



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (APRIL 25-27, 1997)

### WELCOME CEREMONY

#### *ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II*

*Friday, 25 April 1997*

*Mr President of the Czech Republic,*

*Cardinal Vlk, Archbishop of Prague,*

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

*Distinguished Political, Civil and Military Authorities,*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*1. Two years ago when I arrived at this airport for a visit of intense pastoral activity that would take me to Moravia and then to Poland, I was forced to limit my stop in Prague to just a few hours. I expressed the desire to meet you again "for a longer period, in 1997, for the celebrations of the Millennium of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert" (*Address on the Arrival at the Government Airport of Prague-Ruzyně, 20 May 1995, No. 4*). That desire is fulfilled today: here I am, by the grace of God, among you once more, to experience with you the event for which you have been preparing these last ten years. It was in fact the late Cardinal František Tomášek who, with true prophetic spirit, proclaimed the "Decade of Spiritual Renewal" in preparation for the Millennium of Saint Adalbert. Man of God that he was, he, like Abraham, "hoped against all hope" (cf. Rom 4:18). And he was rewarded: he witnessed the canonization of Agnes of Bohemia, the process of the strengthening of democratic principles even before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the return of freedom to the Church after long years of persecution. Having had the joy of welcoming the Pope in April 1990, he will certainly be rejoicing in heaven to see me return among his people twice. History is truly guided by the almighty hand of God!2. I cordially thank you, Mr President, for being here to welcome me in the name of the whole Czech Republic, which you represent with such great prestige, having been among those who brought about the rebirth of this country. To you, dear Cardinal Archbishop of Prague, and to all my Brothers in the Episcopate, I offer my affectionate greeting and express my joy at being once more in this beloved land, at the culmination of these celebrations in honour of Saint Adalbert prepared and organized with great pastoral sensitivity. I affectionately greet the priests, the men and women religious and the faithful in this land of saints, as well as all the citizens of the Republic.3. As you know,

the reason that I have come once more among you is twofold: we wish to celebrate on Sunday the Solemnity of Saint Adalbert and, on that occasion, to meditate on the message that emerges from the decade of spiritual renewal. The *Millennium* and the *Decade*: it is precisely to experience with you these two great moments of the historical and spiritual life of your country that I have returned. And I have come all the more willingly because this year 1997 is also the first year of the three-year period of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. How could we not see a golden thread running through these three great events? At this moment, which for me is one of great emotion, I cannot fail to recall the words that I addressed to you in the homily which I gave in Prague in 1990, when I spoke about the *Decade* proclaimed by Cardinal Tomášek as a "farsighted invitation" to gain a deeper understanding of the religious and civic history of your homeland (cf. *Homily at Mass on the Letná Esplanade*, Prague, 21 April 1990, No. 4). That was an invitation to respond to current challenges and to draw light and strength from the past. And what a radiant light shines upon us from the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert, a thousand years ago! The meek and captivating figure of the holy Bishop speaks with the same power to the present generation as well. He was — as I have previously observed — "the first Czech to occupy the See of Prague, *the first Czech of truly European importance* . . . Saint Adalbert, along with the Patrons of Europe, Benedict and Cyril and Methodius, belongs among the founders of Christian culture in Europe, especially in Central Europe" (*ibid.*).<sup>4</sup> The Decade and the Millennium harmonize well with the preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000, which, for the year 1997, is centred on "*Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever*". As I indicated in my Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, we are called to deepen our understanding of the mystery of Christ, turning "with renewed interest to the Bible" and rediscovering *Baptism* as "the basis of Christian living" (*op. cit.*, Nos. 40 and 41). This is an important commitment also from the *standpoint of ecumenism*, since "the centrality of Christ, of the word of God and of faith ought to inspire interest among Christians of other denominations and meet with a favourable response from them" (*ibid.*, No. 41). I am therefore particularly pleased to say these words as I think of our dear brothers and sisters of the other Christian Churches and denominations present in this Republic. As I cordially greet them, I express the hope that we shall meet again at the ecumenical prayer meeting which will be held on Sunday afternoon in the Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslaus and Adalbert. But I trust that the spiritual purpose of my visit will find a response also among those individuals who for various reasons feel far from the Church and from religion in general. In my experience as a young priest and as a bishop in Krakow I was able to approach many of these people searching for truth, and I have always regarded with great respect the internal anguish that often accompanies them. I am certain that the heritage of Christian values of which Saint Adalbert was a special witness in times marked by ignorance and cruelty will not leave indifferent those who, although far from belief, have at heart the civil, cultural and spiritual roots which have so profoundly marked the history of your homeland.<sup>5</sup> As the first stage of my apostolic visit, I am about to go to the Benedictine monastery at Brevnov, founded 1,004 years ago by Saint Adalbert. To him I entrust the success of my pilgrim journey, and I hope that these millenary celebrations will be a fresh step forward in the ever increasing spiritual and ethical growth of all the dear sons and daughters of this blessed land. Mr President, Venerable Brothers, ladies and gentlemen! With these sentiments, which come from my heart, I renew my sincere thanks for the welcome which has been given to me and I commend to the blessing of Almighty God your persons, your families, and your homeland, which has resolutely set out, amidst understandable difficulties, on the road towards peace, progress, and national and international cooperation. Pochválen bud' Ježíš Kristus! © Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana