



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO AUSTRIA (JUNE 19-21, 1998)

***SPEECH OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
ON HIS DEPARTURE FROM VIENNA AIRPORT***

Sunday, 21 June 1998

Mr President,

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

1. My third Pastoral Visit to this beautiful land of Austria is coming to an end. The time to leave has arrived. With deep gratitude, I think back over the days that I have spent with you. I came as a *pilgrim in the faith, as a servant of joy and as a co-worker in the truth*. I now return to my episcopal see of Rome, having been richly blessed and carrying many beautiful impressions in my heart.

2. This moment of farewell is the occasion to offer everyone a sincere “*God reward you*”. First of all, my gratitude goes to God, giver of all good things, for these days of intense spiritual meetings, liturgical celebrations and moments of shared reflection for a new awakening of the Church in Austria.

A special word of gratitude goes to *my beloved Brothers in the Episcopate*, who in these very difficult times never cease to dedicate themselves with all their strength to the service of unity in truth and love. The invitation for this Pastoral Visit and the meeting with the Bishops’ Conference, which I was able to experience in the past few days, gave me consolation and encouragement, since they confirm that the Bishops, in communion with each other and with the Successor of Peter, are determined to build, together with *the priests, deacons, religious and lay faithful*, the future of the Church in Austria.

My sincere gratitude goes also to you, *Mr Federal President*, to the *public authorities* and to *all the citizens* of this beloved country. Once again you have shown me such truly generous hospitality. I cannot fail to mention the *numerous*

volunteers who for many weeks have been doing everything possible with great enthusiasm to guarantee a smooth visit, working even more than usual.

At this point, *those who contributed in hidden ways* to the success of my visit deserve to be mentioned: the public security and law enforcement authorities, the providers of first aid and the numerous men and women who worked behind the scenes.

3. With my visit I wished to show my *esteem and appreciation* to the Austrian Republic and to the Church of this country, while at the same time to indicate some *prospects* for its future progress. While in Salzburg we meditated on the theme of *mission*, in Sankt Pölten we reflected on the question of *vocations*. Finally, I was able this morning to enter into the book of the blessed the names of three servants of God from your land. During the impressive celebration in the “Heldenplatz” I was able to note once again that “*the heroism of the Church*” is her *holiness*. The “Church’s heroes” are not necessarily those who wrote significant pages of universal history according to human standards, but men and women who may seem insignificant in the eyes of many, but are great in God’s sight. Among the ranks of the powerful we search for them in vain, while in the book of life their names are written in capital letters.

4. The biographies of the saints and blessededs are believable documents that even the people of today can read and understand. This reflection is particularly significant in view of the historical and geographical openness of your country. The foundations of Austria were built by martyrs and confessors during the decline of the Roman Empire. Then came the Irish monks and Scottish missionaries from the Christian West. Sts Cyril and Methodius, apostles to the Slavs, brought their evangelizing work to the area around Vienna. Therefore, during my visit to your country, at the site where the Danube unites the West with the East — two worlds that were formerly divided — it was appropriate to speak about the *Europe of the future*. After the “velvet revolution” and the fall of the Iron Curtain, Europe was restored to us.

This gift is a challenge and an obligation. *Europe needs a spiritual face*. With all the political programmes and economic plans that dominate current discussions, we must not forget that Europe owes much to Christianity. But Christianity also has many reasons to thank Europe. In fact, Christianity was brought from Europe to many other parts of the world. Even today, Europe cannot and must not forget its spiritual responsibility. A prerequisite for this is a return to its Christian origins. Here is the great challenge that Christians of the future Europe must face.

5. I sum up all my thoughts and sentiments in an expression of gratitude that comes from my heart: “God reward you”. And I wish everyone: *God bless you*.

The good intentions in the reflection and planning: God bless them!

The good words in the meetings and dialogues: God bless them!

The commitment to fulfil the ideas and resolutions: God bless them!

God bless all the good in your country. May he bless the good that the Church does in Austria.

God bless each and every one of you. "God reward you".

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