



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
IN POLAND

HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER

MASS IN PIŁSUDZKI SQUARE

Warsaw, 26 May 2006

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ our Lord, “Together with you I wish to sing a hymn of praise to divine Providence, which enables me to be here as a pilgrim.” Twenty-seven years ago, my beloved predecessor Pope John Paul II began his homily in Warsaw with these words. I make them my own, and I thank the Lord who has enabled me to come here today to this historic Square. Here, on the eve of Pentecost, Pope John Paul II uttered the significant words of the prayer “Let your Spirit descend, and renew the face of the earth.” And he added: “The face of this land.” This very place witnessed the solemn funeral ceremony of the great Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, whose twenty-fifth anniversary occurs during these days.

God united these two men not only through the same faith, hope and love, but also through the same human vicissitudes, which linked each of them so strongly to the history of this people and of the Church that lives in their midst. At the beginning of his Pontificate, Pope John Paul II wrote to Cardinal Wyszyński: “This Polish Pope would not be on the Chair of Peter today, beginning a new Pontificate, full of the fear of God, but also full of trust, had it not been for your faith, which did not bend in the face of imprisonment and suffering, your heroic hope, your trusting to the end in the Mother of the Church; had it not been for Jasna Góra and this whole period of the history of the Church in our homeland, linked to your service as Bishop and Primate” (*Letter of Pope John Paul II to the Polish People*, 23 October 1978). How can we not thank God today for all that was

accomplished in your native land and in the whole world during the Pontificate of John Paul II? Before our eyes, changes occurred in entire political, economic and social systems. People in various countries regained their freedom and their sense of dignity. “Let us not forget the great works of God” (cf. *Ps 78:7*). I thank you too for your presence and for your prayer. I thank the Cardinal Primate for the words that he addressed to me. I greet all the Bishops here present. I am glad that the President and the Authorities of national and local government could be here. I embrace with my heart all the Polish people both at home and abroad.

“Stand firm in your faith!” We have just heard the words of Jesus: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor, to be with you for ever, the Spirit of truth” (*Jn 14:15-17a*). With these words Jesus reveals the profound link between faith and the profession of Divine Truth, between faith and dedication to Jesus Christ in love, between faith and the practice of a life inspired by the commandments. All three dimensions of faith are the fruit of the action of the Holy Spirit. This action is manifested as an inner force that harmonizes the hearts of the disciples with the Heart of Christ and makes them capable of loving as he loved them. Hence faith is a gift, but at the same time it is a task.

“He will give you another Counsellor – the Spirit of truth.” Faith, as knowledge and profession of the truth about God and about man, “comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ”, as Saint Paul says (*Rom 10:17*). Throughout the history of the Church, the Apostles preached the word of Christ, taking care to hand it on intact to their successors, who in their turn transmitted it to subsequent generations until our own day. Many preachers of the Gospel gave their lives specifically because of their faithfulness to the truth of the word of Christ. And so solicitude for the truth gave birth to the Church’s Tradition. As in past centuries, so also today there are people or groups who obscure this centuries-old Tradition, seeking to falsify the Word of Christ and to remove from the Gospel those truths which in their view are too uncomfortable for modern man. They try to give the impression that everything is relative: even the truths of faith would depend on the historical situation and on human evaluation. Yet the Church cannot silence the Spirit of Truth. The successors of the Apostles, together with the Pope, are responsible for the truth of the Gospel, and all Christians are called to share in this responsibility, accepting its authoritative indications. Every Christian is bound to confront his own convictions continually with the teachings of the Gospel and of the Church’s Tradition in the effort to remain faithful to the word of Christ, even when it is demanding and, humanly speaking, hard to understand. We must not yield to the temptation of relativism or of a subjectivist and selective interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Only the whole truth can open us to adherence to Christ, dead and risen for our salvation.

Christ says: “If you love me ...” Faith does not just mean accepting a certain number of abstract truths about the mysteries of God, of man, of life and death, of future realities. Faith consists in an intimate relationship with Christ, a relationship based on love of him who loved us first (cf. *1 Jn 4:11*), even to the total offering of himself. “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet

sinner Christ died for us" (*Rom 5:8*). What other response can we give to a love so great, if not that of a heart that is open and ready to love? But what does it mean to love Christ? It means trusting him even in times of trial, following him faithfully even on the *Via Crucis*, in the hope that soon the morning of the Resurrection will come. Entrusting ourselves to Christ, we lose nothing, we gain everything. In his hands our life acquires its true meaning. Love for Christ expresses itself in the will to harmonize our own life with the thoughts and sentiments of his Heart. This is achieved through interior union based on the grace of the Sacraments, strengthened by continuous prayer, praise, thanksgiving and penance. We have to listen attentively to the inspirations that he evokes through his Word, through the people we meet, through the situations of daily life. To love him is to remain in dialogue with him, in order to know his will and to put it into effect promptly.

Yet living one's personal faith as a love-relationship with Christ also means being ready to renounce everything that constitutes a denial of his love. That is why Jesus said to the Apostles: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." But what are Christ's commandments? When the Lord Jesus was teaching the crowds, he did not fail to confirm the law which the Creator had inscribed on men's hearts and had then formulated on the tablets of the Decalogue. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished" (*Mt 5:17-18*). But Jesus showed us with a new clarity the unifying centre of the divine laws revealed on Sinai, namely love of God and love of neighbour: "To love [God] with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbour as oneself, is much more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (*Mk 12:33*). Indeed, in his life and in his Paschal Mystery Jesus brought the entire law to completion. Uniting himself with us through the gift of the Holy Spirit, he carries with us and in us the "yoke" of the law, which thereby becomes a "light burden" (*Mt 11:30*). In this spirit, Jesus formulated his list of the inner qualities of those who seek to live their faith deeply: Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who weep, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for justice, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake ... (cf. *Mt 5:3-12*).

Dear brothers and sisters, faith as adherence to Christ is revealed as love that prompts us to promote the good inscribed by the Creator into the nature of every man and woman among us, into the personality of every other human being and into everything that exists in the world. Whoever believes and loves in this way becomes a builder of the true "civilization of love", of which Christ is the centre. Twenty-seven years ago, in this place, Pope John Paul II said: "Poland has become nowadays the land of a particularly responsible witness" (Warsaw, 2 June 1979). I ask you now, cultivate this rich heritage of faith transmitted to you by earlier generations, the heritage of the thought and the service of that great Pole who was Pope John Paul II. Stand firm in your faith, hand it down to your children, bear witness to the grace which you have experienced so abundantly through the Holy Spirit in the course of your history. May Mary, Queen of Poland, show you the way to her Son, and may she accompany you on your journey towards a happy,

peace-filled future. May your hearts never be wanting in love for Christ and for his Church. Amen!

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