



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday 23 June 1999

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. Today I would like to reflect again on the pilgrimage to Poland which I had the joy of making from the 5th to the 17th of this month. My seventh and longest Pastoral Visit to my country took place 20 years after my first journey from 2 to 10 June 1979. On the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I shared with the Church in Poland in the celebrations to mark the millennium of two events which are at the root of her history: the canonization of St Adalbert and the establishment of the country's first metropolitan see: *Gniezno*, with its three suffragan Dioceses of *Ko{I-slash}obrzeg*, *Kraków* and *Wroc{I-slash}aw*. I was also able to conclude the nation's Second Plenary Synod and to proclaim a new saint, as well as numerous new blessed, exemplary witnesses of God's love.

"*God is love*" was the theme of my apostolic journey, which became a great hymn of praise to the heavenly Father and to the wonderful works of his mercy. For this reason I never stop thanking him, the Lord of the world and of history, who once again allowed me to cross the land of my ancestors as a pilgrim of faith and hope, and in particular, as a pilgrim of his love.

I would like to express my gratitude once again to the President of the Republic and to the State authorities for their welcome and active support. My fraternal meeting with the Pastors of the beloved Church in Poland, whom I warmly thank for their great commitment and apostolic zeal, was also a great comfort to me. I extend my thanks to all who helped in any way to make my visit a success: I am thinking in particular of all who prayed and offered their own sufferings for this intention; I am also thinking of the young people, a large number of whom took part in every stage of my pilgrimage.

2. The overall theme of these days was the Gospel text of the Beatitudes, which shows us God's love in the unmistakable features of Christ's face. What a joy it was for me, in *St Adalbert's* footsteps, to proclaim the eight Beatitudes, as I meditated on the history of my ancestors! My brief stops in *Gdańsk*, *Pelplin* and *Elbląg* in the Baltic region, where Adalbert was martyred, were dedicated to the memory of this great Bishop and martyr. The legacy of Adalbert has always been guarded by the Polish people and has borne wonderful fruits of witness throughout Poland's history.

In this regard I had the opportunity to visit cities which preserve an indelible memory of the destruction, mass executions and deportations of the Second World War. Only faith in God, who is love and mercy, made possible their material and moral resurgence. In *Bydgoszcz*, where Cardinal Wyszyński built the church dedicated to "The Holy Polish Brethren Martyrs", I celebrated Mass for the martyrs, commemorating the "unknown soldiers" of God's cause and those who died in this century. In *Toruń* I beatified Fr *Wincenty Frelichowski* (1913-1945), who was a peacemaker in his pastoral ministry and later in the concentration camp and, until his death, bore witness to God's love among the typhus victims of the Dachau concentration camp. In *Warsaw* I beatified 108 martyrs, including Bishops, priests, religious and lay people, victims of the concentration camps during the Second World War.

In the capital I also beatified *Edmund Bojanowski* — an organizer of educational and charitable works and precursor of the Council's teaching on the lay apostolate — and Sister *Regina Protmann*, who combined the contemplative life with caring for the sick and teaching children and young girls. In *Słoneczko* I canonized *Sister Kinga*, an outstanding 13th-century figure, a model of charity both as the wife of the Polish Prince Boleslaus and, after his death, as a Poor Clare nun.

These heroic witnesses of faith show that the "traditio" of God's Word, heard and put into practice, has been handed down from Adalbert to this day, and should be courageously incarnated in today's society as it prepares to cross the threshold of the third millennium.

3. In Poland faith was nourished and greatly supported by devotion to the *Sacred Heart* and to the *Blessed Virgin Mary*. Veneration of the divine Heart of Jesus had special prominence in this pilgrimage: in the background was the consecration of the human race to the Sacred Heart which my revered Predecessor Leo XIII performed for the first time exactly 100 years ago. Humanity needs to enter the new millennium with trust in God's merciful love. However, this will only be possible if we turn to Christ the Saviour, the inexhaustible source of life and holiness.

And then what can we say of my compatriots' filial affection for their Queen, Mary most holy? In *Licheń* I blessed the large new shrine dedicated to her, and in some cities, including my birthplace, I crowned revered images of the Blessed Virgin. In *Sandomierz* I celebrated the Eucharist in honour of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

I would also like to recall my prayer meetings in *Ełk*, *Zamość*, *Warsaw-Praga*, *Ułowicz*, *Sosnowiec*, *Gliwice* and in my native town of *Wadowice*, as well as my visit to the monastery in *Wigry*.

Before my return I knelt in front of the venerable icon of Our Lady of *Człstochowa* at *Jasna Góra*: it was a moment of deep spiritual feeling. I renewed the entrustment of my life and my Petrine ministry to her, the “Holy Virgin who defends bright *Człstochowa*” (cf. Mickiewicz); to her I consecrated the Church in Poland and throughout the world; to her I prayed for the precious gift of peace for all humanity and solidarity among peoples.

4. During my journey I had several occasions to thank God for the *changes which have occurred in Poland* over the last 20 years in the name of freedom and solidarity. I did this at *Gdańsk*, the city which symbolizes the *Solidarność* movement. I did it especially when I spoke to the Polish *Parliament*, where I recalled the peaceful struggles of the '80s and the revolution of '89. The moral principles of those struggles must continue to inspire political life, so that democracy will be based on strong ethical values: the family, human life, work, education, care of the weak. At the same time as elections were being held for the European Parliament, I prayed for the “old” continent, that it might continue to be a beacon of civilization and authentic progress, rediscovering its spiritual roots and making the very most of its peoples’ potential from the Urals to the Atlantic.

In addition, at the two meetings with the *academic world*, in *Toruń* and *Warsaw*, I was able to emphasize how relations between the Church and the world of science have improved, to the great advantage of both. Nor can I forget the prayer at Radzymin in memory of the war of 1920 and the “Miracle of the Vistula”.

At other events I raised my voice in *defence of the weakest persons and groups*: while the Church performs works of mercy, she encourages justice and solidarity after the example of saints like Queen *Hedwig* and Albert *Chmielowski*, models of sharing with the most needy. Progress cannot be made at the expense of the poor or of economically weaker groups, or at the expense of the natural *environment*.

5. There was also an opportunity to stress that the Church makes her contribution to the integral development of the nation first of all by the formation of consciences. The Church exists to evangelize, that is, to proclaim to all that “God is love” and to enable every person to meet him. The *Second Plenary Synod* renewed this commitment according to the Second Vatican Council and in the light of the signs of the times, calling all believers to generous co-responsibility.

Evangelization is not credible if as Christians we do not love one another according to the Lord's commandment. In *Siedlce* and *Warsaw*, in memory of the Blessed Martyrs of *Podlasie*, I prayed with the Greek-Catholic faithful that the divisions of the second millennium would be overcome. I

also wanted to meet my brothers of other confessions, to *strengthen the bonds of unity*. At a shared ecumenical liturgy in *Drohiczyn*, this prayer involved the Orthodox, Lutherans and other non-Catholic Ecclesial Communities. The need for unity in the Church is felt by all: we must work for its full realization, ready to admit our faults and to forgive one another.

On the morning of the last day of my pilgrimage I was able to celebrate the Eucharist in *Wawel* Cathedral. Thus as I left my beloved city of *Kraków*, I could thank God for the millennium of that Archdiocese.

6. Dear brothers and sisters, let us praise the Lord together for these days of grace. I repeat with you today: *Te Deum laudamus ...!* Yes, we praise you O God, for the holy Church, founded on Christ the cornerstone, on the Apostles and martyrs, and which has spread to every corner of the earth. We especially praise you for the Church in Poland, rich in faith and works of charity.

We praise you, O Mary, Mother of the Church and Queen of Poland! Uniquely involved in the mystery of the Incarnation, help your people to celebrate the Great Jubilee with faith, and come to the aid of everyone in difficulty who has recourse to you. Help each of us to choose the realities which do not pass away: faith, hope and charity. Help us, O Mother, to live charity, which is the greatest of them all, because "God is love".

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Holy Father said:

I extend a cordial welcome to the members of the Young Presidents' Organization and of the Summer University of Christian Culture. May your visit to Rome be an occasion of renewal in faith and in commitment to building a world of justice, peace and solidarity with those in need. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors, especially those from England, Ireland and the United States, I invoke the abundant blessings of almighty God.