



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

HOLY MASS

**HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II**

*Cathedral of Gniezno, 3 June 1979*

*Your Eminence, beloved Primate of Poland.*

*Dear Brothers, the Archbishops and Bishops of Poland.*

1. *In you I greet the whole of the People of God living in my native land—the priests, the religious families, the laity.*

I greet Poland, baptized over a thousand years ago.

I greet Poland, inserted into the mysteries of the divine life through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. I greet the Church in the land of my forefathers, in hierarchical community and unity with the Successor of Saint Peter. I greet the Church in Poland, which was guided from the beginning by the *saints*, Bishops and Martyrs, *Wojciech (Adalbert) and Stanislaus, in union with the Queen of Poland, Our Lady of Jasna Gora (The Bright Mountain—Czestochowa).*

I who have come among you as a pilgrim for the great Jubilee greet all of you, dear brothers and sisters, with the brotherly kiss of peace.

2. Once again the day of Pentecost has come, and we are spiritually present in the Jerusalem upper room, while at the same time we are present here in this upper room of our Polish Millennium, in which we hear as forcefully as ever the voice of the mystery-filled date of that beginning from which we start to count the years of the history of our motherland and of the Church that has been made part of it. The history of Poland ever faithful.

On the day of Pentecost, in the Jerusalem upper room, the promise is fulfilled that was sealed with the blood of the Redeemer on Calvary: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23). The Church is born precisely from the power of these words. The Church is born of the power of this breath. After it had been prepared during the entire life of Christ, the Church is definitively born when *the Apostles receive from Christ* the gift of Pentecost, when they receive from him *the Holy Spirit*. The descent of the Spirit marks the beginning of the Church, which throughout all generations must bring mankind—both the individuals and the nations—into the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ. The descent of the Holy Spirit means the beginning of this mystery and also its continuance. For the continuance is a constant return to the beginning.

And now we hear how in the Jerusalem upper room, the Apostles were "filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). The various languages became theirs, became their own languages, thanks to the mystery-filled action of the Holy Spirit, which "blows where it wills" (Jn 3:8) and renews "the face of the earth" (Ps 103/104:30).

And although the author of Acts does not list our language among those that the Apostles began to speak that day, the time would come when the Successors of the Apostles in the upper room were to begin to speak also the tongue of our forefathers and to proclaim the Gospel to the People that could understand it and receive it only in that language.

3. There is much significance in the names of the castles of the Piast dynasty in which this historic *translation of the Spirit* took place and in which the torch of the Gospel was lit in the land of our forefathers. The language of the Apostles resounded for the first time, as if in a new translation, in our tongue, the tongue that the people living on the banks of the Warta and the Vistula understood and that we still understand today.

The castles with which the beginning of the faith in the land of our Polish forefathers is linked are, in fact, that of Poznan—which from the earliest times, beginning two years after the baptism of Mieszko, was the residence of the Bishop—and that of Gniezno—where the great ecclesiastical and state act of *the year 1000* took place: the meeting before the relics of Saint Wojciech of the envoys of Pope Sylvester II of Rome with the Roman Emperor Otto III and the first Polish king (then only a prince as yet) Boleslaw Chrobry (Boleslaus the Bold), the son and successor of Mieszko, in which the first Polish ecclesiastical province was set up, thus laying *the foundations of the hierarchical order* for the whole of the history of Poland. Within this ecclesiastical province of Gniezno we find in the year 1000 the episcopal sees of Krakow, Wroclaw and Kolobrzeg, linked in a single ecclesiastical organization.

Every time we come to this place, we must see the upper room of Pentecost opened up before us again. And we must listen to the language of our forefathers, in which the proclamation of "the

mighty works of God" (Acts 2:11) began to resound.

It was also here that the Church in Poland intoned in 1966 its first *Te Deum* of thanksgiving for the Millennium of its baptism. As Metropolitan of Krakow, I had the good fortune to participate in that celebration. Today, as the first Pope of the Polish race, I would like *to sing again with you this Te Deum of the Millennium*. Inscrutable and wonderful are the decrees of the Lord that trace the ways leading from Sylvester II to John Paul II in this place.

4. After so many centuries the Jerusalem upper room was again opened up and amazement fell no longer only on the peoples of Mesopotamia and Judea, Egypt and Asia, and visitors from Rome, but also on *the Slav peoples* and the other peoples living *in this part of Europe*, as they heard the apostles of Jesus Christ speaking in their tongue and telling in their language "the mighty works of God".

When in the course of history the first sovereign of Poland wished to introduce Christianity and unite with the See of Saint Peter, he turned above all to the related peoples and married Dobrawa, daughter of the Czech prince Boleslaus, who was a Christian and became the godmother of her husband and of all his subjects. With her, Poland received missionaries from various nations of Europe, from Ireland, Italy and Germany, such as the holy bishop and martyr Saint Bruno of Querfurt. In the memory of the Church in the land of the Boleslaws the deepest impression was made by Saint Wojciech, a son and pastor of the related Czech nation. Well known are his history during the time that he was Bishop of Prague, his pilgrimages to Rome and above all his stay at the court of Gniezno, which was to prepare him for his final missionary journey to the North. In the area of the Baltic Sea this exile bishop, this tireless missionary, became the grain that falls into the ground and must die in order to bear much fruit (cf. Jn 12:24). The witness of martyrdom, the witness of blood, sealed in a special way the baptism received a thousand years ago by our forefathers. The martyred remains of the apostle Wojciech lie at the foundations of Christianity throughout the land of Poland.

5. Today, in the year of the Lord 1979, on this anniversary of the descent of the Holy Spirit, as we go back to those beginnings, we cannot fail to hear also—as well as the language of our own forefathers—other Slav languages and related languages, languages in which there then began to be heard the voice of the upper room that was opened wide to history. These languages cannot fail to be heard especially by the first Slav Pope in the history of the Church. Perhaps that is why Christ has chosen him, perhaps that is why the Holy Spirit has led him—in order that he might introduce into the communion of the Church the understanding of the words and of the languages that still sound strange to the ear accustomed to the Romance, Germanic, English and Celtic tongues. Is it not Christ's will that the Holy Spirit should make *the Mother Church turn*, at the end of the second millennium of Christianity, *with loving understanding*, with special sensitivity, to those forms of human speech that are linked together by their common origin, their common etymology, and which, in spite of the well-known differences, even in way of writing, sound close

and familiar one to another?

Is it not Christ's will, is it not what the Holy Spirit disposes, that this Pope, in whose heart is deeply engraved the history of his own nation from its very beginning and also the history of the brother peoples and the neighbouring peoples, should in a special way manifest and confirm in our age *the presence of these peoples in the Church* and their specific contribution to the history of Christianity?

Is it not the design of Providence that he should reveal the developments that have taken place here in this part of Europe in the rich architecture of the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Is it not Christ's will, is it not what the Holy Spirit disposes, that this Polish Pope, this Slav Pope, should at this precise moment manifest the spiritual unity of Christian Europe? Although there are *two great traditions, that of the West and that of the East*, to which it is indebted, through both of them Christian Europe professes "one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all" (Eph 4:5-6), the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, it is Christ's will, it is what the Holy Spirit disposes, that what I am saying should be said in this very place and at this moment in Gniezno, in the land of the Piasts, in Poland, close to the relics of Saint Wojciech and Saint Stanislaus, before the image of the Virgin Mother of God, Our Lady of the Bright Mountain and Mother of the Church.

On the occasion of the baptism of Poland we must call to mind the Christianization of the Slavs: that of the Croats and Slovenes, among whom missionaries worked as early as about 650 and largely accomplished their evangelization by the year 800; that of the Bulgarians, whose prince, Borys I, received baptism in 864 or 865; that of the Moravians and Slovaks, who were reached by missionaries before 850 and then in 863 by Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, who came to Greater Moravia to consolidate the faith of the young communities; that of the Czechs, whose Prince Borivoj was baptized by Saint Methodius. The field of the evangelizing influence of Saint Methodius and his disciples also included the Vislans and the Slavs living in Serbia. We must also recall the baptism of Russia at Kiev in 988. We must also remember the Christianization of the Slavs dwelling along the Elbe: Obotrits, Wielets and Lusatian Sorbs. The Christianization of Europe was completed with the baptism of Lithuania in 1386 and 1387.

Pope John Paul II, a Slav, a son of the Polish nation, feels *how deeply fixed in the ground of history are the roots of his origin*, how many centuries stand behind the word of the Holy Spirit proclaimed by him from Saint Peter's Vatican Hill, and here at Gniezno, from the hill of Lech, and at Krakow, from the heights of Wawel.

This Pope, who is a witness of Christ and a lover of the Cross and the Resurrection, today comes to this place to give witness to Christ, who is living in the soul of his nation, *to Christ, who is living*

*in the souls of the nations* that have long since accepted him as "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). He comes here to speak before the whole Church, before Europe and the world, of those often forgotten nations and peoples. He comes here to cry "with a loud voice". He comes here to point out the paths that in one way or another lead back towards the Pentecost upper room, towards the Cross and Resurrection. He comes here to embrace all these peoples, together with his own nation, and to hold them close *to the heart of the Church*, to the heart of the Mother of the Church, in whom he has unlimited trust.

6. Within a short time there will end here in Gniezno the visit of the sacred Icon. The image of Our Lady of Jasna Gora, the image of the Mother, expresses in a unique way her presence in the mystery of Christ and of the Church that has been living for so many centuries in the land of Poland. This image, which for more than twenty years has been visiting the individual churches, dioceses and parishes of this land, *ends before long its visit to Gniezno, the ancient See of the Primate*, and goes to Jasna Gora, to begin its pilgrimage in the Diocese of Czestochowa.

It is a great joy for me to be able to do this stage on my pilgrimage together with Mary and to be with her on the great historic route that I have often travelled, *from Gniezno to Krakow by way of Jasna Gora, from Saint Wojciech to Saint Stanislaus by way of the "Virgin Mother of God, whom God has filled with glory, Mary"*.

The chief route of our spiritual history, the route travelled by all the Poles, whether of the West or of the East, as well as those outside their motherland in the various countries and continents.

The chief *route* of our spiritual history and also one of the great routes *of the spiritual history of all the Slavs* and one of the chief spiritual routes of the history *of Europe*.

In these days there will take place for the first time a pilgrimage along this route by the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, the Successor of Peter, the first among those who went forth from the Pentecost upper room in Jerusalem, singing:

"Lord God, how great you are, clothed in majesty and glory, / wrapped in light as in a robe!...

How many are your works, O Lord! / In wisdom you have made them all. / The earth is full of your riches.

You send forth your Spirit, they are created, / and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 103/104: 1-2, 24, 30).

Thus, dear fellow-countrymen, will this Pope, *blood of your blood, bone of your bone*, sing with you, and with you he will exclaim:

"May the glory of the Lord last for ever! / May the Lord rejoice in his works! / ... May the glory of the Lord last for ever! / ... May my thoughts be pleasing to him". (Ps 103/104:31, 34).

We shall go together along this path of our history, from Jasna Gora to Wawel, to Saint Stanislaus. We shall go there, thinking of the past, but with our minds directed towards the future.

We shall not return to the past! *We shall go towards the future!* "Receive the Holy Spirit"! (Jn 20:22).

Amen.

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