

On May 7, 2020, in Wadowice, Poland, Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz officially launched the beatification process of Emilia and Karol Wojtyła. “I want to testify here, here in the presence of the Archbishop and the priests, that as a long-time secretary of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła and Pope John Paul II many times I have heard from Him that he had holy parents,” His Eminence proclaimed.

The primary goal of the beatification process, which commented on the centennial of the birth of Saint John Paul II, is to ascertain that Karol and Emilia Wojtyła “enshrined virtues in a heroic way, that they enjoy the opinion of sanctity and that via their intercession people implore the grace of God,” according to the Archdiocese of Krakow.

The beatification initiative reflects the appreciation of the family and its great role in shaping the Polish pope. “There is no doubt that the spiritual comport of the future pope and saint was formed in his family thanks to the faith of his parents,” wrote Cardinal Dziwisz.

“Saints draw life from other Saints,” as John Paul II put it during his Mass of Canonization of Saint Kinga (1234-1292) in Nowy Sącz on June 16, 1999. According to Father Sławomir Oder, the postulator of the canonization process of Karol and Emilia Wojtyła, that means “saints are born of saints, are nurtured by the saints, draw life from the saints and their call to holiness. Family is the privileged place where holiness starts its roots.”

Emilia (née Kaczorowska) was born in 1884 in Bielsko-Biała. She married Karol Wojtyła, a military man, in 1906. Lieutenant Wojtyła was transferred to Wadowice in 1913, and since then they became linked to that place. However, during the First World War, they had to escape from Wadowice because the Russian front was rolling their way. The couple spent a whole year in Moravia, in what is now the Czech Republic.

“The Wojtyłas were an exceptional family,” said Cardinal Dziwisz,

although it should be emphasized that it was also a very ordinary family whose worries intertwined with the prosaic aspects of everyday life. Emilia and Karol supported each other, but they were also dedicated to their children. They took care of their education and faith. All matters, sufferings, and hardships of daily life they entrusted to God. The Lord was ultimately the most important One in this family.

Emilia and Karol had three children, two sons and one daughter. Olga died about sixteen hours after birth. The eldest son, Edmund, perished of scarlet fever during a virulent epidemic at the hospital where he had just begun his career as a doctor. In 1920, Emilia gave a birth to her second son, Karol fils, despite a difficult pregnancy that threatened her life and the life of her baby. She refused the abortion recommended by her doctor, bringing into the world a completely healthy boy who would later become the head of the Catholic Church.

In his book *The Story of an Extraordinary Friendship*, Eugeniusz Mróz—who, at one hundred years old, is the last living classmate and neighbor of Karol Wojtyła—wrote: “Lolek’s mother, Emilia, because of poor health, did not work, she ran the house.” John Paul II remembered his mother as a longsuffering person, but nonetheless loving and courageous. She was the one who taught him how to pray. The Pope also recalled his mother instructing him to make the Sign of the Cross: “This mystery was taught to me by the hands of my mother, who, by folding my little hands, showed me how to draw the Cross, the sign of Christ, who is the Son of the living God.”

As the Pope himself admitted in *Gift and Mystery*, his mother’s contribution to his religious education “was no doubt profound.” Emilia Wojtyła died when Karol fils was only nine-years old. “My mother’s death made a deep impression on my memory,” John Paul later recalled.

He became a motherless child, and his father Karol père a single father. The widower raised his son alone until his own death twelve years later. The future Pope's father was deeply religious, hard-working, and conscientious. André Frossard, in his *Be Not Afraid!*, quotes the Polish pope:

My father was admirable and almost all my memories of my childhood and adolescence are connected with him. The violence of the blows which had struck him had opened up immense spiritual depths in him; his grief found its outlet in prayer. The mere fact of seeing him on his knees had a decisive influence on my early years. He was so hard on himself that he had no need to be hard on his son; his example alone was sufficient to inculcate discipline and a sense of duty. He was an exceptional person. He died almost suddenly during the war, under the Nazi occupation. I was not yet twenty-one.

The Wojtyła family was known to be faithful Catholics. Emilia and Karol constantly manifested their faith, love, and Christian values in extraordinary ways. "It was a devoutly Christian family, whose members began and ended their day with a prayer. They prayed before and after every meal. Karol Senior read the Bible to his family members in the evenings.... The Wojtyła family was deeply and authentically religious. They participated in all Church rituals," Mr. Mróz recalled.

The beatification process will consider the Wojtyła couple together, but it will also evaluate them separately. In effect, there are two separate canonical trials, conducted by two independent tribunals. The subject of their married life is very important. However, only one miracle obtained by the intercession of both will be enough to decree them beatified. Thanks to the declarations left by Saint John Paul II on his parents, the he will be considered one of the indirect witnesses of the double beatification process.

There is no doubt that John Paul II's spirituality was formed in his family, mainly thanks to the conduct and faith of his parents. Emilia and Karol Wojtyła, with their love and faith, should become a exemplars for Catholic parents today.