

Two historical events vied for our attention on May 1st.

On the one hand, countless news outlets proclaimed the death of Osama Bin Laden. Yet, dramatic as this story's particulars may be, it is not really new.

This tale tells of the demise of a man whose ideology led him and his followers to perpetrate and rejoice in the death of others. In fact, ideology always encourages those caught in its grip to devalue human life in front of the idols it creates and to delight in the deaths of those who refuse to worship them. From this point of view, we found the emotional celebrations for Bin Laden's death to be a disturbing sign of the dominion of another ideology over some, albeit one that employs words such as "freedom," "democracy" and "justice."

On the other hand, we saw that 1.5 million people gathered in Rome to celebrate the beatification of the late pope, John Paul II. Here we witnessed a fascinating story, one that is truly new.

His dramatic life played out within two of the wickedest regimes ever known to history, inspired by two of the most blinding ideologies ever fashioned: Nazism and Communism. Living his faith—in the words of Pope Benedict XVI—as the “intelligence of reality” led him to recognize and proclaim the ultimate goodness and dignity of every person, founded upon a unique relationship with God. By encouraging his countrymen to join together in solidarity and put that intelligence to use, he gave them a weapon that vanquished Communism within their nation, triggering its collapse in Europe.

That intelligence of faith likewise bestowed upon him a palpable love for human beings, witnessed particularly by his forgiveness of his would-be Muslim assassin. Who can forget the 1983 picture of John Paul II in prison with his arm around Mehmet Ali Aca, while shaking his hand? We've recently witnessed that same intelligence of faith wrestle with the ideology of Islamic terrorism in Pakistan, after the murder of its ex-Minister for Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti. After Shahbaz's death, his brother, Paul, said he and his family have forgiven the assassins, "because our faith teaches us to do this. Our brother Shahbaz was a Christian and the Christian faith tells us to forgive."

The intelligence of faith also made John Paul II courageous in front of evil, proclaiming to all, “Be not afraid,” because, “Love is stronger than death!” What a contrast to the fear that grips so many after Bin Laden's death!

We find the story of John Paul II's life and its continued draw upon millions around the globe a much more fascinating story than that of one man's death. This is so because six years after his own passing, John Paul II's story still witnesses to the only truly new announcement in history: the fact of a man who is risen from the dead and of His continuing presence among us.

Looking at His witnesses, we struggle to follow Christ present today and to learn to render the intelligence of our faith an intelligence of reality, in order to build what John Paul II termed a “civilization of love,” one that is stronger than that which opposes it, the culture of death.