



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
IN POLAND

ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER

MEETING WITH THE CLERGY

Warsaw Cathedral, 25 May 2006

"First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you ... For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine" (Rom 1:8-12).

Dear priests, I address to you these words of the Apostle Paul, because they perfectly reflect my feelings and thoughts today, my wishes and my prayers. I greet in particular Cardinal Józef Glemp, Archbishop of Warsaw and Primate of Poland, to whom I extend my most cordial congratulations on his fiftieth anniversary of priestly ordination this very day. I have come to Poland, the beloved homeland of my great Predecessor Pope John Paul II, in order to inhale, as he used to do, this atmosphere of faith in which you live, and to "convey to you some spiritual gift so that you may be strengthened by it." I am confident that my pilgrimage during these days will "encourage the faith that we share, both yours and mine."

I am meeting you today in the great Cathedral of Warsaw, every stone of which speaks of the tragic history of your capital and your country. How many trials you have endured in the recent past! We call to mind heroic witnesses to the faith, who gave their lives to God and to their fellow human beings, both canonized saints and ordinary people who persevered in rectitude, authenticity and goodness, never giving way to despair. In this Cathedral I recall particularly the Servant of God Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, whom you call "the Primate of the Millennium." Abandoning himself to Christ and to his Mother, he knew how to serve the Church faithfully,

despite the tragic and prolonged trials that surrounded him. Let us remember with appreciation and gratitude those who did not let themselves be overwhelmed by the forces of darkness, and let us learn from them the courage to be consistent and constant in our adherence to the Gospel of Christ.

Today I am meeting you, priests called by Christ to serve him in the new millennium. You have been chosen from among the people, appointed to act in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. Believe in the power of your priesthood! By virtue of the sacrament, you have received all that you are. When you utter the words "I" and "my" ("I absolve you ... This is my body ..."), you do it not in your own name, but in the name of Christ, "*in persona Christi*", who wants to use your lips and your hands, your spirit of sacrifice and your talent. At the moment of your ordination, through the liturgical sign of the imposition of hands, Christ took you under his special protection; you are concealed under his hands and in his Heart. Immerse yourselves in his love, and give him your love! When your hands were anointed with oil, the sign of the Holy Spirit, they were destined to serve the Lord as his own hands in today's world. They can no longer serve selfish purposes, but must continue in the world the witness of his love.

The greatness of Christ's priesthood can make us tremble. We can be tempted to cry out with Peter: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man" (*Lk 5:8*), because we find it hard to believe that Christ called us specifically. Could he not have chosen someone else, more capable, more holy? But Jesus has looked lovingly upon each one of us, and in this gaze of his we may have confidence. Let us not be consumed with haste, as if time dedicated to Christ in silent prayer were time wasted. On the contrary, it is precisely then that the most wonderful fruits of pastoral service come to birth. There is no need to be discouraged on account of the fact that prayer requires effort, or because of the impression that Jesus remains silent. He is indeed silent, but he is at work. In this regard, I am pleased to recall [my experience last year in Cologne](#). I witnessed then a deep, unforgettable silence of a million young people at the moment of the Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament! That prayerful silence united us, it gave us great consolation. In a world where there is so much noise, so much bewilderment, there is a need for silent adoration of Jesus concealed in the Host. Be assiduous in the prayer of adoration and teach it to the faithful. It is a source of comfort and light particularly to those who are suffering.

The faithful expect only one thing from priests: that they be specialists in promoting the encounter between man and God. The priest is not asked to be an expert in economics, construction or politics. He is expected to be an expert in the spiritual life. With this end in view, when a young priest takes his first steps, he needs to be able to refer to an experienced teacher who will help him not to lose his way among the many ideas put forward by the culture of the moment. In the face of the temptations of relativism or the permissive society, there is absolutely no need for the priest to know all the latest, changing currents of thought; what the faithful expect from him is that he be a witness to the eternal wisdom contained in the revealed word. Solicitude for the quality of personal prayer and for good theological formation bear fruit in life. Living under the influence of

totalitarianism may have given rise to an unconscious tendency to hide under an external mask, and in consequence to become somewhat hypocritical. Clearly this does not promote authentic fraternal relations and may lead to an exaggerated concentration on oneself. In reality, we grow in affective maturity when our hearts adhere to God. Christ needs priests who are mature, virile, capable of cultivating an authentic spiritual paternity. For this to happen, priests need to be honest with themselves, open with their spiritual director and trusting in divine mercy.

On the occasion of the Great Jubilee, Pope John Paul II frequently exhorted Christians to do penance for infidelities of the past. We believe that the Church is holy, but that there are sinners among her members. We need to reject the desire to identify only with those who are sinless. How could the Church have excluded sinners from her ranks? It is for their salvation that Jesus took flesh, died and rose again. We must therefore learn to live Christian penance with sincerity. By practising it, we confess individual sins in union with others, before them and before God. Yet we must guard against the arrogant claim of setting ourselves up to judge earlier generations, who lived in different times and different circumstances. Humble sincerity is needed in order not to deny the sins of the past, and at the same time not to indulge in facile accusations in the absence of real evidence or without regard for the different preconceptions of the time. Moreover, the *confessio peccati*, to use an expression of Saint Augustine, must always be accompanied by the *confessio laudis* – the confession of praise. As we ask pardon for the wrong that was done in the past, we must also remember the good accomplished with the help of divine grace which, even if contained in earthenware vessels, has borne fruit that is often excellent.

Today the Church in Poland faces an enormous pastoral challenge: how to care for the faithful who have left the country. The scourge of unemployment obliges many people to go abroad. It is a widespread and large-scale phenomenon. When families are divided in this way, when social links are broken, the Church cannot remain indifferent. Those who leave must be cared for by priests who, in partnership with the local Churches, take on a pastoral ministry among the emigrants. The Church in Poland has already given many priests and religious sisters who serve not only the Polish diaspora but also, and sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances, the missions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and other regions. Do not forget these missionaries, my dear priests. The gift of many vocations, with which God has blessed your Church, must be received in a truly Catholic perspective. Polish priests, do not be afraid to leave your secure and familiar world, to go and serve in places where priests are lacking and where your generosity can bear abundant fruit.

Stand firm in your faith! To you too I entrust this motto of my pilgrimage. Be authentic in your life and your ministry. Gazing upon Christ, live a modest life, in solidarity with the faithful to whom you have been sent. Serve everyone; be accessible in the parishes and in the confessionals, accompany the new movements and associations, support families, do not forget the link with young people, remember the poor and the abandoned. If you live by faith, the Holy Spirit will suggest to you what you must say and how you must serve. You will always be able to count on the help of her who goes before the Church in faith. I exhort you to call upon her always in words

that you know well: "We are close to you, we remember you, we watch."

My Blessing upon all of you!

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