



The Holy See

LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE PEOPLE OF POLAND

My beloved Fellow-countrymen,

I am writing these words to you on the day on which it fell upon one of the sons of our country to assume the ministry of bishop on St Peter's chair. I cannot fail to address you all, brothers and sisters, children of beloved Poland, precisely on this day on which, owing to the inscrutable plans of Providence, I, hitherto metropolitan archbishop of Krakow, find myself obliged to leave the ancient chair of St Stanislaus to assume the Roman one of St Peter, and with it concern for the whole universal Church. It is difficult to think and speak of that without a very deep emotion. It seems that the human heart—and in particular the Polish heart—is not sufficient to contain such an emotion. Words are lacking, too, to express all the thoughts which crowd into the mind on this occasion. Do not such thoughts and sentiments pervade our whole history? Do they not embrace the thousand years of its course during which we, sons of Poland, have preserved fidelity to Christ and to his Church, to the Apostolic See, to the heritage of St Peter and St Paul?

These thoughts and sentiments are addressed particularly, however, to the recent period in our history: the history of our country and the history of the Church. How difficult it has been! How hard! A symbol of this crucial period is certainly the figure of Blessed Maximilian Mary Kolbe who, a few years ago, was raised to the glory of the altars by the unforgettable Holy Father Paul VI.

And here we have a significant thing, difficult to understand on the human plane. Just in these last decades the Church in Poland has acquired a special significance in the context of the universal Church and of Christendom. The Church in Poland has become an object of great interest owing to the specific system of relations, a system which has so much importance in the efforts that modern man, the various peoples and states, are undertaking in the social, economic and cultural field. The Church in Poland has acquired a new voice, it has become the Church of a special testimony to which the whole world looks. In this Church our people, the generation of today, lives and expresses itself.

Unless this fact is accepted, it is not possible to understand why a "Polish" pope is speaking to you today. It is difficult to understand how a conclave, which on 26 August (the feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa) had made a magnificent gift to its Church in the person of the Holy Father John Paul I, subsequently, after his unforgettable death which took place after just thirty-three days of pontificate, called a Polish cardinal to St Peter's chair. It is difficult to understand how this choice did not meet with opposition, but with understanding and even benevolent acceptance.

Venerable and beloved Cardinal Primate, allow me to tell you just what I think. This Polish pope, who today, full of fear of God, but also of trust, is beginning a new pontificate, would not be on Peter's chair were it not for your faith which did not retreat before prison and suffering. Were it not for your heroic hope, your unlimited trust in the Mother of the Church! Were it not for Jasna Gora, and the whole period of the history of the Church in our country, together with your ministry as Bishop and Primate! Saying this to you, I say it also to all my brothers in the episcopate: to all of them together and to each of them. To all priests and religious men and women and to each individually. So also to one and all of my beloved fellow-countrymen, brothers and sisters in our country and outside it. I say it also to you, dear Cardinal of Philadelphia in the United States, and to all bishops of Polish origin all over the world. I say it to all my fellow-countrymen without exception, respecting their creed and their convictions. Love of our country unites us and must unite us above all divergences. It has nothing in common with a narrow nationalism or chauvinism, but springs from the law of the human heart. It is a measure of man's nobility: a measure that has been put to the test many times during our difficult history.

Dear fellow-countrymen, it is not easy to renounce returning to my country, "to these fields rich in varied flowers, silvered with wheat and gilded with rye", as Mickiewicz writes. To these mountains and valleys, to the lakes and rivers, to the people loved so much, to this royal city. But if such is Christ's will, it is necessary to accept it, and therefore I accept it. I pray only that this separation will unite us even more and strengthen us in true mutual charity. Do not forget me in prayer at Jasna Gora and in the whole country, in order that this Pope, who is blood of your blood and heart of your hearts, may serve the Church and the world well in the difficult times which precede the end of this second millennium. I pray also: preserve faithfulness to Christ, to his Cross, to the Church and to her pastors. And further: oppose everything that conflicts with human dignity and degrades the morals of a healthy society, that may sometimes threaten its very existence and the common good, that may diminish our contribution to the common heritage of humanity, of Christian nations, of the Church of Christ.

Allow me to quote the words of St Paul: "whether I come and see you ... " (cf. Phil 1:27), I would like so much to come to you for the nine hundredth anniversary of St Stanislaus, for which we have prepared so fervently in the archdiocese and metropolis of Krakow and also in the whole of Poland, because this is the jubilee of its most ancient Patron Saint. I hope that this jubilee will bring the renewal of our faith and of Christian morals, since for nearly one thousand years we have seen in St Stanislaus a patron saint of the moral order, just as in St Adalbert the patron saint

of the hierarchical order.

I wish to bless you, and I do so not only by virtue of my mission as bishop and pope, but also to meet a deep need of my heart. And you, dear fellow-countrymen, today and whenever you receive the blessing of Pope John Paul II, remember that he came from your midst and has a special claim to your affection and your prayer.

Vatican City, 23 October 1978.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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