



The Holy See

LETTER OF JOHN PAUL II TO THE ARCHDIOCESE OF KRAKÓW AND THE CHURCH IN POLAND

"Beatum Stanislaum episcopum digne Sanctorum Catalogo duximus ascribendum".

"We have deemed it fitting to inscribe Bl. Bishop Stanislaus in the roll of the Saints". With these words, on 17 September 1253, my venerable Predecessor, Pope Innocent IV, confirmed the act of canonization of the Martyr of Kraków, and at the same time ordered that he be commemorated every year on 8 May. The Church in Poland, with never-fading joy and devotion, carried out that order by venerating the Patron Saint of the entire nation. This year in which the 750th anniversary of his canonization occurs, she does so with special solemnity. I wholeheartedly desire, therefore, to join in the celebration of this Jubilee and to express my closeness to the clergy and faithful of the Church in Kraków and all Poland who are gathered at the tomb of St Stanislaus to praise God for all the graces received by the Polish nation down the centuries through his intercession.

The memory of the ministry of St Stanislaus in the See of Kraków, which lasted barely seven years, and particularly the memory of his death, have constantly accompanied through the centuries the history of the nation and the Church in Poland. In this collective memory, the holy Bishop of Kraków lives on as a patron of the moral and social order in our homeland.

As Bishop and Pastor he proclaimed faith in God to our ancestors and started in them, through [the sacraments of] holy Baptism, Confirmation, Penance and the Eucharist, the saving power of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. He taught the moral order in the family based on sacramental marriage. He taught the moral order within the State, reminding even the king that in his actions he should keep in mind the unchanging Law of God. He defended freedom, which is the fundamental right of every person and which no authority can take from anyone for any reason without violating the order established by God himself. At the dawn of our history God, Father of peoples and nations, showed us through this holy Patron that the moral order, respect for the Law of God and the just rights of every person are fundamental conditions for the existence and

development of every society.

In 1252 the canonization of the first son of their land coincided with the Polish people's painful experience of the division of Poland into regional duchies. It was that canonization that stirred up in the princes of the Piast dynasty then in power, the desire to gather in Kraków at the tomb of St Stanislaus and the site of his martyrdom, to share the common joy in the raising of one of their fellow-countrymen to the glory of the altars in the universal Church. Everyone recognized in him their Patron and intercessor before God. In him they united their hopes for a better future in the homeland. The devout tradition which tells that the body of Stanislaus, who was killed and chopped into pieces, would be made whole again, gave rise to the hope that the Poland of the Piasts would overcome the dynastic divisions to be once more a State of lasting unity. In the perspective of that hope, after his canonization the holy Bishop of Kraków was chosen as Poland's main Patron and the Father of the homeland.

His relics, preserved in Wawel Cathedral, received the religious veneration of the whole nation. This veneration acquired a new meaning during the parcelling up of the land when Poles, especially from Silesia, streamed in from beyond the barriers in order to come close to these relics that recalled the Christian past of independent Poland. His martyrdom, which testified to the spiritual maturity of our forebears, acquired special eloquence in the history of the nation. His figure was a symbol of the unity then being built, not only on the territorial basis of an independent state, but on the eternal values and spiritual tradition on which our national identity is founded.

St Stanislaus was also the patron of the homeland's struggle for survival during the Second World War, whose end in our country coincides with his feast in the month of May. From heaven above he shared in the nation's trials, sufferings and hopes. In the difficult period of the post-war reconstruction of the country and oppression by hostile ideologies, the nation, sustained by his intercession, won victories and strove for a social, cultural and political renewal. For centuries St Stanislaus has been considered the champion of true freedom and the artisan of a creative union between loyalty to the earthly homeland and fidelity to God and his Law - the synthesis which is active in every believer's heart.

In his Letter for the 700th anniversary of his canonization, Pius XII wrote: "Your people were given a Pastor who laid down his life for his sheep, defending Christian faith and morality, who in pouring out his blood made the seeds of the Gospel even more fruitful. He is known for having entrusted himself to Divine Providence, thus providing a shining example of Christian fortitude. St Stanislaus, who was marked by deep reverence for God and love for his neighbour, possessed nothing sweeter than his solicitude for the flock entrusted to his care, and to the very end of his life had no other desire than to reproduce perfectly in himself the image of the Divine Shepherd". I quote these words in order to point out to the Pastors of today - Bishops and Priests - the model to imitate. Today too, in fact, there is need for courage to pass on and to defend the holy deposit of the faith. At the same time, we are in need of that love of God which is manifested in ceaseless

concern for men and women, for every son and daughter of God, exposed to adversities that seem to extinguish the flame of hope in the victory of truth, goodness and beauty in a better future in temporal reality and in eternal happiness in the kingdom of God. May the example of the generous love of St Stanislaus always enlighten the Pastors of the Church in Poland.

Stanislaus of Szczepanów came to inspire many saints and blessed of our Polish land. There is a deep spiritual bond between the figure of this great Patron of Poland and the multitude of saints and blessed who made an immense contribution of goodness and holiness in the history of our homeland. One sign of this bond is the custom of bearing the relics of the Polish saints in the procession to the Church of Skałka. In the Bishop of Kraków, the Saints found an example of heroic faith, hope and charity given each day and which assumes the form of daily heroism. This chain of holiness, whose first link in Poland is St Stanislaus, cannot be interrupted. Let us all, sons and daughters of Poland, feel responsible for extending it and passing it on to future generations as the most precious treasure. This is the challenge of St Stanislaus to all the faithful today: grow in holiness! Build the house of your life on the rock of divine grace, sparing no efforts to found it on sound fidelity to God and his commandments!

St Stanislaus witnesses eloquently that in Jesus Christ man is called to victory. May this victory of good over evil, of love over hatred, of unity over divisions, become the heritage of every Pole. I pray that the clergy and laity in Poland may become ever holier, and that they will pass on the patrimony of holiness to the new generations in the third millennium.

The Church in Poland wants to live the whole of this year as the year of St Stanislaus. I have therefore decided to combine the Jubilee of the 750th anniversary of his canonization with the possibility of obtaining grace through a plenary indulgence, on the usual conditions, during a visit to his tomb in Wawel cathedral and to the place where he died at Skalce.

To those who would like to benefit from this gift and to those devoted to St Stanislaus in Poland and in the world, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 8 May 2003

JOHN PAUL II