



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Gdansk

Saturday, 5 June 1999

1. *"I know that I shall remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again"* (*Phil 1:25-26*). Paul tells us this in today's Liturgy; the words are from the Letter to the Philippians, but they ring out in a splendid way here, in the footsteps of Adalbert. Rather than Paul speaking to the Philippians, it is as if Adalbert were speaking to us Poles.

The echo of this voice is constantly heard in this land where the Patron of the Church of Gdansk suffered death by martyrdom. "Christ for him was everything, and death a gain" (cf. *Phil 1:21*). In 997 he reached Gdansk, where he proclaimed the Gospel and administered Holy Baptism. Saint Adalbert glorified Christ by his fervent life and heroic death. During my earlier pilgrimage to Gniezno, at the tomb of Saint Adalbert, I said that he followed Christ "as a faithful and generous servant, bearing witness to him at the cost of his very life. And behold, the Father has honoured him. The people of God surrounded him on earth with the veneration reserved to a saint, in the conviction that a martyr of Christ in heaven is surrounded with glory ... His death by martyrdom ... is at the foundation of the Polish Church and in a certain sense of the Polish State itself (Homily in Gniezno, 3 June 1997). Two years after his death, the Church proclaimed Adalbert a saint and today, in celebrating this Most Holy Sacrifice, I commemorate the millennium of his canonization.

2. I thank God for being able to be with you once more and to join you in celebrating this jubilee. This is a great day which the Lord in his goodness has given us. I am pleased to have the opportunity to re-visit the historic and beautiful city of Gdansk. I greet its people and the whole Archdiocese, as well as the people of Sopot, Gdynia and other cities and towns. I greet Archbishop Tadeusz, the Pastor of this Church, the Auxiliary Bishop, the priests, the consecrated persons and all taking part in this Holy Eucharist. With veneration I recall the late Bishops Nowicki and Kaczmarek, who carried out their pastoral ministry in this Church during difficult times. I vividly

recall my meeting twelve years ago with this city and its people, especially with the sick in the Marian basilica and with the workers in Zaspá near Gdansk, and also with the young people in Westerplatte and the seamen at Gdynia. I carry all this in the depths of my heart. From the viewpoint of history, how different those times were! Other experiences and other challenges were then confronting the nation. At that time I spoke to you, but in a certain sense I was also speaking in your name. Today things are different. I am moved as I remember those times, conscious of the great things which since then have come about in our homeland. "New things have come", they have come to this land, and Adalbert was an essential part of them.

The blood he shed produces ever new spiritual fruits. Adalbert is that evangelical seed which fell to the earth and died, and has brought forth a manifold harvest in all the nations associated with his mission. This was the case of Bohemia, Hungary, the Poland of the Piast, and also of Pomerania, Gdansk, and the people living in this region. After the thousand years which separate us from his death on the Baltic, we are becoming ever more fully aware that the blood of this martyr, shed in these territories ten centuries ago, made an essential contribution to evangelization, faith, a new life. How great is our need today to follow the example of his life devoted completely to God and to the spread of the Gospel. His witness of service and apostolic fervour was profoundly rooted in faith and love of Christ. Of Saint Adalbert we can say with the Psalmist: "His soul constantly thirsted for God, he longed for him like an empty, dry land without water" (cf. *Ps* 63:2).

Thank you, Saint Adalbert, for your example of holiness, for by your life you taught us the meaning of the words "for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (cf. *Phil* 1:21). We thank you for the millenium of faith and Christian life which you brought to Poland and all of Central Europe.

3. "*Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (*Mt* 5:48). Christ tells us this in today's Gospel. On the eve of the Third Millennium these words set down by Saint Matthew resound with new power. They sum up the teaching of the eight Beatitudes, at the same time express the fullness of our human vocation. To be perfect in the measure of God! To be, like God, filled with love, since it is he who "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (*Mt* 5:45).

Here we glimpse the mystery of man created in God's likeness and therefore capable of loving and receiving the gift of love. This primordial human vocation has been inscribed by the Creator in man's nature; it is what makes every person seek love, even if at times he does so by choosing the evil of sin, which presents itself under the appearances of good. We seek love because in the depth of our hearts we know that only love can make us happy. Often however we seek this happiness in a groping way. We seek it in pleasures, in material things and in what is earthly and transient. In the Garden Adam heard these words: "Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (cf. *Gen* 3:5). This is what God's enemy, Satan, told him and Adam believed him. However, how painful for humanity has been this way of seeking happiness without

God! How soon did mankind experience the darkness of sin and the tragedy of death! For whenever man distances himself from God, he experiences as a consequence great disappointment, accompanied by fear. This is so because, as a result of his distancing himself from God, man is left by himself and he begins to sense a painful solitude; he feels lost. And yet, from this fear there is born the search for the Creator, for nothing else can satisfy man's innate hunger for God.

Dear brothers and sisters, do not let yourselves be "frightened in anything by your opponents", as Paul tells us in the First Reading. Do not let yourselves be intimidated by those who point to sin as the way to happiness. You are "engaged in the same conflict which you saw and now hear to be mine" (*Phil 1:30*), adds the Apostle to the Nations. This is the struggle against our personal sins and especially sins against love: these can take on disturbing dimensions in the life of society. Man will never be happy at the expense of another man, destroying his freedom, trampling people's dignity and cultivating selfishness. Our happiness are our brothers and sisters, whom God has given to us and entrusted to us, and through them, our happiness is God himself. For "he who loves is born of God and knows God, for God is love" (1 *Jn 4:7-8*).

I say this in the land of Gdansk, which witnessed dramatic battles for Poland's freedom and for the Christian identity of Poles. We remember September 1939: the heroic defence of Westerplatte and of the Polish Post Office in Gdansk. We remember the priests who suffered martyrdom in the concentration camp in nearby Stutthof, and whom the Church will raise to the glory of the altars during this pilgrimage, and the woods of Piasnica, near Wejherowo, where thousands of persons were shot to death. All this belongs to the history of the people of this land and is part of the larger record of the tragic events of the war period. As I wrote in my Message to the Polish Episcopal Conference on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II: "Thousands became victims of prison, torture and execution. Worthy of admiration and lasting remembrance was the unparalleled effort mounted by the whole of society and particularly by the younger generation of Poles in defence of the homeland and its essential values" (No. 2). Let us embrace these persons in prayer, remembering them and their sufferings, their sacrifice and especially their death. Nor is it right to overlook more recent history, including above all the tragic December of 1970, when the workers took to the streets of Gdansk and Gdynia, and then August 1980, a time of hope, and finally the dramatic period of the martial law.

Could there be any more appropriate place to speak of all this than here in Gdansk? It was in this city that "Solidarnosc" was born nineteen years ago. This was an event which signaled a turning point in the history of our nation and in the history of Europe. "Solidarnosc" opened the doors of freedom to countries enslaved by the totalitarian system, tore down the Berlin wall and contributed to the unity of Europe after the divisions which followed the Second World War. We must never cancel this from our memory! This event is part of our national heritage. At that time I heard you say in Gdansk: "There is no freedom without solidarity". Today we need to say: "There is no solidarity without love". Indeed, there is no happiness, there is no future for the individual and the

nation without love, without that love which forgives yet does not forget, which is sensitive to the misfortunes of others, which does not seek its own advantage but seeks the good of the other person; that love which is ever ready to help, which is selfless and disposed to give generously. We are therefore called to build the future based on love of God and of neighbour, establishing the “civilization of love”. Today the world and Poland need great-hearted men who serve with humility and love, who bless and do not curse, who conquer the land with blessing. It is not possible to build the future without reference to the source of love which is God, who “so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (*Jn* 3:16).

Jesus Christ is the one who reveals love to man, while at the same time disclosing his supreme calling. In today’s Gospel, he shows in the words of the Sermon on the Mount how we are to carry out this vocation: “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

4. *“Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil 1:27).*

This is what the Apostle Paul says to the Philippians, and this is what Adalbert is saying to us. After ten centuries these words seem to be even more eloquent. From such a great distance of time this holy Bishop, the Apostle of our land, comes among us, returns to us, in order to examine, in a sense to determine whether we are persevering in fidelity to the Gospel. Our presence at the liturgy in the places connected with him must be our response. We want to assure him that indeed we are persevering, and that we wish to continue to do so. With far-sighted vision, Adalbert prepared our forefathers to enter the Second Millennium. Today here, in response to those words, we are preparing together to enter the Third Millennium. We want to enter it with God, as a people which has placed its trust in love and has loved the truth. As a people that wishes to live in the spirit of truth, since only the truth can make us free and happy. We sing the *Te Deum*, glorifying God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, God the Creator and Redeemer, for all that he has accomplished in this land through his servant, Bishop Adalbert. And at the same time we ask: *Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic haereditati tuae.*

Much has changed and is still changing in Poland. The centuries pass, and Poland grows amid changing destinies, like a great, historic oak tree with healthy roots. Let us thank Divine Providence for blessing this thousand-year process of growth with the presence of Saint Adalbert and with his martyr’s death on the Baltic. This is a great heritage, with which we press on towards the future. Through the work of Saint Adalbert and all the Patron Saints of Poland gathered around the Mother of God, may the fruits of the Redemption endure and take deeper root among generations to come. May the men and women of the Third Millennium take up the mission handed on a thousand years ago by Saint Adalbert and in turn pass it on to the coming generations.

Behold, the grain which fell to the ground,
in this land,
has borne fruit a hundredfold. Amen.

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