the many who could not enter the packed cathedral, the service is broadcast throughout Red Square by sound trucks. The service is dedicated to the Mother of God and to her protection of Christians. The service occurs on the same day as the anniversary date of the "miracle of the sun" at Fatima.

**October 15, 1990**

On the following Monday, it is announced in Oslo that Gorbachev has been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 1990. The Pope sends him a message of congratulations and expresses esteem for his efforts towards better international collaboration. Later, Gorbachev will use part of his Nobel Prize money to help construct an Orthodox church in his birthplace of Privolnoye. He will also donate the home of his deceased parents in Privolnoye to the local Orthodox parish for use by the parish priest and his family.

**October 23, 1990**

Accompanied by Slovak Bishop Pavel Hnilica, Marija Pavlovic, one of the visionaries from Medjugorje, arrives for a three-day stay in Moscow. She is impressed by the faith of the Russian people and states, "I could see that now Jesus will replace Lenin in Russia."

**November 18, 1990**

During a second visit to the Vatican, Gorbachev again urges the Pope to visit the Soviet Union. As Gorbachev leaves, he tells a Soviet reporter that "I think our next meeting will be in our country. We talked about it today." When the Pope is later asked by reporters about a Soviet trip, he responds, "The right moment will come."

**December 9, 1990**

In a landslide victory, Lech Walesa is elected president of Poland, replacing General Jaruzelski. Two days later, Walesa travels to Czestochowa and swears an oath of allegiance to the nation in front of the icon of the Black Madonna.

**January 11, 1991**

The body of St. Seraphim of Sarov is discovered in a remote storage area of the Museum of Atheism at the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God in Leningrad. These relics are returned to the Russian Orthodox Church on the above date.

**January 13, 1991**

In a seeming reversal of reform policies in the Soviet Union, Soviet troops storm the television broadcasting facility in Vilnius, Lithuania and kill fourteen persons. Three days later, hundreds of thousands line the streets of Vilnius and crowd the Vilnius cathedral for the funeral procession and Mass. In his funeral homily, Bishop Steponavicius remarks, "Now our independence is baptized in the blood of martyrs."

**January 16, 1991**

The Vatican announces that Pope John Paul II has confirmed or appointed 15 Catholic bishops for Ukraine. The next month, the bishops of the Ukrainian Catholic Church hold a synod in Rome and at the close of the synod invite the Pope to visit Ukraine.

**March 30, 1991**

Cardinal Lubachivsky, Major Archbishop of Lviv, is permitted by Ukrainian authorities to return to his homeland. He tells more than 70,000 persons crowded in and around St. George Cathedral in Lviv, "This is a miracle of God's greatness."

**April 10, 1991**

The Bishops of Yugoslavia adopt a declaration concerning Medjugorje. The declaration provides in part: “On the basis of studies made so far, it cannot be affirmed that these matters concern supernatural apparitions or revelations.” Nineteen years later, the Vatican will establish an international commission to study the alleged apparitions.

**April 13, 1991**

The Pope appoints apostolic administrators in Moscow, Novosibirsk, and Karaganda. Bishop Kondrusiewicz, who for two years had been the bishop for Byelorussia, is elevated to archbishop and made apostolic administrator for European Russia. On the same day, two new bishops are appointed for Byelorussia.

**May 12-13, 1991**

On the tenth anniversary of the assassination attempt, John Paul II travels to Fatima to thank Our Lady for saving his life. Before a huge crowd, he also refers to the collegial consecration on March 25, 1984 and thanks Mary "for having guided people to freedom." Those in attendance include the Bishop of Czestochowa and the Soviet Ambassador to Portugal.

**June 1-9, 1991**

The Holy Father makes his fourth pilgrimage to Poland. His most emotional encounters are with Ukrainians and Lithuanians near the Soviet border.

**June 12, 1991**

Boris Yeltsin is elected president of the Russian Republic, and the citizens of Leningrad vote to rename their city after St. Peter rather than Lenin. At Yeltsin's swearing-in ceremony, he is formally blessed by Patriarch Alexy.

**June 25, 1991**

The date of June 25, 1981 is considered the beginning of the supposed apparitions at Medjugorje. On June 25, 1991, the very day that marks the tenth anniversary of the beginning of the claimed apparitions, a savage war erupts between Serbia and Croatia. Years earlier, the lady of the apparitions had requested that this day, June 25, be observed as the feast of Our Lady, Queen of Peace.

**August 14-15, 1991**

Approximately 1.4 million young people gather at Czestochowa on the feast of the Assumption to celebrate World Youth Day with John Paul II. They include 20,000 young people from Russia. The meeting has a profound effect on the Pope. He will later refer to it as "an event whose immeasurable meaning for salvation opened a new stage in the process of evangelization."

**August 19-22, 1991**

Four days later, the world is shocked by news that opponents of reform had seized control of the Soviet government and that Gorbachev was being held in his summer dacha in Crimea. On the Orthodox Julian calendar, the coup begins on the feast of the Transfiguration. During the morning of the feast, Patriarch Alexy celebrates the Divine Liturgy in the Assumption Cathedral of the Kremlin. While the Patriarch is conducting the Liturgy, tanks in support of the coup roll into Red Square.

However, the coup is opposed by a defiant Yeltsin, and he is joined by many persons who surround the Russian parliament building, known as the White House. Although the members of the coup had seized control of all communications, Yeltsin uses a radio transmitter provided by a Catholic charitable organization to broadcast his appeals in the Moscow area. On the night of August 19, elite paratroopers (Alpha Unit) refuse to obey orders to attack the White House. However, shortly after midnight on August 21, a column of tanks advance towards to White House, and three protesters are killed during the advance. At 1:42 a.m., Patriarch Alexy delivers a broadcasted appeal. He states that “every person who raises arms against his neighbor, against unarmed civilians, will be taking upon his soul a very profound sin which will separate him from the Church and from God.” He ends his address with an appeal to Mary: “I ask the Holy Mother of God, the protector of our city, at this time of the feast of the Transfiguration, not to withdraw her protection from us, but to preserve all of us. O Mother of God, help us to reconcile ourselves to one another, to the truth, and to God!”

The tanks do not continue their advance, and later on August 21 the coup leaders flee Moscow. On August 22, the feast of the queenship of Mary, Gorbachev returns to Moscow and reassumes control of the Soviet government. On August 26, the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Patriarch Alexy conducts in the Kremlin’s Assumption Cathedral a requiem service for three who died protecting the parliament building. Archbishop Kondrusiewicz is one of the persons attending the service.

**August 24, 1991**

The failed coup has the effect of vastly accelerating the independence movements in the Soviet republics and decimates the Communist Party. Three days after the coup collapses, Ukraine declares its independence subject to a referendum set for December 1, 1991. On August 25, Byelorussia, now called Belarus, declares its independence.

**September 8, 1991**

On September 6, 1991, the new State Council of the Soviet Union officially recognizes the independence of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. Two days later, on the feast of the Nativity of Mary, the bishops of Lithuania and tens of thousands of the faithful gather at the Marian shrine of Siluva and dedicate Lithuania to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as a sign of their gratitude. The act of dedication to Mary is signed by Vytautas Landsbergis, the president of Lithuania.

**October 2, 1991**

Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios dies. His successor is Bartholomew of Chalcedon, who is considered a friend of the Pope and who once studied canon law at the Pontifical Oriental Institute in Rome.

**October 13, 1991**

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz leads the first Russian pilgrimage to Fatima. In a 75-minute broadcast, the Mass at Fatima is shown on television in Russia and in many of the other Soviet republics.

During his visit to Portugal, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz also meets with Sister Lucia, who gives him a small statue of Our Lady to present to Patriarch Alexy of Moscow and All Russia.

**November 17, 1991**

On this date, the Pope canonizes Father Raphael Kalinowski. Kalinowski had participated in the Polish uprising in 1863, and after being captured by the Russians, had spent ten years in forced labor in Siberia. He had subsequently become a Carmelite priest and had done much to rejuvenate the Carmelite order in Poland. He had a great love for Christian unity, especially with respect to Russia, and believed that unity would occur only through Mary. Kalinowski had spent the last 15 years of his life in a Carmelite monastery in the small Polish town of Wadowice. In 1907, while on his deathbed, he had repeated over and over the words of Christ, “Ut unum sint (May all be one).” It was in this small Polish town that Pope John Paul II was born thirteen years later. Like the canonized saint of his native town of Wadowice, the Pope also has a great love for Christian unity, especially with respect to Russia, and will repeat over and over the words, “Ut unum sint.” In fact, the Pope will use these words as the title of his major encyclical on Christian unity.

**November 28 - December 14, 1991**

The Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops is held at the Vatican, and the future course of the Church following the momentous events in Eastern Europe is discussed by bishops from both East and West. The Assembly is marred by the absence of five Orthodox churches which had declined invitations to send "fraternal delegates." In declining, the Russian Orthodox Church criticized what it considers proselytism of Russians by Catholics.

**December 1, 1991**

Ukraine votes overwhelmingly for independence. Without Ukraine, the continuance of the Soviet Union is doomed.

**December 8, 1991**

On the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus sign an agreement which declares that the Soviet Union "is ceasing its existence" and which creates in its place a Commonwealth of Independent States.

**December 20, 1991**

Boris Yeltsin visits the Pope at the Vatican. Yeltsin later describes the audience as “an exceptional moment” in his life.

**December 25, 1991**

After ten of the other republics announce their intention to join the Commonwealth, Gorbachev resigns on Christmas day as president of a country which has ceased to exist. On the evening of Christmas day, the red flag of the USSR flying over the Kremlin is replaced by the Russian tricolor.

**March 9, 1992**

In an article carried by many newspapers, Gorbachev states that he has had "intensive correspondence with Pope John Paul II since we met at the Vatican in December 1989." Gorbachev also remarks, "Now it can be said that everything that took place in Eastern Europe in recent years would have been impossible without the pope's efforts and the enormous role, including the political role that he played in the world arena."

**April 1992**

Bosnia-Herzegovina, where the village of Medjugorje in located, was a little known region of Yugoslavia in 1981 when the "Queen of Peace" supposedly began her appearances there and made her repeated appeals for peace. In April 1992, a war of appalling savagery erupts in that region. Bosnia-Herzegovina suddenly becomes the focus of worldwide attention and becomes a war zone where peace is desperately needed.

**June 24, 1992**

On the above date, Cardinal Cassidy writes a confidential letter to the person in Seattle who had in 1990 had provided Cassidy with a copy of Alexy’s letter requesting that the Kazan icon in Fatima be returned to Leningrad. The letter from Cassidy states in part:

It now seems that there may be an opportunity for the Holy Father personally to take the icon to Saint Petersburg in the not-to-distant future. Should this prove feasible it would be a most significant gesture and undoubtedly do much to improve the atmosphere in which we are seeking to promote our relationships with the Orthodox in general.

The letter from Cassidy also suggests that the icon be brought from Fatima to Rome and then “the Holy Father would take it to St. Petersburg, by arrangement with the Moscow Patriarchate.”

Immediately after receipt of the letter from Cardinal Cassidy, the person in Seattle contacts Father Frederick Miller, the head of the Blue Army, who in turn contacts Archbishop McCarrick of Newark, New Jersey. During the following months, steps are taken to transfer the ownership of the Kazan icon in Fatima to the Holy See. In 1993 the icon will be physically taken from Fatima to the Pope’s personal apartment at the Vatican.

**July 15, 1992**

On the feast of St. Vladimir, the Pope undergoes surgery to remove a large tumor from his colon. Fortunately, tests show that the tumor is still benign. Prior to the surgery, telegrams and letters wishing the Pope well pour into the Vatican. A message from Gorbachev tells the Pope that "I think destiny will give us the joy of another meeting." The Pope also receives a telegram from Mehmet Ali Agca. Agca later informs a reporter that the telegram stated, "I hope that God helps you, that you may be able to complete your worldwide mission of announcing to humanity the third message of Fatima."

**August 26, 1992**

In 1984, Cardinal Slipyj had expressed the dying wish that his remains be placed in St. George's Cathedral in Lviv if the "resurrection" of the Ukrainian Catholic Church occurs. On the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, eight years later, a special liturgy is held in Rome in honor of the Cardinal. The next day, his remains are flown to Lviv and carried to St. George's Cathedral. More than one million people file by the coffin of the Cardinal to pay their last respects before his coffin is placed in the Cathedral's crypt.

**April 18, 1993**

On the first Sunday after Easter, Sister Faustina Kowalska is beatified by Pope John Paul II during a special Mass in St. Peter's Square. He refers to this Polish nun as being "chosen by Christ to remind people of this great mystery of divine mercy." In recent years, the devotion to the Divine Mercy advocated by Sister Faustina has spread to many nations including Catholic parishes in Russia.

**April 25, 1993**

The Pope travels to Albania, a country where the communists had for decades ruthlessly outlawed any form of religion. He remarks, "What happened in Albania never before took place in the course of history." He stresses that Europe must never forget this tragic experience. After reestablishing the Albanian hierarchy by ordaining four new bishops, he entrusts the country to Our Lady.

On the same day, a referendum is held in Russia to determine the future course of that country. In spite of the great economic hardship being experienced in Russia, a majority of voters support Yeltsin and a program of reforms.

**August 26, 1993**

On the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the Polish bishops at Czestochowa and the Holy Father at Castel Gandolfo make a solemn act of entrustment to the Black Madonna. Entitled "The Prayer of the Church in Poland Entrusting her Mission to Mary in the New Historical Situation," the prayer also expresses the desire "to embrace in friendship everyone belonging to other religious and cultural traditions who live among or around us.” That evening, a concert is given for the Holy Father by a group of talented Russian children.

**September 4-10, 1993**

The Holy Father begins the first visit of any pope to the Baltic countries. Arriving at Vilnius airport in Lithuania, he recounts how immediately after he was elected pope, he went to the Lithuanian chapel in St. Peter's and prayed before its copy of the icon of Our Lady of Ausros Vartai. After his arrival in Vilnius, which occurs on the first Saturday of the month, he visits the shrine of Our Lady of Ausros Vartai and there leads the recitation of the rosary.

The next day, at the conclusion of Mass and the Angelus at Vilnius' Vingis Park, the Pope, speaking in Russian, directs special greetings to Russia and "in particular to the Christian communities among which, because of its historical importance and the significance of a glorious tradition, stands out the Orthodox Church, over which the venerable Patriarch of Moscow presides in charity." He entrusts to the Mother of God "once more" the "difficult but providential journey" which Russia is making.

Present at the Mass is a special envoy from the Patriarch of Moscow. Also present is Catholic Archbishop Kondrusiewicz from Moscow with twelve seminarians from Our Lady of the Apostles Seminary which was opened in Moscow just four days earlier. Later, the Pope's press secretary acknowledges that the Pope desires to visit Moscow but that the visit must have an ecumenical character.

**September 19, 1993**

In his Angelus address, the Holy Father refers to the martyrdom that occurred in areas extending from the Baltics to east of the Urals. He specifically mentions the Orthodox martyrs and the Patriarch of Moscow. He appeals to the Mother of God to pray for unity.

Two days later, Yeltsin dissolves the Russian parliament. A major political crisis results.

**September 23, 1993**

Mikhail Gorbachev visits Pope John Paul II for a third time at the Vatican.

**September 30 - October 4, 1993**

The Russian Orthodox Church offers to mediate the confrontation between Yeltsin and defiant members of parliament who refuse to leave the parliament building. After efforts fail and the crisis intensifies, the original Vladimir icon of the Mother of God is brought from the Tretyakov Museum to the Patriarchal Cathedral. On Sunday, October 3, the Patriarch leads prayers for peace and reconciliation before the ancient icon.

Later on Sunday, thousands of anti-Yeltsin demonstrators break through police lines and seek to capture Moscow's main television complex. On Monday, with military assistance, the uprising is suppressed, and the parliament building is shelled and captured by pro-Yeltsin forces. At least 178 people die.

**October 16, 1993**

John Paul II celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of his pontificate. On the anniversary day, he receives in audience Alexander Solzhenitsyn and his wife.

Fifteen years earlier, Solzhenitsyn had been at his home in Cavendish, Vermont USA when he heard of Cardinal Wojtyla’s election as pope. Solzhenitsyn’s personal assistant at Cavendish, Irina Ilovayskaya Alberti, later states that upon receiving the news, Solzhenitsyn had exclaimed, “It’s a miracle. It’s the first positive event since World War I and it’s going to change the face of the world.”

**November 4, 1993**

One of the first projects of Patriarch Alexy after his election as head of the Russian Orthodox Church was to rebuild the Cathedral of the Kazan Icon of the Mother of God on Red Square. Actual construction began in 1991, and on the above date in 1993 the completed cathedral is consecrated. Two months later, on January 24, 1994, Patriarch Alexy writes to a member of the Sister Churches Program in Seattle, the organization which had arranged the meeting between Alexy and the Blue Army in 1989. In his letter, he refers to the consecration and again expresses the hope that the Kazan icon can be returned to Russia.

**March 13, 1994**

On a visit to St. Francis de Sales parish in Rome, the Holy Father refers to Sister Faustina Kowalska as "a great mystic, one of the greatest in the history of the Church."

**April 1, 1994**

On Good Friday, the Holy Father goes to Rome's Colosseum and leads the Way of the Cross. In a promising ecumenical sign, the Pope uses meditations specially written for this occasion by the Ecumenical Patriarch. After the Via Crucis, the Pope speaks of the other "Colosseums" which existed in this century in Russia and Lithuania. Appealing to Eastern Christians, the Holy Father states that we are united through the Roman martyrs and the martyrs of these modern Colosseums.

**April 29, 1994**

The Pope falls in his apartment and breaks his right femur. At the time of his fall, it is in Russia the early hours of Orthodox Good Friday. Later on Good Friday, the Pope undergoes surgery and receives an artificial bone replacement. The surgery is not completely successful. Thereafter, the Pope will not be able to walk normally and will be required to use a cane.

**May 13, 1994**

The Pope chooses the feast of Our Lady of Fatima and the thirteenth anniversary of the assassination attempt as the day for the opening of the small convent of Maria Mater Ecclesiae within the Vatican walls. The purpose of the cloistered community of eight contemplative nuns is to support the work of the Holy Father through continuous prayer.

The Pope also writes on this day a letter to the Italian bishops and recounts how the Mother of God saved his life 13 years ago. He describes how he prayed to the Mother of God at her shrine of Ausros Vartai last September and how his voice broke when he recited the words of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz about Our Lady of Ausros Vartai and Czestochowa, "you saved me ...from death." The Pope comments in the letter that the Ausros Vartai shrine as well as other shrines and "other Colosseums of our century" were awaiting this witness from the Pope.

**May 27, 1994**

After a one-month hospitalization, Pope John Paul II leaves the Gemelli Polyclinic and returns to the Vatican. On the same day, Solzhenitsyn returns to Russia. In a flight from Alaska, Solzhenitsyn's first stop is in the Russian Far East city of Magadan where he pays tribute to the martyrs of the gulags. He states, "Under ancient Christian tradition, land where innocent victims are buried becomes holy."

**June 13, 1994**

The Holy Father calls a special consistory of the Church's cardinals to discuss preparations for the millennium celebrations for the year 2000. At the conclusion of his opening address to the cardinals, the Pope speaks of Mary's presence which he has experienced throughout his life. Referring to various Marian shrines, he states: "I had the personal opportunity to understand the message of Our Lady of Fatima in a particular way -- the first time on 13 May 1981, when an attempt was made on the Pope's life, and then again towards the end of the '80's, when communism collapsed in the countries of the Soviet block."

The Pope urges the cardinals to trust that Mary "will help us find the way to mutual accord between the Catholic West and the Orthodox East. In view of the year 2000, this is perhaps the greatest task."

**April 14, 1995**

On Good Friday, the Holy Father requests several persons to assist him in carrying the cross during the services at Rome's Colosseum. One is a Russian Orthodox priest.

During Lent of this year, the Pope's annual retreat was conducted by Father Tomas Spidlik, a professor at the Pontifical Oriental Institute, who during the retreat stressed Byzantine and Russian spirituality. In thanking Father Spidlik at the close of the retreat, the Pope stated: "We truly wish to draw closer and closer to our Eastern, Byzantine and Russian brethren, because we are deeply convinced that the same faith unites us." The Pope will later make Father Spidlik a cardinal.

**April 23, 1995**

On the first Sunday after Easter, the Holy Father celebrates Mass at the church of Santo Spirito in Sassia, which has become a center in Rome for the devotion to Divine Mercy. Blessed Faustina Kowalska had urged that this day, the first Sunday after Easter, be designated the feast of Divine Mercy. On March 23, 1937, she had had a vision of "Rome, in a beautiful church, and the Holy Father, with all the clergy, was celebrating this Feast."

**May 21, 1995**

Marking the beginning of spiritual preparations for the 400th anniversary of the Union of Brest, more than 700,000 persons gather at the Marian shrine of Zarvanytsia in Ukraine. After the Divine Liturgy, the assembled cardinals, bishops, and over 600 priests lead the vast crowd in consecrating Ukraine to the Mother of God.

**June 27 - 29, 1995**

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits Pope John Paul II in Rome. The visit is marked by great warmth and mutual respect. Following the Mass on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Ecumenical Patriarch tells the crowd in St. Peter's Square, "Let us love one another in truth." Then the two men embrace as a sign of reconciliation.

During the prior month, the Pope had issued two important papal documents. In the first, *Orientale Lumen*, the Pope extolled the richness of the Eastern Christian tradition. In the second, *Ut Unum Sint*, a major encyclical on ecumenism, the Pope devoted a significant part of the encyclical to Orthodox-Catholic relations and expressed his openness to further dialogue on the critical issue of papal primacy.

**November 12, 1995**

On the feast of St. Josaphat, the Pope issues an apostolic letter commemorating the fourth centenary of the Union of Brest. He recalls the history of the Ukrainian Catholic Church including the periods when the Church flourished and other periods when it was subject to great persecution. He refers to this Church's special ecumenical role with Eastern Christians and entrusts to the Mother of God "the yearning for full Christian unity."

**November 1995**

A Russian government commission issues a report that approximately 200,000 clerics in the Soviet Union were killed by the communists during the Soviet era. Describing some of the martyrdom, Alexander Yakovlev, chairman of the commission, stated: "Clergymen and monks were crucified on the royal doors of churches, were shot dead, strangled, and had water poured on them in winter until they turned into frozen pillars." It is later reported that in 1937 alone, 85,300 clergymen and church workers were executed by the NKVD, the predecessor of the KGB.

**June 29, 1996**

During his Angelus address on the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul, the Pope invites Catholics to become familiar with the tradition of the Eastern Churches, "to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity." He also comments, "As the son of a Slav people, I personally feel the Lord's special call to strive for it." He states his intention to concentrate on some aspects of the "great Christian heritage of the East" in future Angelus talks.

**October 13, 1996**

On this anniversary of the miracle of the sun, Cardinal Ratzinger presides over the ceremonies at Fatima. The ceremonies are also marked by the return to Fatima of the International Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which had been taken throughout Poland over the past year. On this occasion, bishops from Poland and Russia concelebrate Mass at Fatima, and the Fatima statue is then taken by the Russian bishops to Russia where it will remain until July 13, 1997, the eightieth anniversary of the prophecy of Our Lady of Fatima concerning Russia.

**December 13, 1996**

Catholicos Karekin, head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, meets with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. In a historic accord, both sign a declaration resolving the Christological dispute which has existed between the Churches since the Council of Chalcedon in 451.

**March 28, 1997**

On Good Friday of this year, the Holy Father again leads the Stations of the Cross at the Colosseum and uses meditations especially prepared for the occasion by Catholicos Karekin.

**April 12-13, 1997**

While the war was raging in Bosnia-Hercegovina, the Pope had a great desire to visit the war-torn city of Sarajevo. With the restoration of peace, he is now able to fulfill that desire. His visit includes a warm meeting with Orthodox Metropolitan Nikolaj. The Pope refers to the years of ”deplorable fratricidal war” and states that “we all feel the urgent need for a real reconciliation between Catholics and Orthodox, so that, with a new heart and a new spirit, it might be possible to resume the journey of an ever more perfect following of Christ.”

**May 31 - June 10, 1997**

Pope John Paul II returns to Poland a sixth time. At Gniezno, before the heads of state of seven European countries, he refers to a new invisible wall which now divides Europe – “the wall that exists in people’s hearts.” He states that there will be “no European unity until it is based on unity of spirit.” Quoting remarks from his June 3, 1979 homily in Gniezno, he again refers to this Slav Pope manifesting the spiritual unity of Christian Europe, a unity consisting of the traditions of both East and West.

At Czestochowa, he entrusts to Mary the great jubilee of the Year 2000 and prays that all Christians may become one family in Christ. At Zakopane, he dedicates the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary where parishioners had constructed a special shrine to Our Lady of Fatima to thank her for saving the Pope’s life on May 13, 1981. At the shrine, the Pope states, “By the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima, my life was given back to me.”

At Krakow, the Pope visits the shrine of Divine Mercy where Blessed Faustina is buried. The next day, at a Mass before one and one-half million people, he canonizes Queen Jadwiga. Jadwiga had become queen of Poland two years after the arrival of the Jasna Gora icon in Poland and had a great love for the icon.

**June 10, 1997**

Following newspaper reports that a meeting between the Pope and Patriarch Alexy would occur at a monastery outside of Vienna on June 21, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church announces that the meeting will not take place because of still unresolved issues. On June 22, the Pope stresses in his Angelus address the need for reconciliation for all the peoples of Europe “from the Atlantic to the Urals.” Referring to the benefits of the ecumenical movement, he adds that “there are still unresolved problems and sometimes unexpected upsets occur, new fears arise and unconscious worries creep in.”

On July 27, during a visit to Lithuania, Patriarch Alexy states that he would like to meet Pope John Paul II but that the meeting would have to be “well prepared.” During this same visit to Lithuania, Patriarch Alexy joins Catholic Archbishop Backis of Vilnius at the Marian shrine of Ausros Vartai. At the beginning of the ceremony, the two hierarchs greet each other with a kiss. Each then reads a short address and offers a benediction to more than 4,000 worshippers including Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas.

Although the meeting between the Pope and the Patriarch did not occur in Vienna, the Patriarch invites Archbishop Christoph Schönborn of Vienna to visit Russia. The Archbishop begins his visit in Moscow on August 26, the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, and is graciously received by the Patriarch. Schönborn is an expert in Eastern Christianity. According to Schönborn, his vocation as a seminarian was saved in 1967 by a Romanian Orthodox monk, Father André Scrima, who gave him a great appreciation for the Church fathers.

**September 5, 1997**

Mother Teresa dies. Four days later, Archbishop Arseny, patriarchal vicar of Moscow, visits the Indian Embassy in Moscow and writes a moving tribute to Mother Teresa in the book of condolences. On behalf of the Patriarch, he states that the charity of Mother Teresa knew no bounds and for her, every person was “the image and likeness of God.”

**October 13, 1997**

For the eightieth anniversary of the miracle of the sun at Fatima, the Holy Father writes to the bishop of Leiria-Fatima a letter in which he refers to Fatima as one of the greatest signs of the times in this twentieth century.

**October 19, 1997**

In a special ceremony in Rome, St. Therese of Lisieux is declared by the Pope to be a “Doctor of the Universal Church.” During the Mass, the Gospel is chanted by a Russian deacon in Church Slavonic and a special troparion and kontakion, parts of the Byzantine liturgy, are sung in the saint’s honor in recognition of her role as a patroness of Russia.

**February 10, 1998**

Boris Yeltsin meets for a second time with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. The meeting is very cordial and continues, at Yeltsin’s insistence, beyond its allotted time. Yeltsin presents to the Pope a special Russian edition of the Pope’s poetry which had been translated and published at Yeltsin’s request.

**March 2, 1998**

According to press reports, Cardinal Padiyara from India and Cardinal Vidal from the Philippines met with Sister Lucia, the sole survivor of the Fatima apparitions. She told them, “Gorbachev, without knowing it, was the instrument in God’s hands for the conversion of Russia.” With respect to the Russian Orthodox Church, she stated, “Our Lady never spoke about Russia converting to the Catholic faith.”

**August 26, 1998**

Dr. Francesco Crucitti, the surgeon who operated on the Pope following the 1981 assassination attempt, dies in Rome on the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Upon learning of his death, the Pope visits the Crucitti home, blesses the doctor’s body, and comforts his family. He tells the family that he came to show his appreciation “for this man who saved my life.”

**September 8, 1998**

Russia is gripped by a serious financial crisis caused by the plummeting value of the ruble and a serious political crisis caused by the inability of Yeltsin and the Duma to agree on a new prime minister. On this day, which is a Marian feast on both the Catholic and Orthodox calendars, Patriarch Alexy visits the Tretyakov Museum in Moscow to pray before the original Vladimir icon of the Mother of God. During the visit, he comments, “In these times, we must increase our prayers to the Blessed Virgin, who has protected our Fatherland in other ages.” A few days later, the crisis is lessened by the selection of Yevgeny Primakov as prime minister.

**October 11, 1998**

The first Fatima shrine in Russia is dedicated by Archbishop Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz. The shrine is located in a beautifully restored chapel in St. Catherine’s Church in St. Petersburg. St. Catherine’s has historically been considered the “Mother Church” for Catholics in Russia and had as its pastor Monsignor Constantine Budkiewicz who was martyred by the Bolsheviks in 1923. The church is located only a few blocks from Palace Square where the Bolshevik Revolution began in 1917 and a half block from the Kazan Cathedral which the Bolsheviks had converted into their headquarters for militant atheism.

Funds for the reconstruction of the chapel were raised by an American priest, Father Robert Fox, and his Fatima Family Apostolate. A focal point of the shrine is a statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, given by Father Fox. Prior to the dedication, Father Fox brought the statue to Fatima where it was blessed by the bishop of Leiria-Fatima and venerated by Sister Lucia.

During the dedication ceremony, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz states that he is presenting the Russian Fatima shrine as a gift to Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of his pontificate. The archbishop wears during the dedication Mass a chasuble with an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**October 16, 1998**

The twentieth anniversary of the pontificate of Pope John Paul II is celebrated on this day. Thousands of Poles travel to Rome to congratulate the Pope. Addressing them in St. Peter’s Square, the Pope states that there would not be a Polish pope were it not for Cardinal Wyszynski and “were it not for Jasna Gora.”

At the same time, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew is visiting Poland. During his visit, he prays before the Black Madonna at Czestochowa and blesses a cornerstone of an Orthodox church dedicated to Our Lady of Czestochowa. He praises the Pope and states, “As His Holiness John Paul II says, we must be united now that we stand on the threshold of the third millennium. Although a long road still stretches before us, both sides are determined to move forward.”

**January 22, 1999**

The Holy Father begins a pilgrimage to Mexico where he will receive a tumultuous welcome. On the flight from Rome to Mexico City, he is asked by a reporter if there were other countries he would still like to visit. The Pope responds, “The biggest ones. First there was the USSR, now it is Russia, both European and Asian. Then there is China….I still have the will and the availability.”

**February 25, 1999**

The relics of St. Therese of Lisieux are brought to Russia and begin a pilgrimage to twenty Russian cities.

**March 24, 1999**

On the vigil of the feast of the Annunciation, NATO planes commence bombing Serbian targets as a result of a dispute arising from ethnic warfare in the Yugoslavian province of Kosovo. In spite of appeals from the Vatican for a peaceful observance of Easter, the bombing continues unabated on both the day on which Easter is observed by the Western churches and the day on which it is observed by the Orthodox churches.

**March 25, 1999**

On the feast of the Annunciation, Catholicos Karekin, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, meets again with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. The Pope thanks the Catholicos for inviting him to visit Armenia and states, “I pray the Lord that he will enable me to make this visit.” Less than four weeks later, the Armenian government announces that the Pope will be visiting Armenia in July.

**April 20, 1999**

Alarmed by the bombing of Serbia, Russian Patriarch Alexy visits Belgrade and celebrates Divine Liturgy with Serbian Patriarch Pavle. Two days prior to the visit, the Pope writes to Patriarch Alexy that he is “comforted to know” that the Patriarch is making this visit and proclaiming “the Easter message of peace.” Upon his return to Moscow, the Patriarch states in a news conference that the Pope had also “expressed readiness to support the peace initiatives of the Russian Orthodox Church and to participate in them.”

**May 2, 1999**

Padre Pio is beatified by the Holy Father before a huge crowd in St. Peter’s Square. In his homily, the Pope states, “When I was a student here in Rome, I myself had the chance to meet him personally, and I thank God for allowing me today to enter Padre Pio’s name in the book of the blessed.”

**May 7-9, 1999**

Pope John Paul II visits Romania at the invitation of the Romanian government and the Romanian Orthodox Church. It is his first visit to a country where a majority of the Christians are Orthodox. He is warmly received by both Catholics and Orthodox.

On May 8, the Pope addresses the leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church including Patriarch Teoctist and the Holy Synod. The Pope stresses Christian unity and states, “I have sought unity with all of my strength, and I will continue to do all that I can until the end….” At the end of his talk, he states extemporaneously, “Thank you. An unforgettable visit, Romania. Here we have gone beyond the threshold of hope.” On May 9, the Pope celebrates Mass in Bucharest’s Podul Izvor Park in the presence of Patriarch Teoctist and before a crowd of 200,000. At the conclusion of the Mass, the crowd chants “Unity” in Romanian, and the Pope joins in the refrain.

**June 3, 1999**

On May 22, the Holy Father had designated June 3, the feast of Corpus Christi, as a day of prayer for peace in the Balkans. Exactly on that day of prayer, while the Pope is meeting with Kofi Annan, Secretary–General of the United Nations, word is received that Yugoslavia has agreed to a peace plan for Kosovo.

**June 5-17, 1999**

The Holy Father makes his seventh pastoral visit to Poland as Pope. In the afternoon of June 6, he leads Sacred Heart devotions in Elblag, a city near the Russian border. Prior to the service, Archbishop Kondrusiewicz tells the crowd, “We are all dreaming of the day when the Pope can come to Russia and set foot in Red Square.”

Although the Pope was not scheduled to go to Czestochowa during this visit to Poland, he makes an unscheduled pilgrimage to the shrine at the end of his visit. He would later remark, “It was a moment of deep spiritual feeling. I renewed the entrustment of my life and my Petrine ministry to her, the ‘Holy Virgin who defends bright Czestochowa,’ to her I consecrated the Church in Poland and throughout the world.”

**June 28, 1999**

In the presence of the Holy Father, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints promulgates a decree attesting to a miracle attributed to the intercession of Francisco and Jacinta, the two young seers of Fatima. The miracle satisfies the necessary condition for their beatification. The cardinal *ponens* who presented the cause is Cardinal Andrzej Maria Deskur, the Pope’s very close friend, who has been paralyzed from the waist down since the Fatima feast day, October 13, 1978.

**June 29, 1999**

On June 10, while the Pope was in Poland, he was informed that the rapidly deteriorating health of Catholicos Karekin, who was dying of cancer, required a postponement of the Pope’s July visit to Armenia. After hearing the news, the Pope suddenly decides to fly directly from Poland to Armenia on June 18 to be with the Catholicos before he dies. However, after making the decision, the Pope contracts a respiratory infection which requires him to cancel the June 18 visit. On June 29, the feast of St. Peter, Catholicos Karekin, who was such a good friend of the See of St. Peter, dies. Shortly before the death of the Catholicos, the Pope had written to him a personal letter which unfortunately arrived after his death. The Pope’s letter is placed in the coffin near the hand of the deceased Catholicos.

**September 20, 1999**

Raisa Gorbachev dies of leukemia in a hospital in Münster, Germany. In the months before her death, many in Russia are moved by the compassion and love shown by Mikhail Gorbachev toward his dying wife. Immediately after her death, the Pope sends a telegram to Gorbachev commending his wife to “God’s eternal love.” Before she is buried at Moscow’s Novodevichy convent, a small copy of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God is placed in her coffin.

**November 8–9, 1999**

The Pope visits the Republic of Georgia, the second predominately Orthodox country to be visited by the Pope. During the papal Mass in Tbilisi, President Eduard Shevardnadze sits in the front row and during the Mass warmly kisses the Pope on the cheek. The day of the Mass marks the tenth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall at which time Shevardnadze was Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union. The Pope also meets with Patriarch Ilia II, the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Upon his return to Rome, the Pope refers to his “cordial” private meeting with the Patriarch. The Pope’s Georgian visit receives favorable media coverage in Russia.

**November 14, 1999**

The Holy Father dedicates the newly renovated Redemptoris Mater chapel located in the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace. The renovation is a gift to the Pope from the College of Cardinals to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Pope’s priesthood. The walls and ceiling of the chapel are covered with brilliant mosaics which the Pope states “bring to life the wealth of the Eastern tradition, reinterpreted with the knowledge of one who knows the Western heritage.” The mosaics were designed and executed by Slovenian Jesuit Father Marko Rupnik and Russian Orthodox artist Aleksandr Kornooukhov. The Pope refers to the mosaics as an exchange of gifts between East and West and an “expression of that theology of two lungs from which the Church of the third millennium can draw new vitality.”

The theology of the “two lungs” refers to a metaphor coined by Russian poet and philosopher, Vyacheslav Ivanov, who later converted to Catholicism. Ivanov stated that Christianity must breathe with both lungs, East and West. Pope John Paul II frequently uses this metaphor.

**December 24, 1999**

The Holy Father opens the Holy Doors at St. Peter’s Basilica to commence the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

**December 31, 1999**

In a surprise announcement, Yeltsin resigns as President of the Russian Federation, and Putin becomes acting President. Patriarch Alexy receives an unexpected telephone call to come immediately to the Kremlin to be present at the transfer of authority from Yeltsin to Putin. At the transfer ceremony, Putin, a former KGB official, asks for and receives the Patriarch’s formal blessing. Several weeks before becoming acting President, Putin, his wife, and two teenage daughters had visited the Trinity Monastery of St. Sergius with Patriarch Alexy.

Although Putin had spent much of his adult life in the KGB, he had been baptized as an infant. His mother had taken him to a priest without the knowledge of his father who was a communist party member. In 1993, Putin went to Israel as part of an official delegation. He later stated, “Mama gave me my baptismal cross to get it blessed at the Lord’s tomb. I did as she said and then put the cross around my neck. I have never taken it off since.” However, in 1996 Putin had taken off the cross to take a sauna at his dacha near St. Petersburg. While Putin was in the sauna, the dacha caught fire. Putin escaped, but the dacha was burnt to the ground. Later, a worker, sifting through the ashes, found the cross perfectly intact and gave it to Putin. The fact that everything at the dacha was destroyed except this simple aluminum cross was interpreted by Putin as a personal sign to him that only spiritual values are imperishable.

**January 18, 2000**

As part of the commencement of the Holy Year celebration, the Holy Father opens the Holy Doors at the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls with the assistance of Anglican Archbishop George Carey and Orthodox Metropolitan Athanasios. Present at this ecumenical service are representatives of many Orthodox churches including the Moscow Patriarchate. One of the readings at the service is from the writings of Georges Florovsky, a Russian Orthodox theologian. A week earlier, a Rome newspaper reported that the Vatican will be giving to the Moscow Patriarchate the 17th-century St. Basil’s Church in Rome.

**February 24-26, 2000**

As a first stage of a Jubilee Pilgrimage, Pope John Paul II visits the land of Moses – Egypt and Mt. Sinai. In Cairo, he is enthusiastically welcomed by Pope Shenouda III, the head of the Orthodox Coptic Church. At an ecumenical service, Pope Shenouda embraces Pope John Paul II and tells him, “We love our country, and we love you.” Pope John Paul later replies, “I wish to reciprocate by saying, we love you too.”

**March 12, 2000**

As part of the Great Jubilee, the Holy Father observes a “Day of Pardon” in which he asks forgiveness for the sins of the members of the Catholic Church throughout the centuries. Included in the prayers for forgiveness is a reference to the occasions when believers in disobedience to the will of Christ “have opposed one another, becoming divided, and have mutually condemned one another and fought against one another.”

On the same day in Poland, the heads of the Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran Churches of Poland hold an ecumenical service in Gniezno attended by the presidents of Poland, Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Hungary. Each church head apologizes for the past failings of the members of his respective church. After the service, Father Henryk Paprocki, spokesperson of the Polish Orthodox Church, states, “This unprecedented event tells us the year 2000 will really be a turning point in relations between Christians.”

The previous month, Patriarch Teoctist of the Romanian Orthodox Church, who hosted the Pope’s recent visit to Romania, also made a formal acknowledgement of past sins. The Patriarch expressed sorrow and asked for personal forgiveness for the concessions made to the Romanian regime during the communist era and for the sufferings of believers which resulted.

**March 25, 2000**

As the second stage of his Jubilee Pilgrimage, the Holy Father fulfills a long-held desire to make a pilgrimage as Pope to the Holy Land. On the morning of the feast of the Annunciation, he celebrates Mass at the Basilica of the Annunciation at Nazareth on what might be the 2000th anniversary of the event. On the afternoon of the feast day, the Pope attends an ecumenical meeting hosted by Diodoros I, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem.

The Pope in his speech at the meeting refers to the richness of the various Christian rites and traditions represented in Jerusalem and states that “none of this wealth must be lost in the fuller unity to which we aspire.” Patriarch Diodoros presents as a gift to the Pope a medallion or enkolpion with an image of the Mother of God.

The next day, March 26, the Patriarch is the guest of the Pope at a Mass held in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. On the same day, elections are held in Russia, and Putin is elected to a four-year term as president.

**April 30, 2000**

As the first saint of the new millennium, Sister Faustina Kowalska is canonized before a huge crowd in St. Peter’s Square. The canonization occurs on April 30, which is the Second Sunday of Easter on Western calendars and Easter Sunday on Orthodox calendars. The Pope states that the Second Sunday of Easter “from now on throughout the Church will be called Divine Mercy Sunday.” He refers to St. Faustina as “a gift of God to our time, a gift from the land of Poland to the whole Church.”

Two months earlier, the Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation had met in St. Petersburg. In a foreshadowing of the Holy Father’s action, they had declared that the Second Sunday of Easter would be observed as Divine Mercy Sunday throughout the Russian Federation.

**May 7, 2000**

At the Colosseum in Rome, the Holy Father conducts an ecumenical commemoration of the vast number of Christians of various denominations who died for their faith during the twentieth century. The Pope states, “The ecumenism of the martyrs and the witnesses to the faith is the most convincing of all; to the Christians of the 21st century it shows the path to unity.” The service is attended by representatives of the Orthodox Churches as well as other Christian denominations. In his homily, the Pope refers specifically to the victims of communism and to the martyrdom of Orthodox Metropolitan Benjamin of St. Petersburg in 1922.

On the same day, Putin is inaugurated in a ceremony at the Kremlin as president of the Russian Federation. Immediately after the official ceremony, he and his wife proceed to the Kremlin’s Annunciation Cathedral where they attend a thanksgiving prayer service and are blessed by Patriarch Alexy. As a gift, the Patriarch presents Putin with mosaic icons to be placed above the Kremlin’s Gate of the Savior and Gate of St. Nicholas to replace those destroyed by the communists after the Bolshevik Revolution.

**May 12-13, 2000**

On the Fatima feast day and the nineteenth anniversary of the assassination attempt, Pope John Paul II beatifies Francisco and Jacinta Marto before a crowd of approximately 600,000 at Fatima. The night before the beatification, the Pope had prayed intensely before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima and had left before her statue, as a token of his gratitude, one his most precious possessions – an episcopal ring given to him by Cardinal Wyszynski a few days after his election as Pope. The ring bears an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa and the inscription, “Totus Tuus.” The ring is later made a part of the rosary held in the hands of the statue.

Immediately before the beatification Mass, the Pope meets with Sister Lucia, the sole survivor of the three shepherd children. During the Mass, the Pope refers to the “great red dragon” of the Apocalypse and the great number of Christians who suffered for their faith during the twentieth century. He also thanks Our Lady who saved him from death on the Fatima feast day 1981 and to Jacinta who offered sacrifices and prayers for the Holy Father whom she saw suffering greatly.

At the conclusion of the beatification Mass, Cardinal Sodano makes public for the first time a summary of the long-held third secret of Fatima. The third secret involved a vision of a “bishop clothed in white,” whom Sister Lucia confirmed was the Pope. “As he makes his way with great effort towards the Cross amid the corpses of those who were martyred (Bishops, priests, men and women religious and many lay persons), he too falls to the ground, apparently dead, under a burst of gunfire.” After watching the announcement on television in prison, Agca tells the media, “I was an unwitting instrument in a mysterious design; now I know this with certainty.”

**May 18, 2000**

In perhaps the largest concelebrated Mass in history, Pope John Paul II celebrates his 80th birthday with approximately 6,000 priests. At the end of the Mass, a Russian Orthodox priest gives to the Pope a message from Patriarch Alexy. The message congratulates the Pope on his 80th birthday and states, “Your ministry as head of the Roman Catholic Church has lasted for many years and has gained you deserved respect among Christians of many countries of the world. I do hope that the problems which exist between our Churches will be successfully solved through our common efforts and the new millennium will be a time for overcoming divisions and contradictions among Christians of East and West.”

**June 5, 2000**

On one of his first state visits as president, Vladimir Putin meets with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. During the meeting, the process of integration between East and West is discussed, and Putin expresses his view that the mission of the Holy See in this field is particularly important.

**June 13, 2000**

Italian President Carlo Ciampi signs an order granting clemency to Mehmet Ali Agca. Agca is immediately released from an Italian prison and is extradited to Turkey to finish a 10-year sentence for killing a Turkish journalist in 1979. The granting of clemency follows a personal letter from the Pope to Ciampi. In the letter, the president was informed that the Pope would very favorably view the granting of clemency for Agca during the Jubilee Year.

**June 26, 2000**

The Vatican releases the exact text of the “third secret” of Fatima together with an interpretation by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The text refers to a bishop dressed in white, other bishops, priests, and religious “going up a steep mountain, at the top of which there was a big Cross of rough-hewn trunks.” The text continues, “before reaching there the Holy Father passed through a big city half in ruins and half trembling with halting step, afflicted with pain and sorrow, he prayed for the souls of the corpses he met on his way; having reached the top of the mountain, on his knees at the foot of the big Cross he was killed by a group of soldiers who fired bullets and arrows at him….” Although not mentioned in the official interpretation, the Holy Father “half trembling and with halting step” bears strong resemblance to the present physical condition of Pope John Paul II, who is afflicted with tremors especially on the left half of his body.

**July 9-19, 2000**

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches holds its first plenary session since 1993. The session is held at a seminary in the American town of Emmitsburg, Maryland. The seminary is located a few hundred meters from a grotto which is one of the oldest Marian shrines in the United States. The subject of the session is the ecclesiological and canonical implications of the Eastern Catholic Churches. It is a stormy and difficult session, and no agreement is reached. The Commission adjourns without setting a date for a future session.

During the ten days of the session, Catholic and Orthodox believers sponsor a prayer vigil at the seminary for the success of the session. The focal point of the vigil is the well-known Sitka icon of the Mother of God, which was brought from the Orthodox cathedral in Sitka, Alaska, for the vigil. The Sitka icon, painted in Russia in approximately 1800, is modeled after the Kazan icon of the Mother of God.

**July 30, 2000**

During the Angelus address at Castel Gandolfo, the Pope recalls that the centenary of the death of Vladimir Soloviev would occur later that week. The Pope states, “In recalling this Russian figure of extraordinary depth, who also noted with great clarity the tragic division among Christians and the urgent need for their unity, I would like to invite you to pray that Christians of the East and West can restore their full communion as soon as possible.” Soloviev, a Russian philosopher and theologian who lived from 1853 to 1900, believed that Russia would play a key role in the reunion of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches.

**August 19-20, 2000**

This weekend marks the culmination of the Millennium celebrations in Moscow and the conclusion of an important meeting of the Russian Orthodox bishops. On Saturday, August 19, Patriarch Alexy and the Russian bishops consecrate the reconstructed Church of Christ the Savior in Moscow. This huge church, considered to be the largest functioning Orthodox church in the world, had been originally constructed in the late 1800s to commemorate the Russian victory over Napoleon. In 1931, the original church had been dynamited by the communists who had planned to replace it with the world’s tallest building, topped by a gigantic statue of Lenin, which would house the worldwide headquarters of communism. The building was never completed, and instead the world’s largest outdoor swimming pool was built on the site. After the demise of the Soviet regime, the Russian government had agreed to subsidize the reconstruction of the historic church.

On the day following the consecration, the Russian Orthodox Church canonizes 1090 victims of the communist persecution in Russia, including Tsar Nicholas II and his family. Prayers are also said for the most recent Russian tragedy, the sinking of the Russian nuclear submarine *Kursk* in the Barents Sea with 118 crew members on board.

This same weekend also marks the largest event of the Millennium celebrations in Rome. Over two million young people, gathered in Rome for World Youth Day, join the Pope for a prayer vigil on Saturday night and for Mass on Sunday morning. At his weekly audience on the following Wednesday, the Pope refers to the World Youth Day celebration as an “unforgettable event.” He also asks prayers for the 118 men who died on the submarine *Kursk*.

**August 27, 2000**

Although the communists had never completed their plans to construct the world’s tallest structure on the site of the demolished Church of Christ the Savior, they had nevertheless built in 1967 what had then became the world’s tallest structure -- the Ostankino tower in Moscow. One the above date, one week after the consecration of the reconstructed Church of Christ the Savior, the Ostankino tower catches fire and sustains major structural damage.

**September 24-25, 2000**

Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad visits the Holy Shroud in Turin, Italy. The Metropolitan refers to the visit as an emotional moment and states that “the Holy Shroud of Turin is venerated in Russia” and that a “majority of the people believe that it is the authentic shroud.” In Moscow, a Center for the Holy Shroud has been established at the Orthodox Sretensky Monastery, located at the site where the Vladimir Icon of the Mother of God was received by the citizens of Moscow on August 26, 1395.

**October 7-8, 2000**

Over 1,400 bishops join the Holy Father in celebrating the Great Jubilee in Rome. On Saturday evening, the Pope and the bishops recite the rosary before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which had been brought from Portugal for this weekend. Sister Lucia and her sisters in their Coimbra, Portugal convent join the bishops by means of a television link and lead the bishops in the recitation of the fifth decade of the rosary. On Sunday morning, the Pope and the bishops, kneeling before the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, entrust to the Mother of God “our journey through the new millennium.”

**October 26, 2000**

The Holy Father receives in audience Kamil Ishkakov, the mayor of the Russian city of Kazan. The mayor raises the question of whether the beautiful Kazan icon in the papal apartments could be given to the City of Kazan to replace the famous Kazan icon destroyed in 1904.

**November 6, 2000**

In denying rumors that Pope John Paul II would resign in December, Joaquin Navarro-Valls, director of the Vatican Press Office, announces that the Pope will visit Ukraine in June 2001.

**November 10, 2000**

In an ecumenical service at St. Peter’s Basilica, the Pope presents to Catholicos Karekin II, who had succeeded Karekin I as head of the Armenian Apostolic Church, a relic of St. Gregory the Illuminator. The seventeenth centenary of the conversion of Armenia to Christianity through the ministry of St. Gregory will be celebrated in 2001. On the evening before the service, the Catholicos had invited the Pope to visit Armenia for that celebration.

**January 14, 2001**

Although the Moscow Patriarchate does not accept the Vatican’s gift of St. Basil’s Church in Rome, it does decide to build a church approximately one kilometer from the Vatican. The new church will be dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria. The Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov is present for the laying of the foundation stone on the above date and one day later meets with the Pope.

**January 24, 2001**

Costis Stephanopoulos, the President of Greece, visits the Pope at the Vatican and formally invites the Pope to visit Greece.

**February 21, 2001**

At a consistory held on this date, the Holy Father appoints 44 new cardinals, the largest number appointed at one time in the history of the Church. Two of the cardinals have their sees in Lviv, Ukraine – Lubomyr Husar, major archbishop of the Byzantine-rite Ukrainian Catholic Church, and Marian Jaworski, archbishop of the Latin-rite Church in Lviv. In announcing these two appointments, the Pope had expressed his desire to honor these two Churches which had borne witness to the faith amid great suffering and persecution.

The Pope had also disclosed that he had secretly made Jaworski a cardinal, *in pectore*, in 1998. As a priest, Jaworski had been a long-time friend of Wojtyla in Krakow. When Wojtyla had been called to Rome in June 1967 to receive his cardinal’s hat, Jaworski had substituted for Wojtyla on a previously scheduled visit to Olsztyn, Poland. While substituting for Wojtyla, Jaworski had been involved in a train accident which resulted in the amputation of his left hand. While Wojtyla’s election as pope coincided with Deskur’s stroke, his appointment as cardinal had coincided with Jaworski’s tragic accident. After becoming pope, Wojtyla had remarked to a close friend, Professor Stefan Swiezawski, that the most important events in his priestly life had been tied to great suffering by his closest friends. As did Deskur, Jaworski now receives the cardinal’s biretta – the same honor Wojtyla had received when Jaworski lost his hand.

**April 26, 2001**

On the fifteenth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the Pope receives a group of children affected by Chernobyl and also receives a boys’ choir from Kiev. On the same day in Moscow, a memorial service is held for the victims of Chernobyl at the Orthodox Danilov Monastery before the Pochaev icon, a famous Ukrainian icon of the Mother of God.

**May 4, 2001**

Following the footsteps of St. Paul, the Pope arrives in Athens on the beginning of a pilgrimage to Greece, Syria, and Malta. At the urging of Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens, the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church of Greece had stated that it would welcome the Pope’s pilgrimage to Greece. However, in the weeks before the Pope’s arrival, there had been protests against the Pope’s visit by various Orthodox groups including the monks of Mt. Athos.

In spite of the concern about more protests, Athens is quiet during the Pope’s visit. Shortly after the Pope’s arrival, he meets with Archbishop Christodoulos and the members of the Holy Synod. After hearing an address by Christodoulos sharply attacking the actions of the Christian West over the centuries, the Pope issues an historic apology – “For all the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by actions or omissions against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of him.” The Pope also expresses “deep regret” over the “disastrous sack” of Constantinople by the Crusaders. The apology is greeted by spontaneous applause by members of the Synod, and Christodoulos later embraces the Pope.

After the meeting with the Synod, the Pope and Archbishop Christodoulos meet at the Areopagus, site of St. Paul’s famous discourse near the Acropolis, and issue a common declaration. There is then a final meeting at the apostolic nunciature. Although the Orthodox had carefully avoided any forms of common prayer in the program of the papal visit, the Pope spontaneously requests the Archbishop to pray with him the Our Father. The Archbishop willingly agrees, and all present join in the recitation of the prayer.

To the press, Archbishop Christodoulos later assesses the papal visit as positive and states that the “Pope was very kind to us.” Public opinion polls show that a majority of Greeks were favorably impressed by the visit. On May 5, Christodoulos departs Athens for Moscow on a previously scheduled visit to the Moscow Patriarchate. On the same day, the Pope departs Athens for Damascus, where he is enthusiastically received by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignace IV Hazim.

**May 6, 2001**

The Italian Catholic weekly, *Famiglia Cristiana*, carries an interview of Vasily Sirotenko, an 85-year old resident of Armavir, Russia, who reports that he had received birthday greetings in March from the Pope. In 1945, Sirotenko had been a major in the Soviet army which had occupied Krakow. Sirotenko had previously been a professor of medieval history, and Wojtyla as a seminarian had assisted Sirotenko in translating the Latin in certain historic texts found in Krakow. In the interview, Sirotenko claims that he had saved the young seminarian by striking his name from a Soviet order directing his deportation to the Soviet Union.

**June 23-27, 2001**

On the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Pope John Paul II arrives in Kiev, Ukraine. At the welcoming ceremony at Boryspil Airport, the Holy Father refers to two of his predecessors, Popes St. Clement and St. Martin, who had been deported to the Crimea and martyred there. Referring to his own pilgrimage, the Pope states, “I come as a brother in the faith to embrace all the Christians who, amid the severest of tribulations, have persevered in their fidelity to Christ.”

Appealing to the Orthodox of Ukraine, the Pope requests, “As we ask forgiveness for the errors committed in both the distant and recent past, let us in turn offer forgiveness for the wrongs endured.” He emphasizes, “I have not come here with the intention of proselytizing but to bear witness to Christ together with all Christians.”

The Pope remembers the “harsh and exhausting trials” which the Ukrainian people have endured including the wars and famines of the last century. Referring to the tragedy of Chernobyl as an “apocalyptic event,” the Pope notes the coincidence that “it was precisely at that moment that the definitive change for the better began” through a “re-awakening” of the Ukrainian people.

On the next day, the feast of St. John the Baptist, the Pope celebrates Mass at Kiev. At the conclusion of the Mass, the Holy Father acknowledges that Mary’s “protection has accompanied every step of the Christian community in Ukraine ever since the Baptism of Rus in 988.” He entrusts his pastoral visit to her and prays that she may “hasten the steps of all Christians to full communion.” Making reference to Christ’s words, “Ut omnes unum sint,” the Pope adds, “May this take place *per Mariam*, through Mary, Mother of all believers, Mother of unity.”

Although the Pope’s visit to Kiev is accompanied by relatively small crowds, he is greeted by very large crowds when he travels to Lviv in Western Ukraine. Approximately one million people attend a Divine Liturgy at which the Pope beatifies 27 martyrs of the Byzantine-rite Ukrainian Catholic Church and a foundress of a religious congregation of that Church. Quoting the words of Cardinal Slipyj, the Pope in his homily refers to Western Ukraine, the land of these martyrs, as covered “with mountains of corpses and rivers of blood.” Referring also to the twentieth century martyrs of other Christian confessions, the Pope stresses their “joint martyrdom is a pressing call for reconciliation and unity.” He adds that the “ecumenism of the martyrs” shows the path of unity. At the beginning of the liturgy, Cardinal Husar reminded the vast crowd that in contrast to its martyrs, some “sons and daughters of our Church deliberately harmed their neighbors and countrymen.” For this he asked pardon.

**August 19, 2001**

This tenth anniversary of the abortive 1991 coup is observed with much commentary by the Russian media. However, Putin, who was a member of the KGB in 1991, makes no comment on the anniversary but spends the time of the anniversary on vacation in northwest Russia. Four days of this vacation are devoted to visits to monasteries and churches. Referring to these visits, he comments to the press that “the choice was not accidental.”

On August 17, Putin visits the Valaam Monastery, located on an island in Lake Lagoda, northeast of St. Petersburg. It was at Valaam that Patriarch Alexy, as a ten-year-old boy, had religious experiences that would greatly affect his life. On August 21, Putin visits the monastery on Lake Valdai dedicated to the Iveron icon of the Mother of God. On August 20, he meets Patriarch Alexy at the Solovetsky Monastery, located in an archipelago in the White Sea near the Arctic Circle. During the 1920s, this famous monastery was converted into a gulag where thousands of Orthodox clergy as well as many Catholic priests were killed. The Solovetsky Monastery is dedicated to the Transfiguration, and it was on the feast of the Transfiguration that the 1991 coup began.

Putin talks to reporters at the Solovetsky Monastery. Referring to the historic role played by Christianity in the formation of the Russian state, he remarks that “it is very important, useful and timely to return to these sources in our search for the moral foundations of our life.” He stresses that these moral values include “the simple truth” that “all peoples are equal before God.”

**August 26-28, 2001**

On August 28, the feast of the Assumption on the Orthodox Julian calendar, the 950th anniversary of the founding of the Monastery of the Caves in celebrated in Kiev by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. One of the guests for the celebration is Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens. Archbishop Christodoulos celebrates the Divine Liturgy at the Monastery on Sunday, August 26, which is also the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa. He brings with him, for a 12-day period of veneration at the Monastery, the famous relic of the Apostle St. Andrew from the cathedral in Patras, Greece. Thousands of Orthodox wait in long lines for an opportunity to venerate the holy relic.

This famous relic, believed to be the head of St. Andrew, had previously been venerated for over 500 years in St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. In 1964, during the Second Vatican Council, the relic was returned to Patras, the site of the crucifixion of St. Andrew, as a gift from the Roman Catholic Church to the Greek Orthodox Church. Although the Pope had been prevented from visiting the Monastery of the Caves by picketing Orthodox believers, this relic, a symbol of the love of Catholics for the Orthodox, is venerated at the Monastery two months later.

**September 22-27, 2001**

Eleven days after the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Pope John Paul II arrives in Kazakhstan in spite of concerns for his safety. At the outdoor Mass in the capital city of Astana, he celebrates the liturgy in Russian. After the Mass, he issues an urgent appeal for peace: “We must not let what happened lead to a deepening of divisions. Religion must never be used as a reason for conflict.”

The Pope then travels to Armenia, the first nation in the world to consider itself Christian, for the celebration of the 1700th anniversary of the proclamation of Christianity as the religion of that country. He is graciously received by Catholicos Karekin II, who accompanies the Pope throughout his visit and who has the Pope as his houseguest at his own personal residence. The Pope celebrates Mass at the Armenian Apostolic Church’s “great outdoor altar,” located at the sacred site where St. Gregory the Illuminator had a vision of Christ. The Pope comments on the warm relations between the members of the Armenian Apostolic and Catholic Churches. Later that day, the Pope urges: “Never again Christians against Christians, never again Church against Church!”

The day before the Pope’s arrival in Armenia, Patriarch Alexy had been the houseguest of the Catholicos. The preceding Sunday, the Patriarch had attended the dedication of the new Cathedral of St. Gregory in Yerevan. This cathedral contains the relics of St. Gregory, given by the Pope to the Catholicos the previous year.

**October 22, 2001**

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, Ignace IV Hazim, visits the Pope at the Vatican to thank the Pope for his recent visit to Damascus. The Pope refers to the Patriarch as “one of the prime movers in the endeavor to bring about a *rapprochement* between the East and the West.” In comments to the press after the meeting, the Patriarch describes the Pope as “one of the greatest men of the 20th century.” He adds, “Both he and I have spent all our lives for the cause of unity.”

**January 1, 2002**

With the blessing of Patriarch Alexy, the Moscow girls’ choir *Iubileum* sings at the Pope’s Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica on the feast of the Mother of God. In the evening, the choir gives a private concert for the Pope in the Redemptoris Mater Chapel. Speaking to the choir in Russian at the end of the concert, the Pope states that he feels “very close to your culture, especially its religious aspects.” He asks the choir to convey to Patriarch Alexy his “brotherly greetings” for the Christmas season.

**January 14, 2002**

Shortly before a state visit to Poland, Putin is interviewed by the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Referring to John Paul II, Putin states that “we even have a feeling of pride that a member of the Slavic peoples has become the Pope.” With respect to a visit by the Pope to Russia, Putin remarks: “I am ready to invite him at any minute. But the Pope himself wants, if he is to come to Moscow, that this would be a full-fledged visit involving full-fledged relations with the Russian Orthodox Church. That, regrettably, does not depend on me.”

**January 24, 2002**

In response to the terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, Pope John Paul II invites representatives of the world’s great religions to observe a Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi, Italy. Those accepting the invitation include representatives of twelve Orthodox Churches including Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Patriarch Ignace IV Hazim of Antioch, and Archbishop Anastasios of Albania. The Moscow Patriarchate is represented by Metropolitan Pitirim and Bishops Hilarion and Innocent.

On the following day, the Pope meets with Metropolitan Pitirim and Bishop Hilarion. During the meeting, the Pope expresses the wish to meet with Patriarch Alexy in order to present to the Patriarch as a gift the Kazan icon venerated by the Pope in his apartment. Bishop Hilarion replies that the Patriarch is ready in principle to meet the Pope provided that certain basis problems between the Vatican and the Moscow Patriarchate are first resolved.

**February 11, 2002**

The Vatican announces that the four Catholic apostolic administrations in the Russian Federation have become dioceses. Although Catholic dioceses are normally given the name of cities, the Catholic dioceses in Russia are given the names of their cathedral churches instead. Thus, the diocese for Northern European Russia is named after the Mother of God. The Vatican also makes Archbishop Kondrusiewicz a metropolitan archbishop responsible for an ecclesiastical province consisting of the four Russian dioceses.

The next day, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church issues a strong statement condemning the Vatican’s actions. However, the statement also makes the following appeal for common action: “Nevertheless, we continue to remind the Vatican that at a time when the confused world expects Orthodox and Catholics to take common public action, we should be working together rather than be at enmity. We still have good relations with dioceses, parishes and monasteries of the Catholic Church and cooperation with Catholic humanitarian organizations and educational institutions. These examples make it possible to hope that, whatever difficulties were provoked by the Vatican’s mistaken policy towards the Russian Orthodox Church, relations between Orthodox and Catholics will develop to become an important factor in the preservation of Christian values in the life of Europe and the world.”

**February 25, 2002**

For the feast day of St. Alexy of Moscow, which is also a feast day of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God, Pope John Paul II sends a telegram to Patriarch Alexy congratulating him on his saint’s name day. In the telegram, the Pope states, “I ask the Lord to guide us beyond the difficulties we are experiencing.”

**March 2, 2002**

As is customary, the Pope leads the Fatima devotions of the recitation of the rosary on the first Saturday of the month. However, in recognition of the first European University Day organized by university chaplains, the Pope’s recitation of the rosary on this first Saturday is linked by television with students in Valencia, Vienna, Strasbourg, Budapest, Athens, and Moscow. At the conclusion of the rosary, the Pope sends his greetings to the students in Italian, French, German, Russian, and Spanish. When the Pope begins to speak in Russian, he is interrupted by four minutes of applause from the students at Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Moscow. While applauding, the students in Moscow chant, “We are waiting in Moscow.”

In reciting the rosary, the Pope prays before an image of Our Lady of Loreto, a statue of the Mother of God venerated at the famous Marian shrine of Loreto, near Rome. By coincidence, an icon with an image of Our Lady of Loreto is often used by Orthodox university students in Russia to pray for good results on their examinations. In Russian, students give this icon of Our Lady of Loreto the title, “Increase of Mind.”

**March 8-13, 2002**

Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens sends a high-level delegation of the Church of Greece to meet with Vatican officials on pastoral issues of common concern relating to the European Union. In a meeting with the Pope, Metropolitan Panteleimon, the leader of the delegation, refers to this first visit to the Vatican by an official delegation of the Church of Greece as “momentous” and as an important step in a “new journey of love, collaboration and unity.” He also refers to the Pope’s visit to Athens as a “truly blessed” event that “opened new horizons and made more cordial the relations between our two apostolic Churches.”

**March 29, 2002**

On this Good Friday, the meditations for the Holy Father’s stations of the cross at the Colosseum are written by 14 journalists accredited to the Press Office of the Holy See. The meditations for the Second Station are written by the Russian journalist Alexei Bukalov of Itar-Tass. His meditation includes the petition, “Lord Jesus, in our divisions, the bitter fruit of sin, show us the way to unity….”

**May 22-26, 2002**

Pope John Paul II, visibly tired and weak, visits Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. In Azerbaijan he meets with the tiny Catholic community of 120. He is also greeted by various church leaders including the Russian Orthodox bishop of Baku, Alexander. The Pope thanks the Orthodox of Baku for the kindness that they had shown to Catholics during the communist persecutions when the Catholics had lost their churches and priests in Azerbaijan.

In Bulgaria, he meets with Patriarch Maxim on May 24, the Orthodox feast day of Saints Cyril and Methodius. The Pope offers to the Bulgarian Orthodox Church a church for its use in Rome and also presents to the Patriarch a relic of St. Dasius, a Roman soldier who was martyred in Bulgaria. In Plovdiv, the Pope beatifies three Catholic priests who were executed by the communists in 1952. The Mass is unexpectedly attended by Orthodox Metropolitan Arsenij of Plovdiv. Referring to the Orthodox who were also martyred by the communists, the Pope declares that “the most convincing form of ecumenism is the ecumenism of the saints and of the martyrs.”

**June 16, 2002**

The Pope canonizes Padre Pio before a huge crowd in St. Peter’s Square. In his homily, the Pope refers to his personal experience of having gone to confession to Padre Pio.

**August 16-19, 2002**

The Pope travels to Poland to dedicate the Shrine of Divine Mercy, located at the convent where St. Faustina had died. During the dedication, the Pope states: “May the binding promise of the Lord Jesus be fulfilled: from here there must go forth ‘the spark which will prepare the world for his final coming.’” The Pope also recalled that when he was a youth and walked to work at the Solvay factory, he often came to this convent “with wooden shoes on my feet.” The next day, the Pope, before a crowd of over two million in Krakow’s Blonie Park, beatifies four Poles including the Archbishop of Warsaw, Sigmund Felinski, who had spent twenty years, 1863-83, in exile in Russia. In 2009, Archbishop Felinski will be canonized.

**August 22, 2002**

On the feast of the Queenship of Mary, President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus tells reporters, “I know the Pope’s stances, and I greatly value him as a man who has made extremely positive statements on the developments in my country.” He adds, “I think the day is rather near when I gladly receive here in Belarus the Patriarch of Moscow and the Primate of the Roman Catholic Church.”

**September 8, 2002**

On the feast of Mary’s nativity, the Symphony Orchestra of the Russian State presents a concert for the Pope in the courtyard of Castel Gondolfo.

**October 7-13, 2002**

On the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, the Pope, before a crowd of more than 100,000 pilgrims who had come for the canonization of Josemaria Escriva, welcomes to the Vatican the Orthodox Patriarch of Romania, Teoctist. The two church leaders, who have frequently corresponded since their 1999 meeting in Bucharest, greet each other warmly and embrace. As in Bucharest, there are shouts from the crowd of “unity.” On October 12, the Patriarch participates in the dedication of the Roman church of San Bartolomeo as a memorial to the twentieth century Christian martyrs. On October 13, the 85th anniversary of the Fatima “miracle of the sun,” the Patriarch attends a Papal Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica and actively participates in the Liturgy of the Word and the final blessing. Although noting the many obstacles to unity, the Patriarch emphasizes that “the estrangement and isolation of Christians from one another are not forms to witness to Christ, who prayed that all might be one.”

**October 26, 2002**

Police units storm a theater in Moscow where over 700 persons have been held hostage by terrorists. On the Julian calendar, this occurs on October 13, the feast of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God. The next day, the Pope, during his Angelus address, states, “Today, let us particularly beg the intercession of the Mother of God, so much loved by the Russian people who, in these last few days, have suffered so much.”

**March 31 – April 4, 2003**

During this week, a special commission, organized by the Russian Ministry of Culture, comes to the Vatican and examines the Kazan icon possessed by the Pope. After removing the jeweled riza covering much of the icon, the commission concludes that the icon was probably painted in the 1700s, more than a century after the original icon was discovered in Kazan.

Before the examination of the icon, the commission attends a service in which a hymn is sung before the icon. On April 2, the members of the commission meet the Pope at the conclusion of the Pope’s Wednesday general audience.

In 2001, Natalia Chugreeva, an art historian from the Andrei Rublev Museum in Moscow, wrote an article in *Mir Bozhi* in which she presented evidence indicating that the Pope’s icon is the famous copy of the Kazan icon purchased for the Diveevo Convent by the Convent’s founder Saint Alexandra. The Diveevo Convent was founded by Saint Alexandra after an alleged apparition in which the Mother of God requested that a church in honor of the Kazan icon be built in the village of Diveevo. In the late 1700s, Saint Alexandra obtained a copy of the Kazan icon for the Convent’s church.

Later, the Diveevo Convent becomes associated with Saint Sephafim of Sarov, who acted as a spiritual father for the nuns there. The relics of Saint Seraphim, discovered in 1991 in the Museum of Atheism in St. Petersburg, are now located at the Convent.

**May 18, 2003**

The Italian newspaper *Avvenire* interviews Cardinal Angelo Sodano concerning the Holy Father’s Kazan icon. The Cardinal states: “The image of the Virgin of Kazan is impressive. I often see it when I go to the Holy Father’s office; it is precisely in front of the desk of the Pope, who venerates it with particular devotion.”

**July 31 – August 1, 2003**

Patriarch Alexy travels to the Diveevo Convent to celebrate the centennial of the canonization of Saint Seraphim. Although the Patriarch was physically weak during services at Sarov the previous day, he gains strength at Diveevo. During the months after the Patriarch’s visit to Diveevo, his health is markedly improved.

**October 16, 2003**

Pope John Paul II celebrates the 25th anniversary of his pontificate. On this occasion, Patriarch Alexy sends a message to the Pope conveying his “heartfelt fraternal greeting” and referring to the Pope as “a selfless Christian, pastor, bishop and primate.”

**November 4-5, 2003**

Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives in Rome on November 4, the feast of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God. The feast day of the Kazan icon is also the feast of St. Charles Borromeo and the Pope’s saint’s name day. Although Patriarch Alexy’s saint’s name day is on a feast of the Iveron icon, the Pope’s saint’s name day is on a feast of the Kazan icon.

On November 5, Putin meets with the Pope at the Vatican. At the beginning of the meeting, the Pope requests that his Kazan icon be present in the room for the entire meeting. When the icon is brought into the room, it is blessed and kissed by the Pope and then kissed by Putin. During the meeting, the Pope thanks Putin for everything he was personally doing to bring the Russian Orthodox and Catholic Churches closer together.

**February 17-22, 2004**

A Vatican delegation led by Cardinal Kasper, the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, visits Moscow. On arriving in Moscow, Cardinal Kasper tells reporters that he hopes to “open a new page, a page of friendship” with the Russian Orthodox Church. During a homily at the Catholic cathedral on February 18, the cardinal acknowledges the difficulty of the task but says: “even little steps will move us forward: a kind greeting, a gesture of friendship, a smiling face, a prayer asking forgiveness if we have made a mistake, helping another in need --- all of these things can make miracles.” The delegation meets with Metropolitan Kirill on February 19, and as a result, both sides “agreed that for the solution of specific issues in relations between the Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches a joint working group should be set up, composed of representatives of both Churches who will examine these questions and make proposals for their solution.”

On February 22, the Vatican delegation meets with Patriarch Alexy. This day is also the Catholic feast of the Chair of Peter. During the meeting, Cardinal Kasper gives the Patriarch a letter from the Pope congratulating the Patriarch on his 75th birthday.

**June 18, 2004**

A formal agreement of cooperation between the Russian Air Force and the Moscow Patriarchate is signed by General Vladimir Mikhailov, the commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force. During the signing ceremony, Father Konstantin Tatarintsev, the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate to the Russian Air Force, presents to General Mikhailov a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa. They recognize the Czestochowa icon, under the title “Invincible Victory,” as the patroness of the Russian Air Force.

**June 29 – July 1, 2004**

To commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the meeting of Pope Paul VI and Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras in Jerusalem, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew celebrates the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul at the Vatican with Pope John Paul II. Comparing this meeting with his 1995 and 2002 meetings with Pope John Paul II, the Ecumenical Patriarch describes this meeting as the most moving and fraternal. The Ecumenical Patriarch invites the Pope to visit him in Istanbul.

**August 25–28, 2004**

Unable to obtain the consent of the Moscow Patriarchate for a papal trip to Russia, Pope John Paul II asks Cardinal Kasper to travel to Moscow and give to Patriarch Alexy the Kazan icon that had been in the papal apartments for the past eleven years. In a formal ceremony on August 25 to hand over the icon to Cardinal Kasper, the Pope states that the icon “has accompanied my daily service to the Church with its motherly gaze.” He adds, “How often since that day [in 1993] have I called on the Mother of God of Kazan, asking her to protect and guide the Russian people who venerate her, and to hasten the moment when all disciples of her Son, recognizing one another as brothers and sisters, will be able to fully restore the compromised unity.”

The next day, the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa, the icon is placed in St. Peter’s Basilica for veneration by the faithful. On August 28, which is the feast of the Assumption on the Russian Orthodox calendar, the Holy Father’s Kazan icon is given by Cardinal Kasper to Patriarch Alexy at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy in the Assumption Cathedral in the Moscow Kremlin. Cardinal Kasper subsequently meets with the Patriarch. Cardinal Kasper later remarks that his reception by the Patriarch at this meeting was much warmer than at their meeting in February. After the Vatican delegation leaves, the icon is placed in the Patriarch’s personal chapel. Although the Patriarch was hospitalized in the month preceding the giving of the icon, his health during the next four years will be much improved.

A representative of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity will subsequently tell a journalist that the giving of the icon to the Patriarch was the gesture that “broke the ice” in the previous chilly relations between the Vatican and the Moscow Patriarchate. The next few years will witness a trend of increasingly positive relations between the two churches.

**October 15, 2004**

The Holy Father celebrates the 26th anniversary of his pontificate by attending a concert of Russian songs and dances performed in his honor by the Russian Army’s Alexandrov Academy. It will be the last such anniversary that he will celebrate before his death. In his remarks at the end of the concert, the Holy Father invokes on all “the protection of the Mother of God of Kazan, whose icon was recently returned to Russia, a Land particularly dear to me.”

**November 27, 2004**

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew travels to the Vatican for a second time in 2004 and receives from Pope John Paul II important relics of St. John Chrysostom and of St. Gregory Nazianzen, two great Eastern fathers of the Church. The Pope describes this as the “acceptable time” to pray for their intercession “so that the Lord will hasten the arrival of the moment when we can live in full communion together.” In a subsequent interview with Vatican Radio, the Ecumenical Patriarch, referring to his reception of these relics, states: “I consider this event as the most important one in my patriarchal service in the last 13 years.”

**December 30, 2004**

Putin signs a law abolishing the November 7 holiday which had originally been established by the communists to commemorate the Bolshevik Revolution. This holiday had been the most important day on the communist calendar and had been celebrated during the communist era by massive military parades in Red Square. In its place, a new public holiday, “People’s Unity Day,” is created. The new holiday, which will be observed on November 4 each year, commemorates the 1612 liberation of Moscow from the Poles and the restoration of Russian sovereignty.

November 4 has long been recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church as an important Marian feast honoring the role of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God in the 1612 liberation of Moscow. In a very real sense, the communists’ Revolution Day is now replaced by a Marian feast day.

**February 13, 2005**

Sister Lucia, the sole survivor of the Fatima apparitions, dies at the age of 97 at the Carmelite Convent in Coimbra, Portugal. In a letter to the bishop of Coimbra, the Pope states, “I recall with emotion my several meetings with her and the bonds of our spiritual friendship that grew stronger with time.” Her death occurs on the 13th of the month, as did the dates of the Fatima apparitions.

**February 1 – April 1, 2005**

During the days preceding the death of Sister Lucia, the Pope’s health also precipitously declines. From February 1-10, he is hospitalized for a severe respiratory problem. He is hospitalized again from February 24 to March 15, and a tracheotomy is performed. For the first time in his pontificate, he is unable to participate in the Holy Week services at the Vatican. On Easter morning, March 27, and on the morning of March 30, the sufferings of the Pope are very visible to the public – the Pope stands silently at his window overlooking St. Peter’s Square for several minutes, unable to speak a word or to give a blessing to the pilgrims below.

Prayers of support are received from the Orthodox world. On March 2, diplomatic representatives to the Holy See from Orthodox countries present an icon of the Mother of God to the Pope and express their hope for his rapid recovery. On the same day, Patriarch Alexy sends to the Pope a letter stating, “I pray and wish Your Holiness speedy recovery after your operation.” On March 6, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Patriarch Teoctist of Romania pray together for the health of the Pope at the altar of the church of St. Spiridon in Bucharest.

**April 2, 2005**

On the first Saturday of the month, Pope John Paul II dies at 9:37 p.m. in his apartment while thousands below his apartment window in St. Peter’s Square are praying the rosary for him. His death marks the end of the third longest pontificate in the history of the Church. He dies on the vigil of the feast of Divine Mercy, a feast desired by Jesus in his apparitions to St. Faustina and instituted by Pope John Paul II in April 2000. During the hour before the Pope’s death, the Mass for Divine Mercy Sunday is celebrated in the Pope’s bedroom by his personal secretary Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz and by this close friend Cardinal Marian Jaworski from Ukraine.

According to Archbishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, the Pope had taken a final look at an image of Our Lady of Czestochowa by his bed and then had closed his eyes for the last time. The last letter sent by the Holy Father before his death is an April 1 letter to the Jasna Gora shrine in Czestochowa. The letter commemorates the 350th anniversary of the victory of the monks at Jasna Gora over the Swedish siege of the monastery. Included with the letter is a gift of new gold crowns for the Black Madonna and the Christ Child. The letter ends with the words “Totus tuus.”

**April 3-8, 2005**

The death of Pope John Paul II evokes a great outpouring of praise and sorrow throughout the world. More than three million pilgrims converge on Rome, and approximately 1.4 million people wait in line for an average of 13 hours to pass by the Pope’s bier. The Pope’s funeral on April 8 is attended by perhaps the greatest gathering of world political and religious leaders ever to attend a funeral. In a moving homily, Cardinal Ratzinger states, “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.” When the pall bearers raise the Pope’s coffin for the last public viewing before carrying it into St. Peter’s Basilica for burial, the crowd packed in St. Peter’s Square bursts into prolonged applause and cheering.

The funeral is attended by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Metropolitan Kirill of the Moscow Patriarchate, and other high-ranking Orthodox prelates. Although the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece had denied permission for Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens to come to Rome in 2004, permission is now granted for this visit to Rome. During the funeral Mass, the gospel is read both in Latin and Greek. At the conclusion of the Mass, a special prayer service is conducted in Greek by prelates of the Eastern Catholic rites.

**April 19, 2005**

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger is elected the 265th Pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church and chooses the name Benedict XVI. His election is well-received by the Orthodox Churches. Patriarch Alexy refers to him as “an authoritative hierarch, combining profound knowledge, a strong mind and fearless testimonial about Christian values.” In his homily at the Installation Mass, the new Pope makes an appeal for Christian unity and prays “help us to be servants of unity.”

On April 25, the day following the Installation Mass, Metropolitan Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church meets with Pope Benedict. The Metropolitan stresses the need for the two churches to cooperate in order to defend common Christian values in present-day Europe. Later, the Pope would state with respect to this visit by Kirill: “We immediately got along.  He has such a joy about him, such a simple faith – the simplicity of the Russian soul, you might say – but also its determination and warmth.  So we understood each other well.”

On April 19, Russian Orthodox Bishop Hilarion of Vienna and Austria had proposed a formal “European Catholic – Orthodox Alliance,” so that the Catholic and Orthodox Churches could “speak with one voice” on all major social and ethical issues facing Europe. A few weeks later, in early May, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew invites Pope Benedict to visit Turkey.

On his first visit outside of Rome as pope, Pope Benedict visits Bari, Italy on May 29. There the Pope states: “Precisely here in Bari, fortunate Bari, a city that preserves the bones of St Nicholas, a land of encounter and dialogue with our Christian brethren of the East, I would like to reaffirm my desire to assume as a fundamental commitment working with all my might for the re-establishment of the full and visible unity of all Christ's followers.”

**June 29-30, 2005**

Metropolitan John of Pergamon leads a delegation of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to the Vatican to celebrate the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul with Pope Benedict. He informs the Pope that all of the Orthodox Churches have now agreed to resume the official international dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches that has been suspended since July 2000. It is subsequently agreed that the next plenary session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches will occur in Belgrade, September 18-25, 2006.

**July 21, 2005**

Patriarch Alexy travels from Moscow to the City of Kazan for the celebration of the millennium of the founding of the City of Kazan and for the 450th anniversary of the founding of the Kazan Orthodox Eparchy. He brings with him the Kazan icon which had been the papal apartments for eleven years and to which the Pope John Paul II had become devoted. On July 21, the feast of the appearance of the Kazan icon, the Patriarch celebrates Divine Liturgy at the Annunciation Cathedral in the Kazan Kremlin. A religious procession of approximately 16,000 believers then accompanies the icon to the Exaltation of the Cross Church, located by the site where the original Kazan icon was discovered in 1579.

The recently restored Exaltation of the Cross Church becomes the new home for the beautiful Kazan icon from the Pope’s study. The icon becomes the replacement for the famous Kazan icon that was venerated for centuries in Kazan but was destroyed in 1904. The site of the Marian apparition, now with the icon from the Pope, again becomes a Marian shrine visited by pilgrims. In August 2005, Putin visits Kazan and during the visit venerates the icon.

The Kazan shrine has a close relationship to Fatima. At Kazan, the Mother of God appeared to a ten year old girl, Matrona, who later became a nun. At Fatima, she appeared to another ten year old girl, Lucia, who also became a nun. The icon brought by the Patriarch to Kazan had been venerated for many years at Fatima.

In stressing that the hope of Europe lies in the unifying effect of Christianity, Pope John Paul II often referred to Europe as extending “from the Atlantic to the Urals.” Fatima is at the far western extremity of Europe near the Atlantic, while Kazan is at the far eastern extremity of Europe near the Ural Mountains. Europe is enclosed by and extends between these two Marian shrines, one shrine being Orthodox and the other Catholic.

**October 29, 2005**

Pope John Paul II had a love for the small Marian shrine of Mentorella, located 55 kilometers from Rome. After becoming pope, his first visit outside of Rome was a private pilgrimage to Mentorella on October 29, 1978. On the 27th anniversary of this visit, October 29, 2005, Pope Benedict makes an unannounced and private visit to Mentorella where he says Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The visit is so sudden that the rector of the shrine, Father Adam Otrebski, had no advanced notice of the visit except for a telephone call from the Vatican on the morning of the visit.

**May 3-5, 2006**

A conference which is entitled “Give a Soul to Europe” and which is jointly sponsored by the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Culture and the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Church Relations is held in Vienna. The conference is very successful. There is almost complete unanimity between the Catholic and the Russian Orthodox sides, and the participants approve a joint statement relating to the great need for traditional moral principles in contemporary Europe. The first day of the conference occurs on the feast day of Mary, Queen of Poland.

**May 13, 2006**

This day marks the 25th anniversary of the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II. At St. Peter’s in Rome, the anniversary is observed by a Mass and a procession with the statue of Our Lady of Fatima, which has been specially brought from Fatima to the Vatican for this anniversary. In his Regina Caeli address the next day, Pope Benedict states: “John Paul II felt that he was saved miraculously from death by the intervention of ‘a maternal hand’ – as he himself said – and his entire Pontificate was marked by what the Virgin had foretold at Fatima.”

On the same date, over 400,000 pilgrims attend a Mass offered at the Fatima shrine. The principal celebrant at the Mass is Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwicz of Krakow, the former personal secretary of Pope John Paul II.

Also on that date, Bishop John Magee, who had been a personal secretary to three different popes, delivers a commencement address at the Franciscan University of Steubenville in the United States. He recounts the following events that began when he was personal secretary to Pope John Paul I:

Two nights before he died, Pope John Paul I returned to his much frequented discourse as to why the cardinals had elected him. Despite my protestations that the Holy Spirit does not make mistakes, the Holy Father said: “There was one sitting in front of me. He should have been elected.” Then he added: “But he will come, for I am going.” Within forty-eight hours he was dead. He never told me who was sitting in front of him at the conclave. Only four years later, after I had served Pope John Paul II as secretary for four years, he then appointed me his Master of Pontifical Liturgical Ceremonies. On my first day in my new office, I had occasion to visit the Archives, and I discovered the seating plan for the two conclaves of 1978. I selected that of the first conclave, searched for the seating position of Cardinal Albino Luciani [who was elected Pope and chose the name John Paul I] and right in front of him was the seating position of Cardinal Karol Wojtyla.

**May 18, 2006**

Metropolitan Kirill travels to Rome to bless the Moscow Patriarchate’s new church, dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, located on the grounds of the Russian Embassy not far from St. Peter’s Basilica. A relic of St. Catherine of Alexandria is donated by the Catholic Church to this new Russian Orthodox church.

On the above date, which is the birthday of Pope John Paul II, Metropolitan Kirill visits the ancient Catholic church of St. Clement and venerates the relics of St. Cyril, the saint whose name the Metropolitan had adopted. Later on the same day, Metropolitan Kirill has a meeting with Pope Benedict. In a subsequent press conference, Metropolitan Kirill states: “I had an opportunity to meet with the pope, and we had a very substantial conversation about the prospects for the development of our relations. The pope’s position coincides with the position of our patriarch; the time has come for our churches to work together, primarily to preserve Christianity in Europe.”

**May 25-28, 2006**

Pope Benedict makes a pilgrimage to Poland in memory of his predecessor, Pope John Paul II. Visiting “places particularly dear to the great John Paul II,” Pope Benedict visits the Jasna Gora shrine at Czestochowa on the afternoon of May 26. Before meeting with religious, seminarians, and representatives of ecclesial movements gathered at the shrine, Pope Benedict prays before the Black Madonna and presents to her a golden rose. It is the second time that the shrine has been given a golden rose, a symbol of great papal favor.

On the morning of May 28, Pope Benedict celebrates Mass in Krakow’s Blonie Park before a crowd of over one million. In his homily, Pope Benedict refers to Poland as “a place of special witness to faith in Jesus Christ” and appeals to the Polish people “to share with the other peoples of Europe and the world the treasure of your faith.” At the invitation of Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwicz, Father Igor Vyzhanov from the Moscow Patriarchate attends the Mass. After the Mass, Father Igor Vyzhanov meets with Pope Benedict and extends to him greetings from Patriarch Alexy.

**July 3-5, 2006**

A World Summit of Religious Leaders, organized by the Interreligious Council of Russia, is held in Moscow. A high-ranking Catholic delegation, including five cardinals, attends. The participants in the Summit issue a declaration stressing the key role of religion in promoting peace and dialogue between civilizations. President Putin subsequently reads the declaration to the leaders of the G8 nations meeting in St. Petersburg, Russia.

July 6, the day following the religious summit, is a feast day of the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God. On the feast day, Divine Liturgy is celebrated in the small church of St. Nicholas, which contains the original Vladimir icon and which is attached to the famous Tretyakov Museum in Moscow. The music used in the Divine Liturgy was composed by Orthodox Bishop Hilarion of Vienna. It is the first Liturgy in which this composition by Bishop Hilarion is sung. Specially invited guests at the Liturgy include Cardinals Kasper, McCarrick, and Etchegaray. After the Liturgy, Bishop Hilarion conducts a prayer service before the original Vladimir icon.

**September 18-25, 2006**

The Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches holds its plenary meeting in Belgrade, Serbia. The leader of the Russian Orthodox delegation is Bishop Hilarion. The Commission is graciously received by Serbian Patriarch Pavle and by the president of Serbia, Boris Tadic. According to the official communiqué, the meeting of the Commission “was marked by a spirit of friendship and trustful collaboration.” A subsequent meeting is set for 2007 in Ravenna, Italy.

**November 28 – December 1, 2006**

Pope Benedict travels to Turkey for a visit of great importance to Catholic relations with the Orthodox and also with Moslems. On the feast of St. Andrew, the Pope is present at the Divine Liturgy celebrated by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Patriarchal Cathedral of St. George in Istanbul. After the Liturgy, the Patriarch and the Pope bless the crowd from a nearby balcony, and then the Patriarch grasps the hand of the Pope and holds it up before the applauding crowd.

In an address to the Roman Curia on December 22, the Pope refers to this meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch. The Pope states: “We felt we were brothers, not only on the basis of words and historical events, but from the depth of the soul; that we were united by the common faith of the Apostles ever in our thoughts and personal feelings.” Later, during a homily on December 31, the Pope expresses his great gratitude to the Mother of God for the special protection that she provided him during his visit to Turkey.

**December 13-16, 2006**

The primate of the Orthodox Church of Greece, Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens, makes an official visit to the Vatican and meets with Pope Benedict. As a gift from the Pope, the Archbishop receives links from the chain that bound St. Paul.

**March 13-14, 2007**

President Putin meets with Pope Benedict for the first time. According to a subsequent Vatican communiqué, the meeting is held in a “very positive atmosphere.” As a gift, Putin gives the Pope an icon of St. Nicholas. On the next day, Putin travels to Bari, Italy, where he visits the Basilica of St. Nicholas. As a result of Putin’s visits to the Vatican and Bari, certain church buildings in Bari are given to the Russian Orthodox Church for the many Russian pilgrims that visit the tomb of St. Nicholas each year.

**May 13, 2007**

The 90th anniversary of the initial apparition of Our Lady to the three shepherd children is celebrated in Fatima. On the same day in Kazan, the Marquise Immacolata Solaro del Borgo, an Italian noblewoman of Rome’s Colonna family, presents to the Kazan Orthodox Eparchy a reliquary containing a fragment of the robe of Our Lady and relics of six saints including St. Nicholas. The Marquise states that the gift is a sign of her “love for Russia and all her people,” and she expresses the hope that the reliquary “can enrich the new Marian sanctuary” being built around the Kazan icon given by Pope John Paul II.

**July 21, 2007**

A delegation from Damascus, Syria visits Kazan to participate in the feast day of the appearance of the Kazan icon. The delegation includes Myrna Nazzour and her husband Nicola. In the Soufanieh neighborhood of Damascus, a small inexpensive reproduction of a Kazan icon, owned by the Nazzours, has exuded pure olive oil at various times since 1982. Myrna herself has reportedly experienced various phenomena, such as olive oil exuding from her hands. The phenomena occur particularly at times when Orthodox and Catholic Easters fall on the same day.

**October 3, 2007**

Patriarch Alexy addresses the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and then visits Paris. In the Notre Dame Cathedral, filled to capacity with over 10,000 believers, the Patriarch and the Catholic Archbishop of Paris venerate the crown of thorns brought by King Louis IX from Byzantium to France in the 13th century. The Patriarch gives to this famous Marian cathedral a copy of the Vladimir icon of the Mother of God, which in subsequent months is displayed for veneration in a prominent location in the cathedral. On October 1, the French newspaper *Le Figaro* published an interview in which the Patriarch stated: “I am convinced that the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church must act together to defend Christian values from an aggressive materialism.”

**October 13-14, 2007**

On this weekend, the 90th anniversary of the “miracle of the sun” is celebrated in Fatima. On the same weekend, the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches concludes its plenary meeting in Ravenna, Italy. The Commission approves a common document on ecclesial communion, conciliarity, and authority in the Church. It also decides that the theme of the next plenary will be the role of the Bishop of Rome in the communion of the Church in the first millennium. On the evening of October 13, the Catholic members of the Commission celebrate the Eucharist at Ravenna’s Cathedral in the presence of the Orthodox members. In a spontaneous and warm gesture, the Catholic faithful in the cathedral enthusiastically applaud the Orthodox members as they recess at the conclusion of the Mass.

The Ravenna meeting is marred by the withdrawal of the Moscow Patriarchate from participation in the plenary due to the presence at the plenary of a delegation from the Estonian Apostolic Church, established by the Ecumenical Patriarchate but not recognized by the Moscow Patriarchate. In a subsequent letter to the Ecumenical Patriarch, Pope Benedict expresses his prayer that these difficulties will soon be resolved so that there will be “full participation” in the next plenary of the Commission.

**December 7, 2007**

Metropolitan Kirill meets again with Pope Benedict at the Vatican. After the meeting, Metropolitan Kirill tells the Vatican newspaper *L’Osservatore Romano* that he is leaving Rome “with a great feeling of hope.”

On the same day that Metropolitan Kirill meets with Pope Benedict, Cardinal Kasper is meeting in Kiev with Metropolitan Vladimir of the Moscow Patriarchate. The Cardinal is graciously received by the Metropolitan and is shown the famous Monastery of the Caves, founded by St. Anthony. This contrasts with the reception given to Pope John Paul II during his June 2001 visit to Kiev. During the Pope’s visit, Metropolitan Vladimir had refused to meet with the Pope, and Orthodox protesters have prevented the Pope from visiting the Monastery of the Caves.

**January 12, 2008**

Patriarch Alexy consecrates the reconstructed main cathedral of the Iveron Monastery located on an island in Lake Valdai. Putin, whose retreat home is also located on the lake, attends the ceremony. At the end of the ceremony, the Patriarch thanks Putin for the help that he has provided in the revival of the Monastery and presents to Putin a copy of the Iveron icon of the Mother of God.

In response Putin remarks that he “represents a state that has done much over the previous decades to undermine the roots of our history and culture, including the spiritual ones; therefore it is too early to thank us for anything.” He adds that he receives the thanks “exclusively as a hope that the state will repay its debt to the Russian Orthodox Church and other traditional denominations and its debt to the Russian people.”

**May 21-30, 2008**

Cardinal Kasper makes a personal pilgrimage to Russia. At the invitation of Metropolitan Kirill, the Cardinal attends the Metropolitan’s saint name’s day celebration in Smolensk on May 24.

On May 27, the Cardinal visits the city of Kazan, where he venerates the copy of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God which had belonged to Pope John Paul II. The Cardinal expresses the hope that the Mother of God of Kazan “will help the people here and in the whole world live in peace.” Kazan, a city where Muslims outnumber Christians, is known for its good relations between Muslims and Christians. Many of the people who come to venerate the Kazan icon are Muslim.

On May 29, Cardinal Kasper is cordially received by Patriarch Alexy at the Patriarch’s residence in Moscow. In the meeting, the Cardinal delivers a letter from Pope Benedict to the Patriarch. One paragraph of the letter refers to Cardinal Kasper’s visit to Kazan and states concerning the icon: “This icon bears a likeness to all the other venerated icons of the Mother of God, and as such offers a powerful sign of the closeness which exists between us. It also offers an opportunity for encounter with Muslims, who show great respect for Mary, the Mother of Jesus.”

During the next five months, four more cardinals make their own personal pilgrimages to Russia: Cardinal Tettamanzi of Milan (Aug. 23 - 30); Cardinal Sodano, dean of the College of Cardinals (Aug. 27- 30); Cardinal Sepe of Naples (Sept. 29 - Oct. 3); and Cardinal Vingt-Trois of Paris (Oct. 26-30). During this same period, Cardinal Bertone visits Belarus (June 18-22), and Cardinal Sandri visits Ukraine (July 10-15). Contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church on all of these visits are very positive. The visit of Cardinal Sepe results in an exchange of letters with warm words between Patriarch Alexy and Pope Benedict. The letter from the Patriarch states: “without a doubt, the principal acting force in Orthodox – Catholic dialogue must be fraternal Christian love.”

**June 28, 2008**

Although the year of St. Paul’s birth is not known with certainty, Pope Benedict decides that a Pauline Year should be observed from June 28, 2008 to June 29, 2009 to celebrate the 2000th anniversary of the birth of St. Paul. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew likewise declares 2008 as the Year of the Apostle Paul for the Orthodox. The Pauline Year is officially opened on the above date at the Roman Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls by the Pope in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch.

**July 25-28, 2008**

The 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus is celebrated in Kiev, Ukraine. The celebration is led by Patriarch Alexy. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and certain other Orthodox primates also attend. Although there were fears by the Moscow Patriarchate that the visit by the Ecumenical Patriarch would be used by him as an occasion to recognize certain schismatic Orthodox groups in Ukraine, this does not happen. Contrary to expectations, the presence of the two Patriarchs in Kiev does not generate conflict, but rather becomes an important first step in reconciling differences between the two patriarchates. After the Divine Liturgy, the two primates meet privately for more than one hour. Patriarch Alexy subsequently tells reporters, “We have agreed that all of the differences in the relations between our two Churches -- and problems can arise in every family -- should be resolved through dialogue.”

**August 29, 2008**

A new church for the Catholic parish in Kazan, Russia is dedicated by Cardinal Angelo Solano. In an unusual gesture by a Muslim-dominated government to the Catholic ChurchChuCChur, the land and much of the funds for the construction of the new church were provided by the city government of Kazan. Also attending the dedication are the mayors of the Marian cities of Czestochowa, Fatima, and Mariazell. Prior to the dedication, the Cardinal visits the Orthodox Exaltation of the Cross Church to venerate the Kazan icon of the Mother of God given by Pope John Paul II. Like the Orthodox church, the Catholic parish in Kazan is also dedicated to the Exaltation of the Cross. Father Diogenes, the pastor of the Catholic parish, expresses the hope that the Catholic parish can provide assistance to Catholic pilgrims coming to Kazan to venerate the Pope’s Kazan icon.

**October 10-12, 2008**

At the invitation of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, primates of the Orthodox Churches gather at the Phanar in Istanbul to celebrate the Year of the Apostle Paul. Patriarch Alexy attends in spite of instructions by his doctors not to make this long trip. The primates celebrate the Divine Liturgy together, and there are additional meetings between the Ecumenical Patriarch and Patriarch Alexy. At the gathering, the primates agree to a common message which addresses important issues facing the world and the Orthodox Churches, including the need to overcome internal conflicts within the Orthodox Church. With respect to solving such conflicts, the message welcomes the proposal of the Ecumenical Patriarch to convene Pan-Orthodox consultations.

**October 18, 2008**

The Catholic Church holds the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the subject, “The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church.” At the invitation of the Holy Father, the Ecumenical Patriarch addresses the bishops in a vesper service held in the Sistine Chapel. It is the first time in history that an Ecumenical Patriarch is given an opportunity to address a synod of bishops of the Roman Catholic Church. The Ecumenical Patriarch refers to it as “an historic event” which manifests “the work of the Holy Spirit leading our Churches to a closer and deeper relationship to each other.” After the Ecumenical Patriarch’s insightful address, which made frequent references to the Church Fathers, the Pope reveals a thought that occurred to him during the Patriarch’s address: “If we have common Fathers, how is it possible for us not to be brothers?”

**December 5, 2008**

Patriarch Alexy dies at the age of 79. During his eighteen years as patriarch, he had guided the Russian Orthodox Church through the period of tremendous growth occurring after the fall of atheistic communism. He had also strengthened the unity of the Church, including the restoration of communion between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia and the Moscow Patriarchate. In a scene reminiscent of the death of Pope John Paul II, thousands of believers wait in long lines for hours to pay their last respects to the Patriarch lying in state in Moscow’s Cathedral of Christ the Savior.

The Patriarch had a great devotion to the Mother of God. It was providential that the last Liturgy of his life, celebrated on the day before he died, was in her honor. It occurred in the Assumption Cathedral of the Kremlin on the feast of the Presentation of Mary in the Temple.

It is also providential that during the final months of the Patriarch’s life, he and the Ecumenical Patriarch had occasion to meet several times and to initiate a process of reconciliation between the two patriarchates. The reduction in tensions between the two patriarchates resulting from these meetings is visible at the funeral service of Patriarch Alexy where the Ecumenical Patriarch is asked to preside at part of the service.

The funeral of Patriarch Alexy is attended by a high-level Vatican delegation including Cardinal Kasper and Cardinal Etchegaray. Cardinal Etchegaray had been a personal friend of Patriarch Alexy for forty years and had been instrumental in arranging the visit of the Patriarch to Paris in 2007. At the close of the Patriarch’s funeral service, the hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church and bishops of other Orthodox churches approach the bier and kiss the deceased Patriarch whose face is covered with a white shroud. The members of the Vatican delegation are greatly touched when Metropolitan Kirill invites them to do the same.

**January 27, 2009**

The Local Council of the Russian Orthodox Church elects Metropolitan Kirill as Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus. The next day, Pope Benedict at his weekly general audience expresses his “joy” at the election of the new patriarch and invokes “the light of the Holy Spirit upon him for the generous service to the Russian Orthodox Church, entrusting him to the special protection of the Mother of God.”

**September 24, 2009**

A group of Russian Orthodox monks, led by Archimandrite Arkady (Gubanov), travel to Czestochowa from the 16th century Nilo-Stolobensky Monastery, near Ostashkov, Russia. From 1939 to 1940, this monastery, located on an island in Lake Seliger, was used as a detention camp by the NKVD for over 6,000 prisoners, mostly Polish police officers. In 1940, almost all of these prisoners were systematically executed by the NKVD by a shot in the head. In recent years, the monastery has been visited by Polish families of some of the prisoners executed by the NKVD. The monks at the monastery therefore decided to obtain a copy of the Czestochowa icon of the Mother of God and to construct a special chapel at their monastery for this icon as a place of prayer by both Orthodox and Catholics for the victims of this atrocity.

On the above date, the Russian monks receive from the Pauline Fathers at the Czestochowa shrine a beautiful copy of the Black Madonna, specially created for the Nilo-Stolobensky Monastery. Later during the visit, Archimandrite Arkady states that the image of the Virgin of Czestochowa “unites Polish and Russian Christians, the two Churches and the two peoples.” There is also discussion during the visit of the possibility of a future document on the reconciliation of the Polish and Russian peoples.

**October 16-23, 2009**

The eleventh plenary session of the Joint International Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches is held in Patmos, Cyprus. The subject of the plenary is “the role of the Bishop of Rome in the communion of the Church in the first millennium.” As a further sign of the recently improved relations between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Moscow Patriarchate, representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate attend the Cyprus plenary after having boycotted the prior plenary due to a dispute with the Ecumenical Patriarchate. In the next year, 2010, Pope Benedict will become the first pope in history to visit the Orthodox country of Cyprus.

**December 3, 2009**

Dmitry Medvedev, who was elected president of the Russian Federation in 2008, meets with Pope Benedict at the Vatican. As a result of the meeting, Russia establishes full diplomatic relations with the Vatican. When asked by the media concerning this action, Archbishop Hilarion, who had been appointed earlier in the year as head of the Moscow Patriarchate’s Department of External Church Relations, states, “We can only welcome this step by the Russian state.” Two month later, Hilarion is elevated to the rank of Metropolitan.

**January 26, 2010**

Monsignor Slawomir Oder, postulator for the cause of beatification and canonization of Pope John Paul II, writes a book describing some of the interesting facts revealed by the investigation required by the beatification process. In describing the future pope’s contacts with Padre Pio, the book states: “Back when the young Father Wojtyla arrived in Giovanni Rotondo in 1947 to meet him, Padre Pio had already shown an unusual attitude toward him: as he was climbing the stairs to his cell, after confession, he turned and winked to a seminarian, his spiritual son, indicating the foreign priest with a nod of the head. Sometime later, speaking of the future of the Church, he described to the same seminarian a Polish pope who would be ‘a great fisher of men.’” Padre Pio died in 1968, ten years before Wojtyla was elected pope. This testimony obtained by Oder lends some support to the story, confirmed by the magazine *Notiziario Cappuccino* in interviews with elderly Krakow priests, that Padre Pio had predicted to Wojtyla that he would become pope.

Monsignor Oder also describes in his book the favorable impressions that Pope John Paul II had of the alleged apparitions in Medjugorje. For example, Cardinal Frantisek Tomasek stated that he heard the Pope state that if he were not pope, he would like to go to Medjugorje and help with the pilgrimages.

**February 26, 2010**

A historic meeting is held in Warsaw between representatives of the Moscow Patriarchate and the Catholic Church in Poland. According to a communiqué issued at the end of the meeting, the meeting constituted “the first and very important step on the way to the rapprochement of our Local Churches and reconciliation between our nations.” A commission is established to draft a joint document on how the Catholic Church in Poland and the Moscow Patriarchate can contribute to reconciliation between the Russian and Polish peoples. The communiqué invokes “the help of God’s Providence and intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God” for this reconciliation. The co-chairmen of the new commission will be Russian Orthodox Metropolitan Hilarion and Catholic Archbishop Henryk Muszynski, the retiring primate of Poland.

**March 10, 2010**

The State Museum of the History of Religion, the successor of the Museum of Atheism formally located in the Kazan Cathedral in St. Petersburg, discloses that it has in storage the copy of the Czestochowa icon given by the Jasna Gora Monastery to Tsar Alexander I in 1813. The Czestochowa icon, venerated from more than one hundred years in the Kazan Cathedral, had disappeared when the communists closed the Cathedral in 1932. During subsequent decades, it was presumed by the Russian Orthodox Church and others that this icon had been destroyed by the communists.

On the above date, approximately 600 Russian Orthodox believers, including the rector of the Kazan Cathedral and other prominent persons, petition the Russian Department of Culture for permission to hold a prayer service at the Museum before the Czestochowa icon on March 19 (March 6 on the Julian calendar) – the feast day of the Czestochowa icon of the Mother of God on the Russian Orthodox liturgical calendar.  The petition also requests that the Czestochowa icon be returned to the Kazan Cathedral.   The prayer service is allowed, and the director of the Museum, Boris Arakcheev, indicates at the prayer service that the icon might well be returned to the Kazan Cathedral in the future.

This copy of the Czestochowa icon of the Mother of God – a symbol of the spiritual bonds between Russians and Poles – now reappears after almost 80 years – at a time when the Moscow Patriarchate and the Polish Catholic Bishops have begun a dialogue on the reconciliation of the Russian and Polish peoples.

**March 17, 2010**

The Vatican establishes an international commission, headed by Cardinal Camillo Ruini and operating under the direction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, to investigate the alleged apparitions at Medjugorje.

**April 10, 2010**

In this past decade, the two saddest events for the Polish nation have both occurred on the Saturday prior to Divine Mercy Sunday – a feast day established at the urging of a Polish saint. On the Saturday prior to Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005, Poland had lost her beloved son, Pope John Paul II. Now, five years later, on the Saturday prior to Divine Mercy Sunday in 2010, Poland loses its president and many other national leaders in a tragic plane crash on the approach to the Smolensk airport in Russia. President Lech Kaczynski and his party of 95 were coming to attend a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the great tragedy of the massacre of 15,000 Polish officers by the Soviet secret police in the Katyn forest in 1940. The Katyn anniversary commemoration suddenly and unexpectedly becomes another great Polish tragedy.

The general Russian reaction to this latest Polish tragedy is one of great sympathy and compassion. Putin immediately rushes to the crash site. President Medvedev declares the following Monday a national day of mourning in the Russian Federation with flags flying at half-mast and entertainment on television channels cancelled. Defying the closure of European airspace due to a volcano eruption in Iceland, President Medvedev flies to Krakov to attend the funeral of President Kaczynski and his wife.

At the beginning of the funeral Mass, Cardinal Dziwicz of Krakov directs his remarks especially to President Medvedev. The cardinal states that the sympathy and assistance that Poles received in these days from their Russian brothers revives the hopes of rapprochement and reconciliation between the two Slavic nations. “These are the words that I address to you, the President of Russia,” said the Cardinal. “This is the task of our generation.” He adds that the tragedy at Smolensk has become the “leaven in the process of strengthening mutual ties between our countries, regardless of any differences.” After the funeral, Medvedev tells Polish television, “Tragedies can spark difficult emotions, but often they draw people closer together, and I think this is necessary for the people of our country and the Poles.”

**April 25, 2010**

The prior of the Jasna Gora Monastery announces that a fragment of the wing of the Polish plane that crashed at Smolensk will be made a part of a new jeweled dress that will cover the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**May 20, 2010**

Metropolitan Hilarion visits Italy including Turin, Bologna, Ravenna, Milan, and Rome. At the Vatican, Metropolitan Hilarion and Pope Benedict attend a special Russian concert – a gift to Pope Benedict from Patriarch Kirill.

**April 11, 2011**

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Polish President Bronislaw Komorowski meet at Katyn to observe the first anniversary of the tragic plane crash at Smolensk. During the ceremonies, the Russian Orthodox Bishop Panteleimon of Smolensk gives to the Polish bishops a copy of the Smolensk icon of the Mother of God and expresses the hope that prayers before this image will serve to unify the two brotherly Slavic peoples. In return, the Polish bishops promise to give a gift to the Russian Orthodox Church -- a copy of the icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa.

**May 1, 2011**

Over a million people crowd into St. Peter’s Square and the Via della Conciliazione for the beatification of Pope John Paul II. The beatification occurs on Divine Mercy Sunday.

**November 4, 2011**

For the feast day commemorating the role of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God in the liberation of Moscow in 1612, Metropolitan Hilarion travels to Kazan. In the Annunciation Cathedral of the Kazan Kremlin, he serves Divine Liturgy in the presence of the Kazan icon of the Mother of God which had been given by Pope John Paul II to Patriarch Alexy in 2004. He joins thousands of believers, both Orthodox and Catholic, in a procession with the icon through the streets of Kazan.

**October 20 – November 28, 2011**

A relic said to be a belt worn by the Virgin Mary is brought to Russia for veneration from the Vatopedi Monastery at Mount Athos. During its tour in Russia, approximately three million people wait in extremely long lines, stretching at times for kilometers, to kiss the box containing the relic. In Moscow, approximately 800,000 people wait in line, sometimes for 20 hours or more in freezing weather, to venerate the relic. It is an amazing demonstration of the devotion to the Mother of God among the Russian people. Although people during communist times waited in long lines to see the embalmed body of Lenin in his mausoleum in Red Square, no lines in Moscow history can compare to these lines to honor the Mother of God.

**June 14, 2012**

Representatives of pro-life organizations from 16 nations meet at the Czestochowa shrine. On January 28, 2012, they entrust to Our Lady of Czestochowa their work in defense of human life. At the same time, they receive from the Pauline Fathers at the shrine an exact replica of the Czestochowa icon of the Mother of God. The group decides on a program, entitled “From Ocean to Ocean,” in which the icon will travel by vehicle from Vladivostok to Fatima in support of human life and in opposition to abortion.

On June 14, the Czestochowa icon leaves Vladivostok by van for the long journey across the Russian Far East, Siberia, and European Russia. The icon is venerated by many Orthodox believers in Orthodox cathedrals in Vladivostok, Krasnoyarsk, Yekaterinburg, Nizhny Novgorod, and Smolensk. Orthodox assume the responsibility for organizing the journey of the icon through Russia and Belarus. Thereafter the icon continues its journey through many European nations and is greeted by thousands of people.

The journey of the Czestochowa icon from Vladivostok to Fatima was the idea of Dr. Igor Beloborodov, who is the director of the Demographic Research Institute in Moscow and a member of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Czestochowa icon was chosen because it is venerated by both Orthodox and Catholics. After the completion of the journey of the icon, it will have a permanent home in Russia.

**August 17, 2012**

Patriarch Kirill becomes the first patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church to visit Poland. The visit receives extensive coverage by the Polish media, and the reaction of the Polish public to the visit is very positive. On the above date, Patriarch Kirill and Archbishop Jozef Michalik, on behalf of the Polish bishops, sign an historic “Joint Message to the Polish and Russian Peoples.” The message calls “on our faithful to ask for the forgiveness of the wrongs, injustice and all evil we have inflicted on each other” and asks God to “grant His grace so that each Pole can see each Russian and each Russian can see each Pole as their friend and brother.” The Polish bishops subsequently direct that the full text of the joint message be read at all Sunday Masses in Poland on the weekend of September 9.

In the final paragraph of the joint message, the work of reconciliation is entrusted to the Mother of God. The message states: “Both Poles and Russians have profound respect for the Holy Virgin Mary. Having trust in the intercession of the Mother of God, we entrust to her care the great work of the reconciliation and rapprochement between our Churches and nations.” On the day preceding the signing of the joint message, the Polish bishops had given to Patriarch Kirill a copy of the Czestochowa icon of the Mother of God, and Patriarch Kirill had given to the Polish bishops a copy of the Smolensk icon of the Mother of God. Archbishop Michalik informed the media that the process of reconciliation began with the visit of the Russian Orthodox monks to the Czestochowa shrine in September 2009.