



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

Homily at Mass

Lowicz, 14 June 1999

1. “*Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ*” (*Gal 1:3*).

With the words of the Apostle Paul I warmly greet all who have gathered here for this Eucharist. I am grateful to Divine Providence for the grace of this meeting. Before this altar and in your midst, I wish to be one with all who have come here, as well as with those who gather around their priests every day in church, bearing witness to their faith, hope and love. In the Eucharist Christ has revealed in the most perfect way God’s infinite love for man: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (*Jn 15:13*).

I greet the young Church of Lowicz, together with its Pastor, Bishop Alojzy, and Auxiliary Bishop Józef. I also greet the diocesan and religious clergy, the religious brothers and sisters and all the faithful of this Diocese, and in a special way the many children and young people gathered here. I greet the pilgrims who have come for this meeting from the neighbouring Archdioceses of Warsaw and Lódz, as well as from the Dioceses of Plock and Włocławek, together with their Pastors, and the pilgrims who have come from other parts of Poland and from abroad.

I greet you, land of Lowicz, with your rich history. It was in fact here, in the city of Lowicz, that for centuries the Archbishops of Gniezno, Primates of Poland, lived. Many of them found their place of eternal repose in the crypt of the ancient collegiate church of Lowicz, now the Cathedral.

I greet you, land of Blessed Maria Franciszka Siedliska, foundress of the Congregation of the Holy Family of Nazareth; land of Blessed Bolesława Lament, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Family. Here, through the efforts of Father Stanisław Konarski, the reform of the Scolopian schools took place. From history we know how important this was in the period of

the Polish Enlightenment, and what great fruits of this reform were gathered by the generations of Poles living under the partitions.

I greet you, land so abundantly rich in Christian tradition and in the faith of your people, which despite the storms of history has always persevered, unchanged, beside Christ and his Church.

2. *"I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Eph 4:1).*

Saint Paul writes this in the Letter to the Ephesians. Today the same words could be addressed to us, his fellow countrymen, by Bishop Michal Kozal, a prisoner in the concentration camp at Dachau. Today is the liturgical memorial of this faithful witness to Christ. The grace which God gave him "was not in vain" (cf. 1 Cor 15:10) and continues to bear fruit today. Blessed Bishop Kozal exhorts us to behave in a manner worthy of our human and Christian vocation, as sons and daughters of this land, the same homeland of which he was a son. Saint Paul shows the greatness of this vocation. We are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, which he instituted and of which he is the Head. In this Church the Holy Spirit continually distributes the gifts necessary for various services and tasks. These make up the great richness of the Church and serve the good of all.

Recalling these words, I think especially of you, dear parents. God has given you a special vocation. To preserve human life on earth, he instituted the family. You are the first guardians and protectors of the life which has not yet come into the world but is already conceived. Accept the gift of life as the greatest grace of God, as his blessing for the family, for the nation and for the Church. Here, from this place, I say to all the fathers and mothers of my homeland and of the whole world, to all men and women without exception: every child conceived in the womb of its mother has the right to life! I repeat once again what I have already said many times: "Human life is sacred. No one, in any circumstance, can claim the right to directly destroy an innocent human life. God is the absolute Lord of the life of man, made in his image and likeness (cf. Gn 1:26-28). Human life is thus given a sacred and inviolable character, which reflects the inviolability of the Creator himself" (cf. *Evangelium Vitae*, 53). God protects life with the firm prohibition proclaimed on Sinai: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). Remain faithful to this commandment. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of the Millennium, once said "We wish to be a nation of the living, not of the dead".

The family is also called upon to educate its children. The first place where the educational process of a young person begins is the family home. All children have the natural, inalienable right to have their own family, parents, brothers and sisters, among whom they come to the realization that they are persons needing love and capable of loving others. May the Holy Family of Nazareth always be the example for you, the family in which Christ grew up with his mother Mary and putative father Joseph. Since parents give life to their own children, they have the right

to be recognized as the first and principal educators. They also have the duty to create a family atmosphere, filled with love and respect for God and neighbour, which favours the personal and social education of their children. What a great task the mother has! Thanks to the particularly deep bond which unites her to her child, she can draw her child close to Christ and the Church in an effective way. However, she always expects the help of her husband, the father of the family.

Dear parents, you know well that in these days it is not easy to create the Christian conditions necessary for educating children. You must do everything to ensure that God is present and honoured in your families. Do not forget daily family prayer, especially in the evening, keeping Sunday holy and going to Sunday Mass. You are your children's first teachers of prayer and Christian virtue, and no one can take your place in this. Observe religious customs and cultivate Christian tradition, teach your children to respect everyone. May your greatest desire be to educate the younger generation in union with Christ and the Church. Only in this way will you be faithful to your vocation as parents and provide for your children's spiritual needs.

3. In this responsible duty of education, the family must receive assistance. It needs help and expects it from the Church and the State. It is not a matter of replacing the family in its duties but of harmoniously uniting everyone in this great task.

I therefore speak to you, my brother priests, and to all who are involved in catechesis: open wide the doors of the Church so that everyone, and in particular the young, can draw abundantly upon and profit from her enormous spiritual wealth. In our country today, the Church can teach religion in the schools without hindrance. The times of struggle for freedom of catechesis are past. Many of us know what sacrifices and what courage this cost Catholic society in Poland. One of the wrongs done to the faithful in the times of the totalitarian system has been righted.

The teaching of religion in the schools, which is a great good, requires sincere and responsible commitment. We should make the best possible use of this good. Thanks to catechesis, the Church can carry out her own evangelizing activity with still greater efficiency and in this way widen the scope of her mission.

I also speak to you, dear teachers and educators. You have taken on the great task of handing on knowledge and education to the children and young people entrusted to you. You are faced with a difficult and serious call. Young people need you. They look for models as points of reference. They expect answers to the many questions of life which trouble their minds and hearts, and in a special way they demand from you an example of how to live. You must be their friends, faithful companions and allies in the struggles of youth. Help them to build the foundations for their future.

I am pleased that in Poland many new Catholic schools are being established. This is a sign that the Church is present in a practical way in the area of education. These schools are to be supported, and conditions must be created to enable them to contribute to the common good of

society in cooperation with the entire educational world in Poland.

Particular sensitivity is needed on the part of all those involved in schools in order to create the climate for friendly and open dialogue. A spirit of familiarity and mutual respect should prevail in all schools; this was and is characteristic of the Polish school. The school should be a source of the social virtues which our country so greatly needs. Such a climate needs to contribute to enabling children and young people to declare their religious convictions openly and behave in accordance with them. Let us seek to develop and strengthen in the hearts of children and young people patriotic feeling and a bond with the homeland. Let us seek to make them aware of the common good of the nation and teach them a sense of responsibility for the future. The education of the younger generation in a spirit of love for the homeland is of great importance for the future of the nation. In fact, it is not possible to serve the nation well without knowing its history, its rich tradition and its culture. Poland needs people open to the world, who love their own country.

Dear teachers and educators, I wish to express to you my appreciation for your efforts in the education of young people. I warmly thank you for this particularly important and difficult work. I thank you for your service to the country. I myself owe a personal debt of gratitude to schools, and to my teachers and educators, whom I remember to this day and for whom I pray every day. What I received in my school years continues to bear fruit in my life today.

May the good of the younger generation be the concern of your life and educational work. Saint Paul says: "I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling . . . for building up the body of Christ" (*Eph 4:1, 12*). Could there be a vocation greater than the one God has given to you?

4. "*Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift*" (*Eph 4:7*). Saint Paul teaches us today and at the same time reminds us that grace is the gift by which God gives us his life, making us his children and partakers of his nature. The question therefore arises: how should I live, so that the power of God's grace will be manifest in me in the fullest possible way, like the mysterious power of a grain of wheat which produces a hundredfold?

Dear boys and girls, pupils of the primary and secondary schools of the Diocese of Lowicz and the neighbouring Dioceses, and also from other parts of Poland: it is good that you are here today. I am very happy to have this meeting. What you have just heard concerns you and your education in a special way. I want to assure you: the Pope loves you very much and has your future very much at heart, so that you will prepare yourselves well for the tasks which await you.

You know that we are coming close to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In this regard, many of you are probably asking: the new millennium which is about to arrive, what will it be like? Will it be better than the one which is about to end? Will it bring important and positive changes for the world, or will it be the same as before? I want to tell to that to a great extent the future of the world, of our country and of the Church depends on you. You will be the ones to shape it, on you

depends the great task of building up the times which are coming. Now you understand why I first spoke so much about the education of the young.

Do not be afraid to follow the path of your vocation, do not be afraid to seek the truth about yourselves and the world around you. How much I would like you all to have in your homes an atmosphere of real love! God has given you your parents and for this great gift you should often thank him. Respect and love your parents. They brought you into the world and they are educating you. Your parents are in fact your dearest friends, and you should seek their help and advice in the problems of your lives. At this moment I think with sadness and great concern about all those young people of your own age who do not have a family home, who are deprived of the love and warmth of parents. Tell them that the Pope remembers them in his prayers and that he wishes them very well.

Your age is the most profitable time of life for sowing and preparing the ground for future harvests. The more you commit yourselves to your duties, the more efficiently you will carry out your mission in the future. Devote yourselves to your studies with great enthusiasm. Learn to know new things. Knowledge opens new horizons and helps man's spiritual growth. The person who always wants to learn something new is truly great.

Youth seeks models and examples. Christ himself comes to your aid, he who dedicated his entire life to the good of others. Look to him. May he be present in your thoughts, in your games and in your conversations. You should always live in friendship with him. The Lord Jesus wishes to help you. He wishes to be your support and to strengthen you in your youthful struggles in order to attain the virtues such as faith, love, honesty, purity and generosity. When you have to face some difficulty, when you experience lack of success or disappointment in your life, may your thoughts go straight to Christ, who loves you and helps you to overcome every difficulty. Know that you are not alone. At your side there is someone who will never disappoint you. Christ understands the most secret desires of your heart. He awaits your love and your witness.

5. "You have one teacher and you are all brethren" (Mt 23:8).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us turn our hearts to Christ, "the true light that enlightens every man" (cf. Jn 1:9). He is the Teacher, the Risen One who has life in himself and who remains ever present in the Church and the world. It is he who reveals to us the will of the Father and who teaches us how to live out the vocation which we have received from God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us entrust to Christ the great work of education. Only he fully knows man and knows what is hidden in the depths of the human heart. Today Christ says to us: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5) – I, your Teacher, I wish to be your way and your light, your life and truth "always, to the close of the age" (Mt 28:20). Amen.

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