



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Victory Square, Warsaw, 2 June 1979

Beloved Fellow-countrymen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters.

Participants in the Eucharistic Sacrifice celebrated today in Victory Square in Warsaw.

1. Together with you I wish to sing a hymn of praise to Divine Providence, which enables me to be here as a pilgrim.

We know that the recently deceased Paul VI, the first pilgrim Pope after so many centuries, ardently *desired to set foot on the soil of Poland*, especially at Jasna Gora (the Bright Mountain). To the end of his life he kept this desire in his heart, and with it he went to the grave. And we feel that this desire—a desire so potent and so deeply rooted that it goes beyond the span of a pontificate—is being realized today in a way that it would have been difficult to foresee. And so we thank Divine Providence for having given Paul VI so strong a desire. We thank it for the pattern of the pilgrim Pope that he began with the Second Vatican Council. At a time when the whole *Church* has become newly aware of being the People of God, a People sharing in the mission of Christ, a *People* that goes through history with that mission, a "*pilgrim*" People, the Pope could no longer remain a "prisoner of the Vatican". He had to become again the pilgrim Peter, like the first Peter, who from Jerusalem, through Antioch, reached Rome to give witness there to Christ and seal his witness with his blood.

Today it is granted to me to fulfil this desire of the deceased Pope Paul VI in the midst of you, beloved sons and daughters of my motherland. When, after the death of Paul VI and the brief

pontificate of my immediate Predecessor John Paul I, which lasted only a few weeks, I was, through the inscrutable designs of Divine Providence, called by the votes of the Cardinals from the chair of Saint Stanislaus in Krakow to that of Saint Peter in Rome, I immediately understood that *it was for me to fulfil that desire*, the desire that Paul VI had been unable to carry out at the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland.

My pilgrimage to my motherland in the year in which the Church in Poland is celebrating the ninth centenary of the death of Saint Stanislaus is surely a special sign of the pilgrimage that we Poles are making down through the history of the Church not only along the ways of our motherland but also along those of Europe and the world. Leaving myself aside at this point, I must nonetheless with all of you ask myself why, precisely in 1978, after so many centuries of a well established tradition in this field, a son of the Polish Nation, of the land of Poland, was called to the chair of Saint Peter. Christ demanded of Peter and of the other Apostles that they should be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Have we not the right, with reference to these words of Christ, to think that *Poland has become nowadays the land of a particularly responsible witness*? The right to think that from here—from Warsaw, and also from Gniezno, from Jasna Gora, from Krakow and from the whole of this historic route that I have so often in my life traversed and that it is to proclaim Christ with singular humility but also with conviction? The right to think that one must come to this very place, to this land, on this route, to read again the witness of his Cross and his Resurrection? But if we accept all that I have dared to affirm in this moment, how many great duties and obligations arise? Are we capable of them?

2. Today, at the first stopping place in my papal pilgrimage in Poland, it is granted to me to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice in Victory Square in Warsaw. The liturgy of the evening of Saturday the Vigil of Pentecost takes us to the *Upper Room in Jerusalem*, where the Apostles, gathered around Mary the Mother of Christ, were on the following day to receive the Holy Spirit. They were to receive the Spirit obtained for them by Christ through the Cross, in order that through the power of this Spirit they might fulfil his command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Mt 28:19-20). Before Christ the Lord left the world, he transmitted to the Apostles with these words his last recommendation, his "missionary mandate". And he added: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20).

It is good that my pilgrimage to Poland on the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus should fall in the *Pentecost period* and on the solemnity of the *Most Holy Trinity*. Fulfilling the desire of Paul VI after his death, I am able to relive the Millennium of the Baptism on Polish soil and to inscribe this year's jubilee of Saint Stanislaus in the Millennium since the beginning of the nation and the Church. The Solemnity of Pentecost and that of the Most Holy Trinity bring us close to this beginning. In the apostles who receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost are spiritually present in a way all their successors, all the Bishops, including those whose task it has been for a thousand years to proclaim the Gospel on Polish soil. Among them was this Stanislaus of

Szczepanow, who paid with his blood for his mission on the episcopal chair of Krakow nine centuries ago.

On the day of Pentecost there were gathered, in the Apostles and around them, not only the representatives of the peoples and tongues listed in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Even then there were gathered about them the various peoples and nations that, through the light of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, were to enter the Church at different periods and centuries. The day of Pentecost is *the birthday of the faith and of the Church in our land of Poland also*. It is the proclamation of the mighty works of God in our Polish language also. It is the beginning of Christianity in the life of our nation also, in its history, its culture, its trials.

3a. To Poland the Church brought Christ, *the key to understanding that great and fundamental reality that is man*. For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his true dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final end is. He cannot understand any of this without Christ.

Therefore Christ cannot be kept out of the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography. The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act against man. Without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland, especially the history of the people who have passed or are passing through this land. The history of people. The history of the nation is above all the history of people. And the history of each person unfolds in Jesus Christ. In him it becomes the history of salvation.

The history of the nation deserves to be adequately appraised in the light of its contribution *to the development of man and humanity*, to intellect, heart and conscience. This is the deepest stream of culture. It is culture's firmest support, its core, its strength. It is impossible without Christ to understand and appraise the contribution of the Polish nation *to the development of man and his humanity* in the past and its contribution today also: "This old oak tree has grown in such a way and has not been knocked down by any wind since its root is Christ" (Piotr Skarga, *Kazania Sejmowe* IV, Biblioteka Narodowa, I, 70, p. 92). It is necessary to follow the traces of what, or rather who, Christ was for the sons and daughters of this land down the generations. Not only for those who openly believed in him and professed him with the faith of the Church, but also for those who appeared to be at a distance, outside the Church. For those who doubted or were opposed.

3b. It is right to understand the history of the nation through man, each human being of this nation. At the same time man cannot be understood apart from this community that is constituted by the nation. Of course it is not the only community, but it is a special community, perhaps that most intimately linked with the family, the most important for the spiritual history of man. *It is therefore impossible without Christ to understand the history of the Polish nation*—this great thousand-year-

old community—that is so profoundly decisive for me and each one of us. If we reject this key to understanding our nation, we lay ourselves open to a substantial misunderstanding. We no longer understand ourselves. It is impossible without Christ to understand this nation with its past so full of splendour and also of terrible difficulties. It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, that undertook in 1944 an unequal battle against the aggressor, a battle in which it was abandoned by the allied powers, a battle in which it was buried under its own ruins—if it is not remembered that under those same ruins there was also the statue of Christ the Saviour with his cross that is in front of the church at Krakowskie Przedmiescie. It is impossible to understand the history of Poland from Stanislaus in Skalka to Maximilian Kolbe at Oswiecim unless we apply to them that same single *fundamental criterion* that is called Jesus Christ.

The Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, of which Saint Stanislaus is the first mature fruit—the millennium of Christ in our yesterday, and today—is the chief reason for my pilgrimage, for my prayer of thanksgiving together with all of you, dear fellow-countrymen, to whom Christ does not cease to teach the great cause of man; together with you, for whom Jesus Christ does not cease to be an ever open book on man, his dignity and his rights and also a book of knowledge on the dignity and rights of the nation.

Today, here in Victory Square, in the capital of Poland, I am asking with all of you, through the great Eucharistic prayer, *that Christ will not cease to be for us an open book of life for the future*, for our Polish future.

4. We are before the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. In the ancient and contemporary history of Poland this tomb has a special basis, a special reason for its existence. In how many places in our native land has that soldier fallen! In how many places in Europe and the world has he cried with his death that there can be no just Europe without the independence of Poland marked on its map! On how many battlefields has that soldier given witness to the rights of man, indelibly inscribed in the inviolable rights of the people, by falling for "our free-dom and yours"!

"Where are their tombs, O Po-land? Where are they not! You know better than anyone—and God knows it in heaven" (A. Oppman, *Pacierz za zmarlych*).

The history of the motherland written through *the tomb of an Unknown Soldier!*

I wish to kneel before this tomb to venerate every seed that falls into the earth and dies and thus bears fruit. It may be the seed of the blood of a soldier shed on the battlefield, or the sacrifice of martyrdom in concentration camps or in prisons. It may be the seed of hard daily toil, with the sweat of one's brow, in the fields, the workshop, the mine, the foundries and the factories. It may be the seed of the love of parents who do not refuse to give life to a new human being and undertake the whole of the task of bringing him up. It may be the seed of creative work in the universities, the higher institutes, the libraries and the places where the national culture is built. It

may be the seed of prayer, of service of the sick, the suffering, the abandoned—"all that of which Poland is made".

All that in the hands of the Mother of God—at the foot of the cross on Calvary and in the Upper Room of Pentecost!

All that—the history of the motherland shaped for a thousand years by the succession of the generations (among them the present generation and the coming generation) and by each son and daughter of the motherland, even if they are anonymous and unknown like the Soldier before whose tomb we are now.

All that—including the history of the peoples that have lived with us and among us, such as those who died in their hundreds of thousands within the walls of the Warsaw ghetto.

All that I embrace in thought and in my heart during this Eucharist and I include it in this unique most holy Sacrifice of Christ, on Victory Square.

And I cry—I who am a Son of the land of Poland and who am also Pope John Paul II—I cry from all the depths of this Millennium, I cry on the vigil of Pentecost:

Let your Spirit descend.

Let your Spirit descend.

and renew the face of the earth,

the face of this land.

Amen.

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