



The Holy See

**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)
*ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT THE MEETING WITH CHILDREN
WHO RECEIVED FIRST HOLY COMMUNION***

Zakopane

Saturday 7 June 1997

1. "Let the children come to me" (Mk 10:14), Jesus once said to the Apostles. This was a marvellous invitation. The Lord Jesus loved children and wanted them to be close to him. Many times he blessed them and even used them as an example for adults. He said that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who become like little children (cf. Mt 18:3). Naturally, that does not mean that adults must become like children in every aspect, but that their hearts must be pure, good and trusting, that they must be filled with love. Dear children! The Pope comes to you today to tell you in the name of the Lord Jesus that He loves you. Certainly the priests and sisters who have taught you have spoken about this many times. But I want to say it once more so that you will remember this happy news all your lives. Jesus loves you! A little while ago you experienced this in a special way — when Jesus came for the first time into your hearts. You received him under the appearance of bread in First Holy Communion. What does it mean that he came into your hearts? To answer this question we must go back for a moment to the Upper Room. There, during the Last Supper, just before his death, the Lord Jesus gave the bread to the Apostles and said: "Take this and eat it: this is my Body". In the same way he gave them the wine, saying: "Take this and drink from it: this is the cup of my Blood". And we believe that, although the Apostles ate what tasted like bread and wine, they were really eating the Body and drinking the Blood of Christ. And this was the sign of his infinite love. For a person who loves is ready to give to the person he loves all the most precious things he has. In this world, the Lord Jesus did not have many things to offer to the Apostles. But he gave them something more — he gave them himself. From then on, when they received this most holy Food, they could always be with Jesus. He himself lived in their hearts and filled them with holiness. This is what it means that Jesus has come into your hearts. He is in you, his love fills you and makes you become always more like him, always more holy. This is a great grace, but also a great task. So that the Lord Jesus can live in us we must make sure that our hearts are always open to him. And so this is what you must do: love Jesus always; have a good and pure heart; and as often as possible invite him in, so that through Holy Communion he can live in you. And never do anything that is bad. Sometimes this can be hard.

But remember that Jesus loves you and wants you to love him with all your strength.² Today, together with you, I want to thank Christ for the infinite love that he pours out on every person. We praise him in a special way for the gift of the Eucharist, in which he has remained so that we may have life and have it abundantly (cf. Jn 10:10). I also thank your teachers, who have brought you to the Eucharistic Jesus, and I thank all those throughout Poland who take on the work of passing on the faith in schools. It is a noble task, although often not easy. It demands a witness of faith, hope and love: faith that stands firmly on the Gospels; hope that sees no one as beyond the possibility of salvation; love that does not hesitate to give the best, even at the cost of self-sacrifice. Do not lose the conviction that young people, even if they do not show it, need and want this witness of yours. May the Holy Spirit who has enlightened and strengthened generations and generations of Christ's apostles sustain you too — the legions of catechists in Poland today. Finally, I wish to address a word of gratitude also to the parents, those present and all parents in Poland. When you brought your children one day for Baptism, you took on the obligation of educating them in the faith of the Church and in the love of God. These children, who for the first time have received Holy Communion, are a sign that you have accepted this obligation and are sincerely trying to live up to it. I beg you never to reject this. It is first of all the parents who have the right and the duty to educate their children in keeping with their own convictions. Do not give up this right to institutions which can pass on to children and young people indispensable knowledge but which are not able to give them the witness of parental care and love. Do not let yourselves be fooled by the temptation to ensure for your children the best material conditions at the price of your time and attention, which they need in order to grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52). If you want to defend your children against the loss of moral values and the spiritual void which the world proposes by various means, sometimes even in school programmes, surround them with the warmth of your motherly and fatherly love and give them the example of a Christian life. I entrust your love, your efforts and your concerns to the Holy Family, the Patron of this church. May the protection of Jesus, Mary and Joseph bring you comfort.³ Once more I embrace with all my heart the children present and all the children of our country, especially those who bear the burden of suffering or neglect. I pay homage to all parents who accept the daily task of taking care of their children and educating them. I thank the pastors and faithful of the whole parish for their generosity, hospitality and for the gift of their prayers. I cordially bless them all.