



# The Holy See

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VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF SAINT STANISLAUS IN ROME

**HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

*13 May 197*

## 1. "Abide..."

The word that returns most often to the readings of the Fifth Sunday of Easter is precisely the word "Abide". With this word the Risen Christ, who had first been crucified, *invites us to union with him*. He presents this union to us, referring to a simile drawn from nature. The branches abide in the vine and for this reason they bear fruit. They cannot do so by themselves if this organic link with life is lacking. In this case, in fact, there remain only twigs and dry branches, which are gathered and thrown into the fire because they can be used as firewood. On the other hand, *as long as the branches remain in the vine and draw vital sap from it*, they continue to be real branches. They form one thing with the vine, and are even defined together with it with the same name "*the vine*". They also deserve careful attention on the part of the owner, the vine-dresser. He looks carefully at every vine and every branch.

If it bears fruit, "he prunes it" so that it may bear even more fruit. But if it does not bear fruit, he removes it so that it will not get in the way, and with its fruitless growth weigh down the vine.

Here is the simile.

Here is the image in which there is expressed everything that had to be said in order that listeners would understand—first: *the mystery, of spiritual abiding in Christ; and then: the duty of producing spiritual fruits owing to the fact that they abide in him*. For this reason the Master uses at the same time descriptive language, showing the branch that remains in the vine, and normative language, giving an order; he says, "abide in me".

2. In what does this "abiding" in Jesus Christ consist? St John himself, who included the allegory of the vine in his Gospel, offers an answer to this question as author of the first letter. "All who keep his commandments abide in him (God), and he (God) in them (1 Jn 3:24). This is the most evident proof. The Apostle almost seems to hesitate in answering the question whether it is possible to establish and ascertain, with the help of some criterion that is verifiable, such a mysterious reality *as the abiding of God in man*, and thanks to that of *man in God*. This reality is strictly spiritual in nature. Is it possible to ascertain, to check this reality? Can man have the certainty that his works are good, pleasing to God and that they serve His abiding in his soul? Can man be certain that he is in a state of grace?

The Apostle answers this question as if he were answering himself and us at the same time: "if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God" (1 Jn 3:21), the confidence that we abide in him and he in us. And if, on the contrary, we have reasons for apprehension, it is from active love of God and of our brothers that we will be able to derive interior certainty and peace, we will be able to "reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything" (cf. Jn 3:20). Then, too, we do not cease to be in the range of his love, which can change the state of sin into the state of grace and make our heart once more the dwelling of the Living God. All that is necessary is our response to his love. *Love is the principle of divine Life in our souls*. Love is the law of our abiding in Christ: of the branch in the vine.

Let us love, therefore—St John writes—let us love "in deed and in truth" (1 Jn 3:18). Let our love prove its interior truth by means of deeds. Let us defend ourselves from the appearances of love .... "let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him" (1 Jn 3:18-19). "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us" (Jn 3:24).

3. We meet today, dear Brothers and Sisters, in St Stanislaus' church in Rome, to begin here the Jubilee of the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of the Patron Saint of Poland. It has started simultaneously in Krakow, in conformity with the very ancient Polish tradition: 8 May and the Sunday that immediately follows this day.

Every year this solemnity is the patronal feast of the Church in Poland, and it is closely connected with the solemnity of the White Mountain Queen of Poland, on 3 May, and the feast of St Wojciech (Adalbert) at Gniezno, on 23 April.

In the current year, which, in relation to the ninth centenary of St Stanislaus' death has been proclaimed a jubilee year, this annual feast of Krakow constitutes the beginning of the religious celebrations, the culminating point of which will occur on the Sunday of Pentecost and that of the Holy Trinity.

The usual gathering of Poles in the Roman church of St Stanislaus recalls the important initiative of the Servant of God, Cardinal Stanislaw Hozjusz, Bishop of Warmia and one of the Pope's legates at the Council of Trent, who founded St Stanislaus' hospice precisely at this church. The Cardinal, born at Krakow, and therefore spiritually sensitive to the cult of the Holy Bishop and Martyr, wished to designate this place in Rome with his name, as if to remind his fellow-countrymen in Poland that they had *remained in union with St Peter's See* for many centuries and must continue to remain in this union. In the year 1579 that great ecclesiastic, a close friend of St Charles Borromeo, died and was buried in St Mary's church in Trastevere, that is, in the church which is at present the titular church of the Cardinal Primate of Poland. The fourth centenary of Cardinal Hozjusz' death coincides with St Stanislaus' jubilee this year.

4. Dear Fellow-countrymen! The eloquence of the facts is such that it enables us to understand more adequately and deeper the Gospel of the vine and the branches this Sunday. We have abided in union with Christ since the time of the baptism of Poland and this spiritual union finds its visible expression in union with the Church. In the year of the anniversary of St Stanislaus' death we owe *special gratitude* to God who accepted the sacrifice of martyrdom and strengthened by this martyrdom our link with Christ living in the Church. And just as, during the millennium, we have sung the "Te Deum" of thanks for the gift of faith and baptism, so we should sing the "Te Deum" this year in thanksgiving for the strengthening of what started with baptism.

And at the same time, meditating on the allegory of the vine and the branches, let us look at the figure of that "Owner" who cultivates the vineyard, looks after every branch solicitously and, if need be, "prunes" it so that it may bear more fruit. Understanding the meaning of this allegory more deeply, let us pray *ardently and humbly*, each one for himself and everyone for everyone, that the branches will not wither and break away from Christ, who is the vine. Let us pray that the forces of irreligiousness, the forces of death, may not be more powerful than *the forces of life, the lights of faith*. We have lit up over Poland and over Poles all over the world the lights of the millennium. Let us all strive so that they will not be extinguished. May they shine in the same way as the cross of Stanislaus of Szczepanow shines in the hearts and consciences of Poles, indicating to them Christ who continues to be "the way, the truth and the life" (Jn 14:6) of men and of nations.

And now I would like to add a word for the Italian-speaking faithful gathered here.

We meet in this Roman church of St Stanislaus to begin the jubilee of the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of the Patron Saint of Poland, as is happening simultaneously also in Krakow. While I thank you, I invite you, too, to participate with your thought, and above all with your prayer, in this great solemnity of the Poles. St Stanislaus' church, in which we are gathered, represents in itself a concrete link between the city of Rome and my land of origin, since it was founded by the Polish Cardinal Stanislaus Hozjusz, a native of Krakow and Bishop of Warmia, Papal Legate at the Council of Trent, who died in 1579.

Beloved, today we read at Mass the Gospel of the vine and the branches. Jesus' word is for us all a stimulus to *remain united* with the Lord, separated from whom we are, on the contrary, destined to wither and die. Poland, since the time of its baptism, has remained faithfully united with Christ and expresses this spiritual bond of faith and love by means of visible integration in the Church. Well, on the anniversary of St Stanislaus' martyrdom, we must thank the Lord particularly, who accepted the sacrificial offering of that life, by means of which our link with Christ living in the Church was strengthened.

Let us pray together, therefore, humbly and ardently, that we may never separate from the Lord, and that the forces of faith and life in the Lord may never succumb to those of disbelief and death. Amen.

Praised be Jesus Christ.

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