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"Miracle of Freedom "

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Pope's impact in Lithuania

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For the first time since the fall of Communism, Pope John Paul II set foot in a republic formerly claimed by the Soviet Union today, kissing the ground of this Baltic country and urging his followers to see "neither winners nor losers" among those emerging from decades of Communist rule.

At the same time, however, he called for the "expiation" of Communist guilt and demanded that governments "not intrude" on church rites as priests return to their pulpits after decades as clandestine political figures.



The Pope's message came at the start of a tour of the three Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which were occupied by Soviet forces in 1940 and subsequently annexed. Though the annexation was never recognized by the United States, the three lands in effect remained Soviet republics until shortly before the union's demise in late 1991.

Pilgrim Route of John Paul II

- The visit of Pope John Paul II in 1993 was an important guidepost for the life of the Catholic Church in Lithuania and for the nation as a whole. In homilies and speeches, the Holy Father presented the sources of spiritual regeneration and the principles on which a free life must be built to this people that had only just delivered itself from the yoke of totalitarianism. The Pilgrim Route of John Paul II aims to remind people of the universally valid foundations for a true and complete life which the pope so emphasized: Christ, the Cross, the Holy Spirit, and Mary's example of faith and virtue. In light of this purpose, the route includes not only the sanctuaries which the pope visited in Lithuania, but also other sites of pious renown which received the Holy Father's attention.

In Vilnius, pilgrims following in the footsteps of John Paul II may see Vilnius Cathedral and its chapel with the tomb of St Casimir, Patron of Lithuania. They can also pray at the Gate of Dawn before the world famous image of Mary the Mother of Mercy. The theme of the Cross, so emphasized by the Pope in Lithuania, is reflected brilliantly in the Way of the Cross at Vilnius Calvary.

In Trakai pilgrims will discover a painting of the Mother of God and Child which has a long tradition of pious renown, and which is closely associated with the efforts of Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas to bring Lithuania into the family of Christian nations.

Pivašiūnai also presents pilgrims with a painting, renowned for graces and adorned with crowns blessed by Pope John Paul II, of Mary the Comfort of the Afflicted.





And in the basilica of Marijampolė one can kneel to pray by the remains of Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis, whom John Paul II beatified.

Christ's Resurrection Church, rising high into the Kaunas city skyline, reflects the path travelled by the Lithuanian people in the 20th century and seems to recall the prayer of John Paul II for the nation's spiritual rebirth. At Kaunas Cathedral, where the pope came to pray privately, a painting of Our Lady of Sorrows – long associated with many special graces – generally captivates pilgrims. The Pažaislis monastery, which is enjoying a spiritual renaissance under the care of the Sisters of St Casimir, is sure to fascinate visitors with its inimitable architecture and art. A painting here of Mary the Mother of Fair Love, the object of ages-old pious traditions, continues moving visitors to prayer.



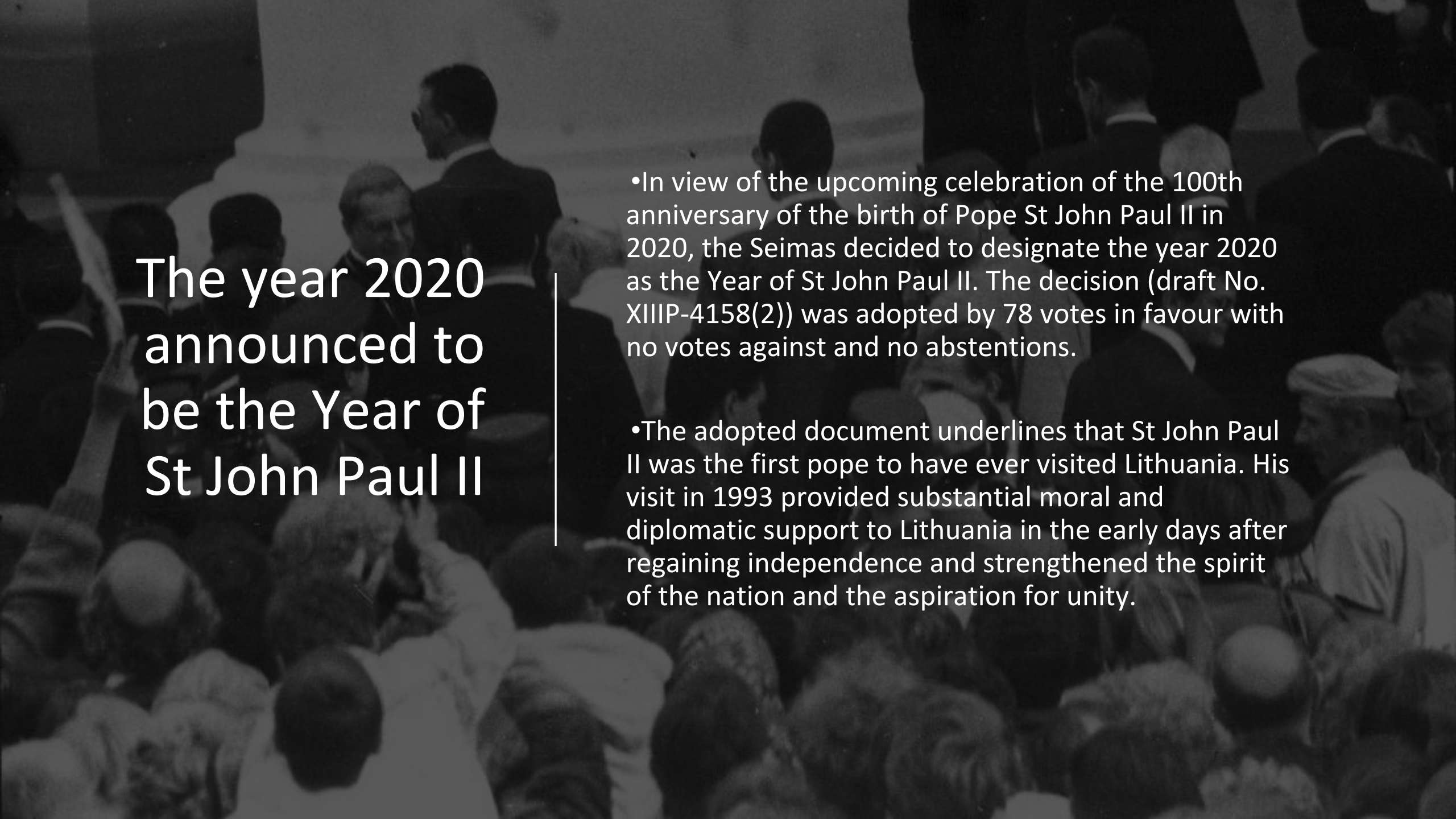
Šiauliai Cathedral is a frequent starting point for pilgrimages by foot to the Hill of Crosses, which in turn was made world-famous by Pope John Paul II, who spoke here about the mystery of the Cross. For its part, Samogitian Calvary maintains authentic centuries-old Way of the Cross traditions. The shrine also attracts pilgrims for its celebrated painting of Mary the Queen of the Christian Family and for the annual Great Indulgenced Feast of Samogitian Calvary.

The Pilgrim Route connects the places which for long ages Lithuanians have cherished and considered holy. It has been named in honor of this great Pope and great pilgrim as a token of gratitude and respect. Just as John Paul II once helped the world hear the voice of the “silenced Church”, we hope that his intercession will help pilgrims from many different lands discover Lithuania’s living treasures of Christian faith...



The renovated shrine complex of Šiluva spreads the Christological message left by the Blessed Virgin Mary during an apparition in the town in 1608: “My Son used to be worshipped in this place...” Pilgrims can pray in the Apparition Chapel as well as in the nearby Basilica, before a painting of Mary, Health of the Sick, which has long been considered miraculous.

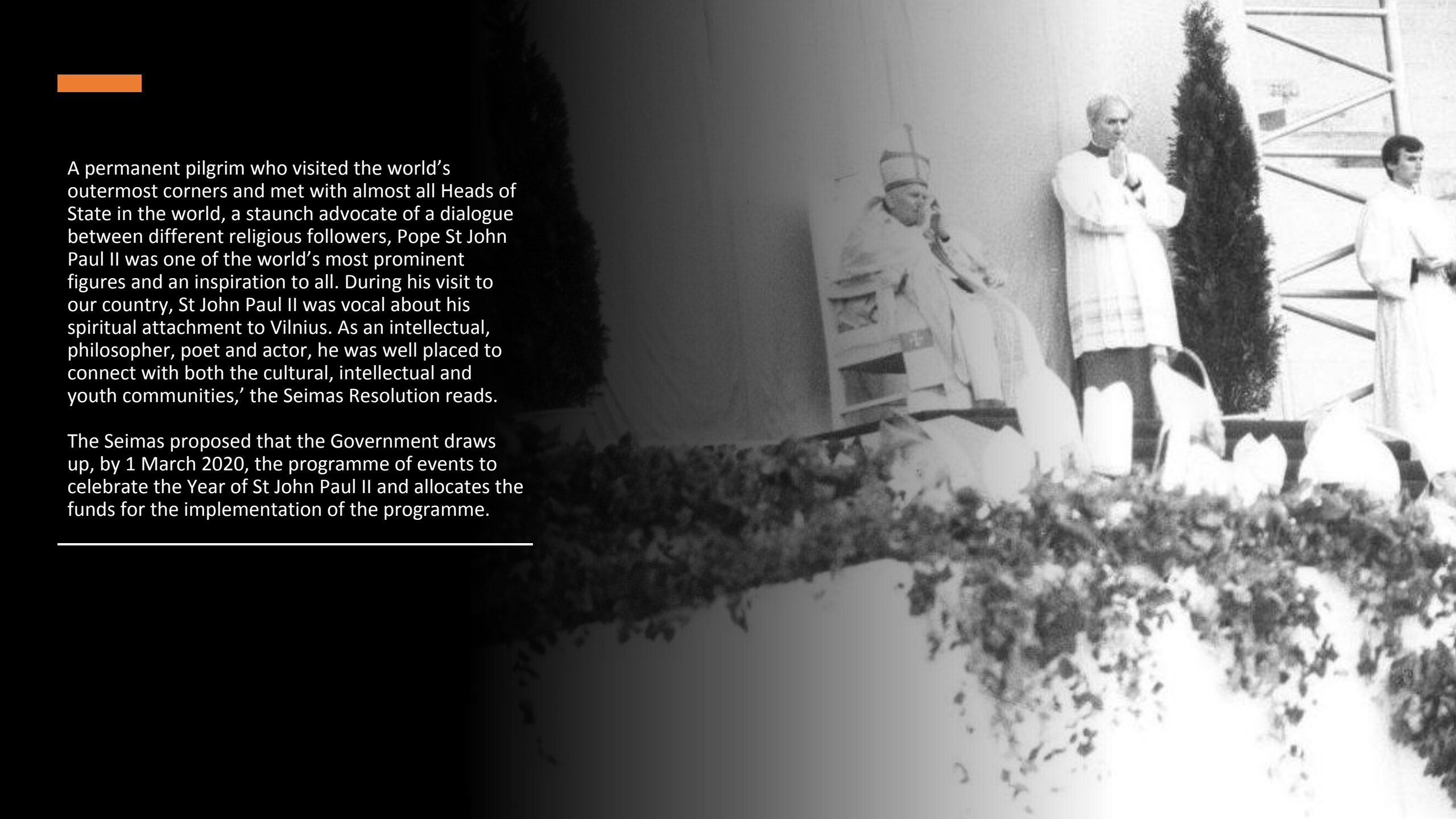
The Tytuvėnai monastery and church complex is notable for its Stations of the Cross, as well as for the Holy Steps Chapel modelled on a chapel at the Lateran Palace in Rome.



The year 2020 announced to be the Year of St John Paul II

- In view of the upcoming celebration of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Pope St John Paul II in 2020, the Seimas decided to designate the year 2020 as the Year of St John Paul II. The decision (draft No. XIII P-4158(2)) was adopted by 78 votes in favour with no votes against and no abstentions.

- The adopted document underlines that St John Paul II was the first pope to have ever visited Lithuania. His visit in 1993 provided substantial moral and diplomatic support to Lithuania in the early days after regaining independence and strengthened the spirit of the nation and the aspiration for unity.



A permanent pilgrim who visited the world's outermost corners and met with almost all Heads of State in the world, a staunch advocate of a dialogue between different religious followers, Pope St John Paul II was one of the world's most prominent figures and an inspiration to all. During his visit to our country, St John Paul II was vocal about his spiritual attachment to Vilnius. As an intellectual, philosopher, poet and actor, he was well placed to connect with both the cultural, intellectual and youth communities,' the Seimas Resolution reads.

The Seimas proposed that the Government draws up, by 1 March 2020, the programme of events to celebrate the Year of St John Paul II and allocates the funds for the implementation of the programme.



**Thanks for
attention!**