

Pope John Paul II – The Making of a Papal Cross

The Making of a Papal Cross for Pope John Paul II

Timeline: These events took place from June 12th, 2003 to June 18th 2003

We were commissioned to make a matching pair of crosses, one was to be given to Pope John Paul II and the other cross was to be given to Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, his personal secretary and long time friend.

My boss, David had bought a suite of turquoise that consisted of 22 pieces that all matched up really well and he had been holding on to this suite for a couple of years.

One day I got a mysterious phone call asking if we made jewelry and if we could make a turquoise cross. Well the more the person talked the stranger the conversation got.

Needless to say 3 phone calls later we got the news that we were going to build two (2) crosses and one was going to be given and worn by Pope John Paul II.

We made the two crosses by hand from scratch other than the flat sheet stock and flat bezel wire. Everything else was hand fabricated. We even went so far as to make each link of both chains by hand.

The two (2) crosses were Sterling Silver, Arizona Turquoise accented with 14kt yellow gold beads.

Our design team of four bench jewelers and our polisher made these two crosses in two weeks along with doing all of our other daily work.

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This is a rough outline of what we were going to do and what they should look as far as shape.

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Here is my boss David making each bezel.
See the stones in the upper right hand corner of the photo.

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David looking at me as I tell him I'm the official historian in-charge of taking all the pictures.

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We went so far as to twist our own wire to make the twisted wire bezel rings.

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Laying everything out and hand-fitting everything together, piece-by-piece, by piece

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Snipping solder as David solders the bezels and twisted bezel wire rings to the 18 gauge plate that will serve as the backbone of the cross

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Takashi was our foreign jeweler who had just graduated from jewelry school and was working for us. He was in charge of making the chains from scratch. Each link was hand soldered shut and hand polished. As you can clearly see Takashi was a big Hulk Hogan fan. Go figure!

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We all worked together as a team from start to finish.
Right to Left: Phil, David & Takashi.
That's me behind the camera.

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A closer look at the work being done as David solders more bezels in place.

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A closer look at the hand-made chain Takashi is working on.

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It is starting to take shape. David is adding the 14kt yellow gold beads
This is actually the Pope's cross.
Notice the second bezel from the bottom of the cross is oval shaped.
This is how we were able to tell the two crosses apart from one another.

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That's me (La Shawn) on the left with the jeweler's apron
I had to make sure the gold beads didn't move as we soldered them into place

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That's me with the rough cut out of the cross after all of the soldering was done.
Once again this is the Pope's Cross.
Notice the second bezel from the bottom is oval shaped

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David doing the final cut out
Again this is the Pope's cross being worked on

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After final cut out and getting ready to set all of the pieces of turquoise. We used double sticky tape to tape all of the stones in place so that we didn't get things mixed up or it would have been a real puzzle trying to figure out what stone went where.

Now in this picture this is the Bishop's Cross because the second bezel from the bottom is round in shape.

Notice the turquoise on the white sheet of paper the second stone from the bottom is round

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Packing each bezel with sawdust before setting each piece of turquoise into place

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Using a bezel pusher or rocker to set the turquoise

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Getting closer, almost done
Once again this is the Bishop's cross that is being worked on

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David doing some of the polishing using a bristle brush

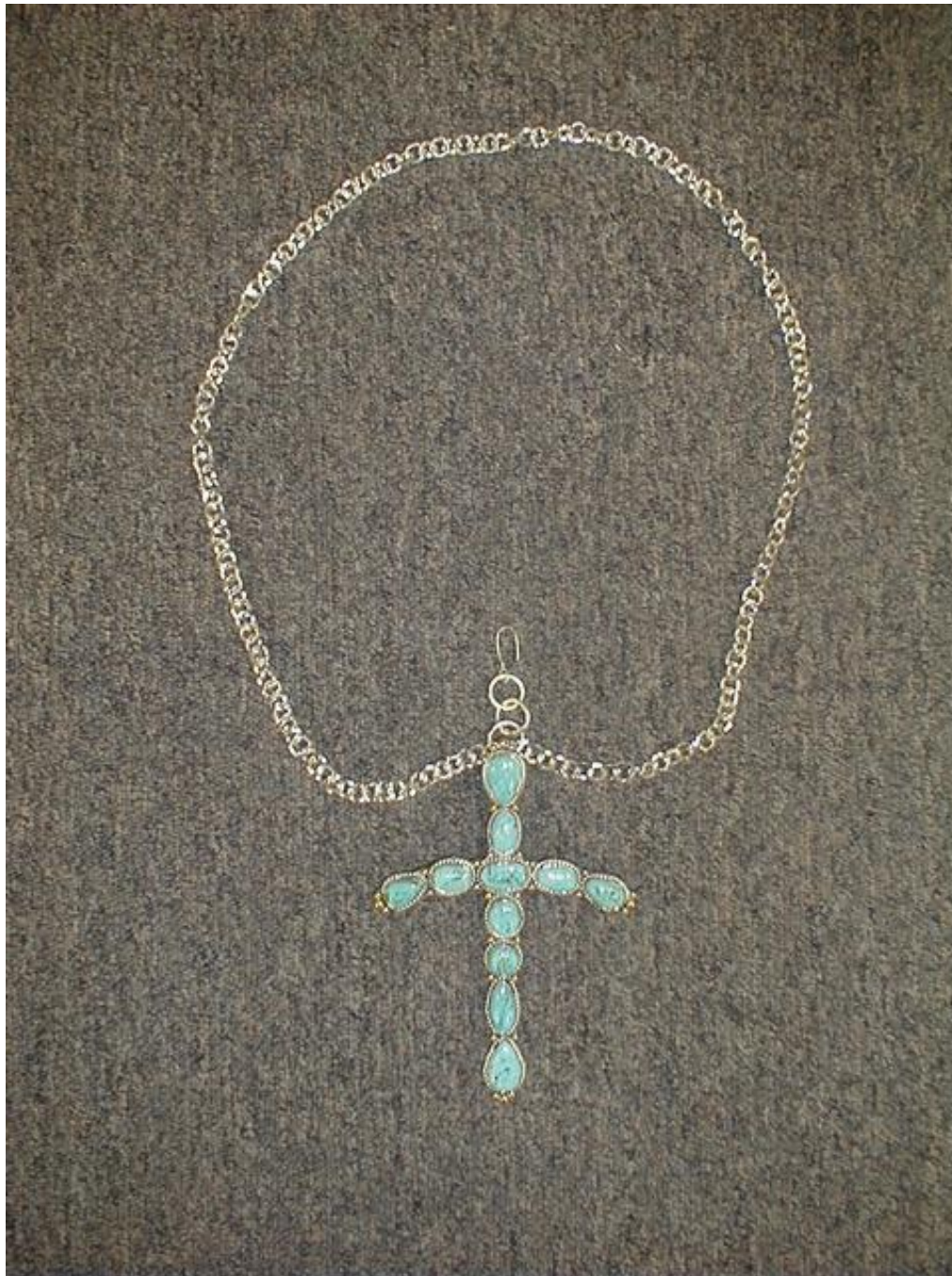
This is the Pope's cross being polished

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This is how long the chains were for each of the crosses.
I designed the special hook for each chain and I also designed the back hook on the back of each cross so that the crosses would hang right when worn by both the Pope and the Bishop.

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The Pope's Cross and chain attached and all assembled together

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This is how it will look when they wear the crosses with their chain.

I only had one picture of the Pope wearing a different kind of cross and it hung this way but I had no idea what the back looked like. I just saw a small hook that went into kind of like a button hole on his robe so I just kind of winged it from there.

I had to test fit it to make sure the cross hung correctly and didn't turn or rotate while being worn.

If you notice the shorter chain directly above the cross actually suspends and holds the weight of the cross and the small fish-hook at the top of the short chain is then inserted into a small buttonhole on the robe while the longer chain around the neck is more decorative as it doesn't support the weight of the cross.

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The two (2) Crosses completed
The one on the right that is slightly higher than the one on the left is the Pope's cross.
The second stone up from the bottom is oval.
That is how we could tell them apart.
The Pope's cross is also just slightly larger not by much.

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Both crosses barely fit into the large omega style presentation boxes.
We didn't even think about it until we were done and luckily they fit into the boxes.

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The Pope's Cross

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The Bishop's Cross

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That's David with the Pope's Cross after final polish and ready to be boxed and shipped air express to the Vatican.

Since our boss David is a devout Catholic he called in his priest and they all did a blessing of the crosses before they were boxed and shipped off.

THE END

Well I hope you all enjoyed the little photo essay on how I was involved in helping make a very special cross for Pope John Paul II.

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It was presented to him (Pope John Paul II) on July 4th 2003



However my part in this great adventure was not yet over

I wrote the appraisals for both Pope John Paul II and Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz

That was a real honor because my appraisal report along with all of the photographs were sent in a binder and are now archived and stored in the Vatican's historical document vaults.

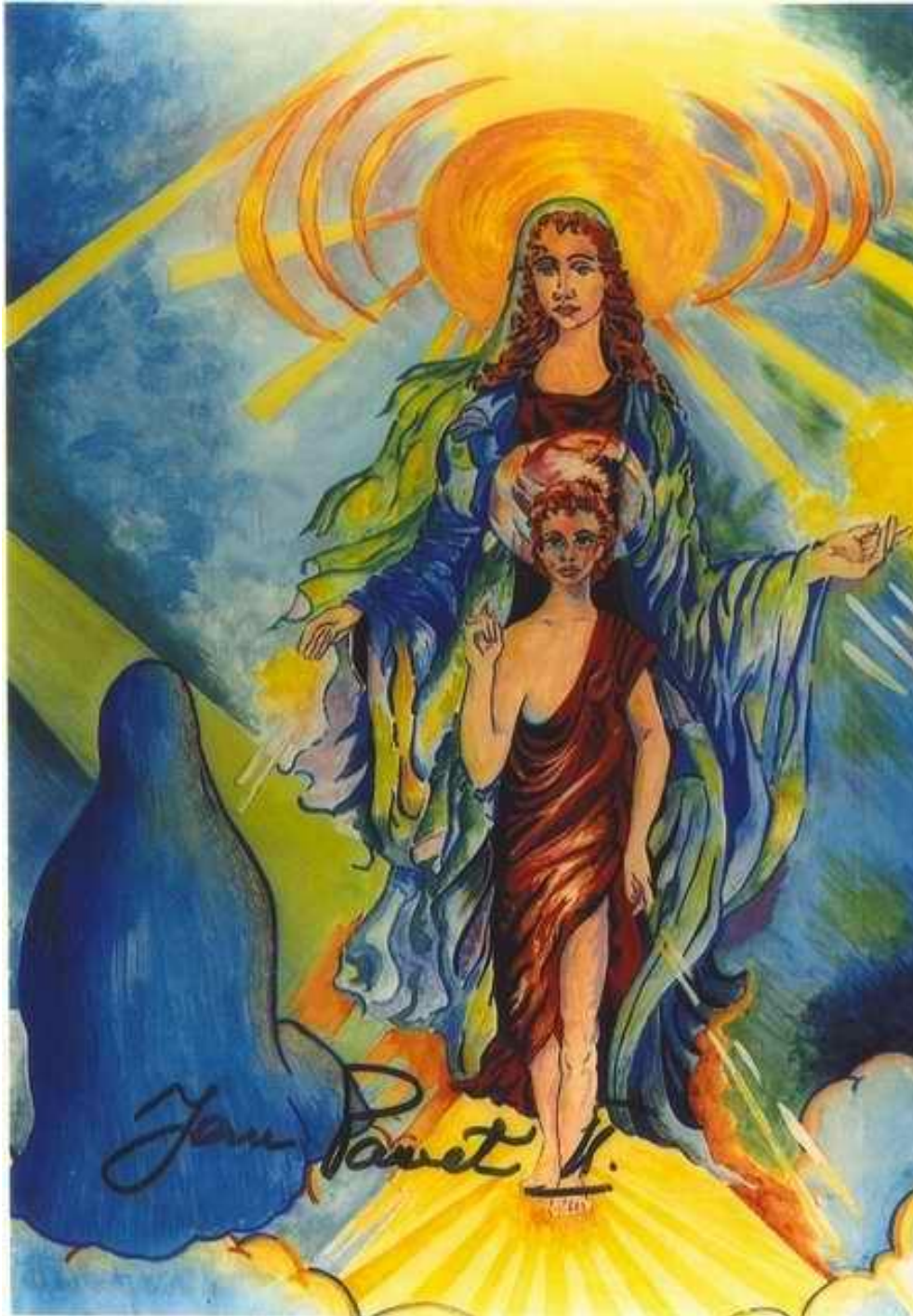
Just think my appraisal report now resides besides such works of arts as notes, letters and documents from Galileo, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, and other famous people throughout history.

Granted no one will probably look at them but maybe in several hundred years maybe my document will still be there.

It's really kind of cool.

It was a project of a lifetime for all of us at our shop and it is something we can tell our grandchildren about.

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This is a postcard size picture each of us were given who were involved in this project.

If anyone has any information on this card or the painting itself I would love to hear from you and tell me the story behind this card and painting.

Here is some info on the crosses we made taken from my appraisal reports.

The Papal Cross made especially for Pope John Paul II.

It measures approximately 6 5/8 inches long x 4 3/4 inches wide.

It is hand-fabricated out of 18gauge Sterling Silver Flat Sheet Stock with hand-made bezels and twisted wire bezel rings for each piece of turquoise along with a total of thirty-two (32) 14K yellow gold beads, twenty-eight (28) 3.5mm round beads that weigh approximately 0.3grams each and four (4) 5mm round beads that weigh approximately 0.6grams each.

Total weight of the cross is 105.0 grams

Total weight of 14k yellow gold beads is 10.8 grams

Total Gem weight of turquoise is 116.49ct.

It has a total of eleven (11) pieces of turquoise. The dimensions and weights are as follows.

A. 22.4mm x 15.7mm x 5.0mm = 14.35ct.

B. 18.2mm x 12.0mm x 5.3mm = 9.93ct.

C. 18.4mm x 12.4mm x 4.6mm = 7.65ct.

D. 17.8mm x 13.2mm x 4.4mm = 8.96ct.

E. 23.8mm x 11.9mm x 5.2mm = 12.17ct

F. 18.9mm x 12.0mm x 4.6mm = 9.13ct

G. 18.4mm x 12.2mm x 5.9mm = 10.74ct.

H. 14.0mm x 14.0mm x 5.7mm = 9.10ct.

I. 16.8mm x 14.2mm x 5.6mm = 11.18ct.

J. 21.6mm x 12.8mm x 3.8mm = 9.74ct.

K. 23.6mm x 15.6mm x 4.9mm = 13.54ct.

The custom-made, hand-fabricated sterling silver chain is approximately 39 inches long and has a total of 160 links that are made from 1.5mm square wire that was hand-wrapped and individually soldered closed. There are Three (3) 13mm links that are made of 2.5mm round wire. A button fishhook is also attached to the chain.

The chain weighs approximately 116.3 grams

The Second Cross was made especially for Bishop Stanislaw Dziwisz, personal secretary to the Pope.

It measures approximately 6 1/4 inches long x 4 3/4 inches wide.

It is hand-fabricated out of 18gauge Sterling Silver Flat Sheet Stock with hand-made bezels and twisted bezel wire for each piece of turquoise along with a total of thirty-two (32) 14K yellow gold beads, twenty-eight (28) 3.5mm round beads that weigh approximately 0.3grams each and four (4) 5mm round beads that weigh approximately 0.6grams each.

Total weight of the cross is 103.0 grams
Total weight of 14k yellow gold beads is 10.8 grams
Total Gem weight of turquoise is 110.99ct.

It has a total of eleven (11) pieces of turquoise. The dimensions and weights are as follows.

- A. 23.2mm x 13.0mm x 6.0mm = 15.20ct.
- B. 17.0mm x 12.4mm x 4.3mm = 8.01ct.
- C. 20.0mm x 13.2mm x 4.7mm = 9.93ct.
- D. 14.6mm x 12.6mm x 4.1mm = 6.40ct.
- E. 23.8mm x 12.3mm x 4.9mm = 12.44ct.
- F. 14.8mm x 12.8mm x 6.4mm = 9.59ct.
- G. 18.7mm x 12.8mm x 5.0mm = 8.86ct.
- H. 16.3mm x 14.7mm x 4.9mm = 8.80ct.
- I. 16.7mm x 14.7mm x 5.3mm = 10.50ct.
- J. 16.3mm x 13.0mm x 5.1mm = 9.05ct.
- K. 20.2mm x 14.4mm x 5.3mm = 12.21ct.

The custom-made, hand-fabricated sterling silver chain is approximately 39 inches long and has a total of 160 links that are made from 1.5mm square wire that was hand-wrapped and individually soldered closed. There are Three (3) 13mm links that are made of 2.5mm round wire. A button fishhook is also attached to the chain.

The chain weighs approximately 116.3 grams

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Looking for information:

If anyone has any information or knows of someone inside the Vatican who knows where these crosses are or if they are on public display I would love to know.

Also if anyone can shed some light on the picture postcard of this painting and who the artist is and where the painting resides and how big the painting is I would greatly appreciate it as well.

I would also like to know if these small picture postcards were given out by just the Pope or his staff or by the Vatican and how many of these postcard-sized pictures were made and distributed.

Please relay any useful information to: HighSierraGemLab@gmail.com