



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND

MEETING WITH DIOCESAN PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS IN THE CATHEDRAL OF THE HOLY FAMILY

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Czestochowa

Wednesday, 6 June 1979

1. My dear brothers in the priesthood, and at the same time, in the same priesthood of Christ, beloved sons.

We meet here at the feet of the Mother of God, before the face of our Mother: The Mother of priests. We meet in unusual circumstances, by which you certainly, like me, are deeply moved. And yet this first Polish Pope who today stands before you received the grace of a priestly vocation on Polish soil; he passed through the Polish Major Seminary (for the most part when it was underground, because it was during the Occupation); he studied at the Theology Faculty of the Jagellonian University; he received priestly ordination from the Polish bishop and inflexible prince of unforgettable memory, Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha; and, with you, he shared in the same experiences of the Church and the nation.

This in particular I want to say to you at today's meeting. Everything that was formed in me here, everything I have taken away from here, echoes in all the meetings I have had with priests since 16 October 1978. And so today, in this meeting with you, I wish especially to refer to the words that I have said on those various occasions. In fact I believe that you all have some share in their formation, and in part you have authorship rights. I also hold that though these words have been already said in Rome or elsewhere, they refer to you in Poland.

2. Here is a part of the talk I gave to the diocesan and religious priests of the Diocese of Rome last

November 9:

I said: "I remember the admirable, zealous and often heroic priests with whom I was able to share the concern and the struggles... In my previous episcopal work the Priests' Council rendered me great service, both as a community and as a meeting-place for sharing, together with the Bishop, common solicitude for the whole life of the *presbyterium* and for the effectiveness of its pastoral activity... As I meet you here for the first time and greet you with sincere affection," I also said to the priests and religious of Rome, "I still have before my eyes and in my heart the *presbyterium* of the Church in Krakow—all our meetings on various occasions—the many talks that began right from the years in the Seminary—the meetings of priests—ordination groups of the individual seminary courses, to which I always went and in which I took part with joy and benefit!" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 November 1978, p. 1, nos. 2-3).

3. And now let us return together to the great *meeting with the Mexican priests* at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe. I said this to them:

"Servants of a great cause, on you largely depends the destiny of the Church in the spheres entrusted to your pastoral care. This imposes upon you the duty to have a deep awareness of the greatness of the mission that you have received, and an awareness of the need to make yourselves ever more fit for it. In fact, it is a question... of Christ's Church—with what respect and love this ought to fill us!—which you must serve with joy in holiness of life (cf. Eph 4:13). This lofty and .demanding service cannot be rendered unless you have a clear and firmly-rooted conviction of your identity as priests of Christ, stewards and ministers of God's mysteries, instruments of salvation for people, witnesses to a kingdom that begins in this world but reaches fulfilment in the world to come" (nos. 2-3; AAS 71 (1979), p. 180).

4. Finally, the fourth statement, and perhaps the best known one: the *Letter to all the priests of the Church on the occasion of Holy Thursday 1979*. I felt the particularly strong need to address the priests of the whole Church precisely at the beginning of my pontificate. I wanted this to happen on the occasion of Holy Thursday, on the occasion of the "feast of priests", I had before my eyes that day in the Cathedral at Wawel, when we renewed together our faith in the priesthood of Jesus Christ and dedicated to him anew, at his complete disposal, our whole being, soul and body, so that he might be able to work through us and carry out his salvific work.

"Our pastoral activity demands," I wrote, "that we should be close to people and all their problems, whether these problems be personal, family or social ones, but it also demands that we should be close to all these problems 'in a priestly way'. Only then, in the sphere of all these problems, do we remain ourselves. Therefore if we are really of assistance in those human problems, and they are sometimes very difficult ones, then we keep our identity and are really faithful to our vocation. With great perspicacity we must seek, together with all men, truth and justice, the true and definitive dimensions of which we can only find in the Gospel, or rather in Christ himself" (no. 17 A AS 71

(1979), p. 404).

5. Dear Polish priests gathered today at Jasna Gora, those are the thoughts that I wanted to share with you. The priests of Poland have their own history, a history that has been written, in close connection with the history of the motherland, by the entire generations of the "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1) whom our land has given.

We have always felt a profound bond with the People of God, with this people from the midst of which we have been "chosen", and for which we have been "appointed" (cf. Heb 5:1). The witness of living faith that we draw from the Upper Room, from Gethsemane, from Calvary, from the faith that we absorbed with our mothers' milk; from the faith that was strengthened amid the hard trials suffered by our fellow countrymen—this is our spiritual hallmark; the foundation of our priestly identity.

In today's meeting, could I fail to recall the thousands of Polish priests who lost their lives in the last war, especially in the concentration camps?

But allow me to limit the memories that crowd into my mind and heart.

I shall say only that this heritage of priestly faith, service and solidarity with the nation in her most difficult periods, which constitutes in a sense the foundation of the historical trust of society in the Polish priests, *must always be developed* by each of you and must, I would say, always be *won again*. Christ the Lord taught the Apostles what idea they were to have of themselves and what they were to demand of themselves: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Lk 17:10). Dear brothers, Polish Priests, as you recall these words and the experiences of history, you must always keep before your eyes *the demands arising from the Gospel that are the measure of your vocation*. It is a great blessing this trust that the Polish priest has to his credit with society when he is faithful to his mission and his attitude is clear and in keeping with the style developed by the Church in Poland in the last decades: namely, *the style of the evangelical witness of social service*. May God assist us in order that this style may not be exposed to any "hesitation".

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