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O'Neill Plaza

We gather as the Boston College community this afternoon to pray for Pope John Paul II. We feel a sense of loss and sadness because he was such a presence in our lives for so many years. At times like these, we want to be with others and draw strength from those around us.

It seems to me that today is a time to remember and to rededicate.

We remember Pope John Paul, his life, values, and personality. He touched the lives of millions, especially young people, through his faith, travels, and example. I am sure many images of him have come to mind in recent days:

of John Paul, dressed in white, blessing crowds and reaching out to touch those near him;

of John Paul speaking from the window of his Vatican apartment;

of John Paul praying at the Western Wall in Jerusalem;

of John Paul struggling to walk and talk and be present to us in his last years.

In his life he was many things: head of the Catholic Church; a religious and political leader; teacher and philosopher; voice for the poor, the unborn, and defenseless; and advocate for linking Christian faith and social justice.

I think of John Paul as a pilgrim, someone traveling the road of life with a powerful sense of a mission. He did not restrict himself to the Vatican. He visited more than 100 countries and traveled almost 750,000 miles as pope. Because of the medium of television, his face was instantly recognized throughout the world. His life reminds me of a passage in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. The crowds attracted to Christ tried to prevent him from leaving them. But Christ declared, "To the other towns also I must

proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God, because for this purpose I have been sent."

John Paul was a pilgrim imbued with deep religious faith. God was his guide as he lived out his priesthood, first in Poland and later as pope. His journey was not always easy, particularly his encounter with the two great totalitarian evils of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Nazism and Communism. But as pilgrims must, he did not give up hope, but emerged wiser and compassionate from these experiences. On his life's pilgrimage, he labored to serve people, to speak the truth in love. He was clear and steadfast in his views, despite opposition. In so many ways he lived the words of the prophet Micah: "to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God."

He sought to proclaim that Christ was the source of life and hope, that we should not be afraid of the future or be overwhelmed by challenges. He showed us how to live with faith and hope--and in recent weeks how to die with trust and confidence--as he dealt with declining health and approaching death in such a public and courageous way. He was ever the pilgrim, moving through life, preaching in word and deed, calling on human beings to live their faith and to be signs of hope.

So, today we remember John Paul II. But I think it is also a time to rededicate: to rededicate ourselves to living according to our core human, religious, and cultural values. Those will be different for each of us, but the life and death of Pope John Paul invite us to consider how we live as human beings in today's world, how we respond to those in need, how we use our gifts, how we build up the community around us.

John Paul was shaped by his Catholic faith, Polish roots, and intellectual pursuits, and his life was marked by integrity, zeal, and compassion. What finer way to honor him than to rededicate ourselves to our own intellectual, spiritual, and social pursuits and in doing so help make our world more just, more peaceful, and more loving, goals for which John Paul worked all his life.

The life journey of John Paul II, the pilgrim pope, has ended; God has called him home. May he rest in peace and may all of us draw strength from his faith and example.