



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC MASS AND BEATIFICATIONS **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

Bratislava, Esplanade of Petržalka

Sunday, 14 September 2003

1. *O Crux, ave spes unica!* Hail, O Cross, our only hope!

During the celebration of this Sunday Liturgy, Dear Brothers and Sisters, *we are invited to look upon the Cross*. It is the “privileged place” where the love of God is revealed and shown to us. Bishop Vasil’ Hopko and Sister Zdenka Schelingová, whom I have had the joy of enrolling today among the Blessed, looked upon the Cross with invincible faith.

On the Cross human misery and divine mercy meet. The adoration of this unlimited mercy is for man the only way to open himself to the mystery which the Cross reveals.

The Cross is planted in the earth and would seem to extend its roots in human malice, but it reaches up, pointing as it were to the heavens, *pointing to the goodness of God*. By means of the Cross of Christ, the Evil One has been defeated, death is overcome, life is given to us, hope is restored, light is imparted. *O Crux, ave spes unica!*

2. In the name of the crucified and risen Lord, *I greet affectionately all of you gathered here on the esplanade of Petržalka*. I greet you, dear brother Bishop Ján Sokol, Pastor of this Church of Bratislava-Trnava, which today has given me so festive a welcome. I greet your Auxiliary Bishops and all the Bishops of Slovakia, especially the Venerable Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec. I joyfully unite myself to your common thanksgiving for the tenth anniversary of the establishment of your Episcopal Conference.

I greet the Cardinals and the Bishops who have come from the neighbouring countries together with large numbers of the faithful. Your fraternal presence eloquently manifests the bond of

communion which unites the different local Churches.

I greet the President of the Republic and the other civil and military authorities. I thank you all for having generously cooperated in the preparation of every aspect of my apostolic visit.

Finally with warm affection *I greet you, beloved Slovak people* here present or listening by radio or television. I thank God because you have been able to safeguard, even in difficult times, your fidelity to Christ and to his Church. And I exhort you: *never be ashamed of the Gospel* (cf. *Rom 1:16*)! Guard it in your heart as the most precious treasure, from which you may draw light and strength in the everyday pilgrimage of life.

3. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (*Jn 3:14-15*), says Jesus. What do we see then when we bring our eyes to bear on the cross where Jesus was nailed (cf. *Jn 19:37*)? We contemplate *the sign of God’s infinite love for humanity*.

O Crux, ave spes unica! Saint Paul speaks of the same theme in the letter to the Ephesians which we have just heard. Not only did Christ Jesus become man, in everything similar to human beings, but he took on the condition of a servant and humbled himself even more by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (cf. *Phil 2:6-8*).

Yes, “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (*Jn 3:16*). We admire – overwhelmed and gratified – the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge (cf. *Eph 3:18-19*)! *O Crux, ave spes unica!*

4. Certainly, it was meditation on this great and wonderful mystery that sustained *Blessed Bishop Vasil’ Hopko* and *Blessed Sister Zdenka Schelingová* in their choice of the consecrated life and especially in the sufferings endured during their terrible imprisonment.

Both shine before us as *radiant examples of faithfulness* in times of harsh and ruthless religious persecution. Bishop Vasil’ never repudiated his attachment to the Catholic Church and to the Pope. Sister Zdenka did not hesitate to risk her life so as to assist God’s ministers.

Both faced up to an unjust trial and an ignoble condemnation, to torture, humiliation, solitude, death. And so the Cross became for them the way that led them to life, a source of fortitude and hope, a proof of love for God and man. *O Crux, ave spes unica!*

5. In the Garden of Eden, at the foot of the tree, *there was a woman, Eve* (cf. *Gen 3*). Seduced by the Evil One, she takes possession of what she thinks is divine life. Instead it is a seed of death which enters into her (cf. *Jas 1:15; Rom 6:23*).

On Calvary, at the foot of the tree of the cross, *there was another woman, Mary* (cf. *Jn 19:25-27*). Accepting God's plan, she shares intimately in the Son's gift of self to the Father for the life of the world and, receiving from Jesus the entrustment of John the Apostle, she becomes the Mother of all mankind.

It is the *Virgin most Sorrowful*, whom we will remember tomorrow in the liturgy and whom you, with tender devotion, venerate as your Patroness. To her I entrust the present and the future of the Church and Nation of Slovakia, so that they will grow at the foot of the Cross of Christ, and will always know how to seek out and accept its message of love and salvation.

Through the mystery of your Cross and your resurrection, save us O Lord! Amen.

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