

Brazil's Lula Going to Pope's Funeral as a Worker

Contributed by Newsroom
Monday, 04 April 2005

In a statement to the press, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said that he will "certainly" go to Rome to pay his last respects to John Paul II. "It is the least one worker can do for another worker," the President declared, in a reference to Karol Wojtyła's youth in Poland, where he worked as a miner and chemist.

Lula recalled his two encounters with Pope John Paul II, to whom, he said, he owed a "debt of gratitude." The first meeting, the President recounted, occurred during the Pope's visit to Brazil in 1980, after a gathering of workers with the Pope in the Morumbi stadium, in São Paulo.

At the time, President Lula was one of the directors of the ABC Metalworkers' Union, which had been closed by the military regime. To speak to the Pope "was not an easy task," the President recalled, because the Armed Forces were in charge of security at the event. The two met once again in 1989, according to Lula.

The President recalled that the Pope urged social reforms, such as "non-violent agrarian reform," every time a Brazilian bishop paid him a visit.

"I believe that humanity has lost not just a Pope but more than a Pope. It has lost a symbol of peace, because I think that nobody in the last century was as dedicated, traveled as much around the world, and preached peace as much as Pope John Paul II," he said.

The people of Brazil, "the world's largest Catholic country" are deeply saddened by the death of John Paul II, affirms a presidential message issued soon after the official announcement of the Pope's death on Saturday, April 2. Lula decreed an official seven-day period of mourning in the country.

ABr