



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO ARCHBISHOP LUDWIG AVERKAMP OF HAMBURG
FOR 94th GERMAN "KATHOLIKENTAG"**

To my Venerable Brother Ludwig Averkamp Archbishop of Hamburg

Dear Brother,

Dear Sisters and dear Brothers,

1. "All time belongs to him". With this motto you have gathered in Hamburg for the *94th German Katholikentag*. From Rome I greet all those who have assembled for the solemn Mass in the "Fishmarket" of this ancient Hanseatic city, and those who are taking part in this Eucharistic celebration by radio and television. The peace of the risen Christ be with you all! I extend a special greeting to you, dear Archbishop Averkamp. You declared yourself willing to host the *Katholikentag* this year and to take part personally in its organization. With you, I greet all the Bishops of Germany and of many other countries, particularly the Cardinals present and Bishop Karl Lehmann, President of the German Bishops' Conference.

2. "All time belongs to him". I am pleased that you chose a motto that fits in the framework I determined for the Jubilee year: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb 13: 8*). The logo you have chosen is also very fitting: you decided on the hourglass as the symbol, visibly expressing the *Katholikentag's* theme.

Our ancestors measured time with the hourglass. Today digital and quartz clocks are used. Their advantage is that they can measure time right down to the second. However, modern clocks fail to communicate a message the hourglass vividly expresses: the sand trickling from the upper bulb to the lower. The trickling of the sand can be compared to the fate of time. Time passes; it has an end. It flows and runs out. It is like the limited number of years we are given.

3. A few weeks ago I was able to celebrate my 80th birthday. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude for the many kind words, encouraging gestures and signs of thoughtfulness

which Catholics, Christians and people of good will sent me from Germany. The festive days organized for me were an opportunity above all to thank God, my Creator, for having given me life. At the same time, you have once again strengthened my conviction that God is a generous giver: in giving life, he also gives time. The time we have available to us is a gift that God offers us.

What we do with this gift depends on us. People can waste time or lose it; they can squander it or even kill it. But there are also other possibilities. Time is given to us so that we can use it and fill it.

Time well used is so valuable that we can give it away as a precious gift. If the proverb says: "Time is money", then Christ replies: "Time cannot be bought with money. Time is worth more than gold".

I urge you, dear brothers and sisters: be generous with your time! Give it to each other: pastors to their parishes and parishes to their pastors, husbands to their wives and viceversa, children to their parents, young people to the elderly, the healthy to the sick, one to another. Whoever gives time to others is giving them life.

4. Managing time has much to do with faith. God has time. He had time for us human beings. Entering into time through the Incarnation of his Son, he has become our contemporary. In Jesus Christ time is fulfilled. It has found its centre. In the course of "chronos", the hour of the great "kairos" strikes: "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (*Gal* 4: 4). Two thousand years after this event we have reason to rejoice. In this Holy Year we want to have an even deeper sense that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever" (*Heb* 13: 8). "For the Church respects the measurements of time: hours, days, years, centuries", helping "everyone to realize how each of these measurements of time is imbued with the presence of God and with his saving activity" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 16). All the time that we let him fill thus belongs to him.

For this very reason the Church has a service to perform on behalf of men and women today. The Church has the role of guardian. She is committed never to tire of remembering the Lord's coming and of awakening our contemporaries from the sleep of security and comfort. I am sure that Catholics in Germany will be faithful to this "wake-up service". Their voice on various issues is asked for: the protection of human life in every phase from conception until natural death, the defence of the inalienable values of marriage and the family in conformity with the order of creation, the observance of Sunday worship in a society governed by economic interests, hospitality to foreigners resident in your country and commitment to the Christian image of man in your reunited homeland. These are only some of the many areas where we must be attentively involved.

In this regard, I have a special request for you: may unity be an important value for you! Do not let

yourselves be divided by any earthly power in your projects! If the Church is the pilgrim People of God, then there is only one way through time for all who belong to this people, the way of cooperation. Bishops, priests, religious and lay people, we are all the Church. We are only strong together. Jesus Christ has established only one Church, built on the foundations of the Apostles united round Peter, the rock (cf. *Mt 16: 18*). My prayer for you is that what St Paul wrote to the Romans may be fulfilled: "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Rom 15: 5-6*).

5. The *Katholikentag* programme reflects the diversity and vitality of the Church in your country. I look at the varied image reflected there with gratitude and esteem. Along with the many Eucharistic celebrations and spiritual events, there are also meetings and round tables which show that the Church in Germany is willing to listen to the signs of the times and to interpret them in God's light.

The *Katholikentag* is intended as a sort of areopagus for analysis and exchange, for dialogue and joint action. For this spiritual undertaking, to which you intend to give a special ecumenical character, I invoke the Holy Spirit, who is also the Spirit of discernment.

6. *Dear brothers and sisters!*

Once again I return to the hourglass, which contains yet another valuable message. The sand which trickles from the upper bulb to the lower does not only indicate the passage of time. The sand is also a messenger of Christian hope, for it does not fall into a void. It is gathered in the lower bulb.

The bulbs of an hourglass remind me of God's hands stretched out to us. We can abandon ourselves into his hands. They gather up our time. Time lies in God's hands. Every evening at Compline we pray: "Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit". This prayer does not only concern a few. It is an evening prayer that can be adopted by all who, at the end of the day, offer the fruit of their troubles and work to God, the Lord of time.

"Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit". God blesses the time of those who pray in this way. I call on Mary, who put her own life in God's hands as no one ever has, to be our guide. May she protect and guide the Church in Germany on her way through time. I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing to all of you who have gathered in Hamburg.

From the Vatican, 23 May 2000.

