



The Holy See

**LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 80th ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL PROVINCE
AND THE CREATION OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KAUNAS**

*To my Venerable Brother
Metropolitan Archbishop Sigitas Tamkevicius, S.J., of Kaunas*

I received with great pleasure the letter in which you informed me of the events planned to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Ecclesiastical Province and the creation of the Archdiocese of Kaunas.

In fact, on 4 April 1926, with the Apostolic Constitution *Lituanorum Gente*, Pope Pius XI of venerable memory crowned the ancient desire of the Lithuanian Bishops and faithful who, in a spirit of deep communion with the Pope of Rome after the rebirth of their own State at the end of the First World War, had asked to enjoy full ecclesiastical organization in the Land of Lithuania.

On this happy occasion, how can we forget all the people who cooperated to achieve this providential work and toiled with dedication in the Lord's vineyard for the good of the People of God?

In the first place was Bl. Archbishop Jurgis Matulaitis, M.I.C., Apostolic Visitor in Lithuania, and Cardinal Vincentas Sladkevicius, M.I.C., Metropolitan Archbishop of Kaunas of venerable memory, who were instruments of reconciliation and balance in God's hands, thanks also to their example of personal holiness in the fulfilment of their pastoral ministry.

The painful trials imposed upon the Lithuanian People in the past eight decades are well known. The Ecclesiastical Province, young in years but already rich and flourishing with apostolic vitality, came under attack in the harsh Soviet persecution, opposed to the values of the Catholic faith which is deeply rooted in a large part of the Lithuanian People.

Thanks to God's help, which was never lacking, the years of trial saw the flourishing of a true nursery of witnesses and martyrs of the faith.

With the fall of the Communist dictatorship, the Lithuanian People regained its freedom and has become increasingly part of the family of nations, contributing to its own patrimony of values.

The newfound freedom, together with the new challenges to the Church, showed the need for a reorganization of the Ecclesiastical Province. This was provided with the creation of the new Ecclesiastical Province of Vilnius by my Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II.

On the happy event of the anniversary being celebrated, it is helpful to take a look at the new needs of life today which also require of Lithuanian Catholics a strong and mature witness of the human and Christian values inherited from their forefathers.

As the lessons of past and also recent history attest, the wrong use of freedom leads to emptiness and to the distortion of the authentic face of the human being, created in the image and likeness of God.

I hope that the Catholics of Lithuania, and the faithful of the Ecclesiastical Province of Kaunas in particular, will be able to respond ever better to God's fatherly love, of which I spoke in my first Encyclical. Authentic Christian life is expressed and certified in the witness of active charity to all, on the basis of the deep certainty that God is love. This is the eternal proclamation of Christ's Church, established in the world to enlighten consciences and guide them towards knowledge of the deeper meaning of human and Christian life.

I gladly join in the spiritual gratitude of the Church of Kaunas, which is raising her praise to God for the gifts received during the eight decades that have passed, and I invoke the intercession of the Mother of God, venerated at Lithuania's shrines, and especially at the Shrine of Siluva.

May God, under the auspices of the Immaculate Virgin, pour out an abundance of his spiritual favours upon the faithful in the above-mentioned Ecclesiastical Province and upon those gathered in the Basilica-Archcathedral of Kaunas on the occasion of this joyful celebration.

With these wishes, I cordially impart to you, Venerable Brother, to the clergy, to the men and women religious, to the consecrated persons and to all the faithful, the implored Apostolic Blessing, which I gladly extend to the Bishops, priests and faithful of the current suffragan Dioceses of Siauliai, Telsiai and Vilkaviskis.

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