



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND

MEETING WITH BISHOPS AND DISTINGUISHED GUESTS FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES AND DIOCESES OF POLAND

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Residence of the Archbishop of Krakow

Saturday, 9 June 1979

*Venerable Brothers,
Gentlemen,*

I am very happy to be able to have this meeting with you, the guests of the Church in Poland, who have come from various countries to take part in the solemn jubilee celebrations commemorating the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus of Szczepanow, the Bishop of Krakow. Once again I would like to express my sincere thanks for your kindness in taking part in these celebrations. You agreed to come when the venerable Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, and I myself, at that time the Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow, extended to you a cordial invitation.

1. These celebrations take on a special meaning and have a loud echo also from the fact that, through a mysterious plan of Divine Providence, I was called last October by the Cardinal Electors from the See of Saint Stanislaus to the Chair of Saint Peter. At this time then it is my will to participate in this solemn jubilee as a guest, joining the faithful of Poland and pilgrims from the whole world in venerating the glorious figure of my saintly Predecessor in the See of Krakow and in asking, at the beginning of my Pontificate, his heavenly protection in carrying out my new world-wide pastoral service:

Stanislaus was born in the first half of the eleventh century in the town of Szczepanow. Because of

his deep piety and his cultural preparation he was named a canon in the Cathedral of Bishop Lambert Zula. On the death of Bishop Lambert, Pope Alexander II, at the request of the clergy and the lay people as well as of King Boleslaus II himself, raised Stanislaus to the See of Krakow.

History tells how the relationship between Bishop Stanislaus and King Boleslaus II, serene at first, later deteriorated because of the injustices and cruelty visited by the King upon his subjects. The Bishop of Krakow, an authentic "good shepherd" (cf. John 10:10-14), defended his flock. The King replied with violence. Bishop Stanislaus was killed while celebrating Mass. On the venerated skull of the Martyr, now preciously preserved in an artistic reliquary, one can still see the signs of the heavy mortal blows.

2. From that time on, Saint Stanislaus became the Patron of Poland. He became especially the benefactor and protector of poor people; he became, above all, an example to Bishops as to how to communicate and defend the sacred deposit of faith with undaunted strength and unbending spirit. For centuries he has been considered an illustrious witness to genuine freedom and to the fruitful synthesis which is brought about in a believer between loyalty to an earthly fatherland and fidelity to the Church which lives in the expectation of a definitive and future city (cf. Heb 13:14).

After nine centuries the personality and the message of Saint Stanislaus preserve an extraordinary relevance. This regards both his life as a pastor of a portion of God's People and the witness of blood given by his martyrdom.

But Saint Stanislaus is certainly and especially "the man" of his times: his pastoral ministry is fulfilled under the pontificate of Saint Gregory VII, in a period, that is, in which the Church claims her own freedom and her own original spiritual mission in the face of the powerful men of the world. In the eleventh century, Poland and the Church in Poland, at the beginning of the second century of their history, also found themselves in the sphere of complex and delicate problems, which at that time both Europe and Christianity itself had to live and face.

If the Polish Episcopate has decided to invite so many illustrious guests, it has done so in order to emphasize these historical bonds. And it is in the name of these bonds that I desire to thank you for your presence.

And hence, if on this extraordinary occasion I desire to wish something for everybody, it is that this our common meditation on the events which took place nine hundred years ago may help us to see with even greater clarity the mission of Christianity and of the Church in their relationship to the modern world. Perhaps this has a particular importance for the Europe of today that finds herself at a point of new searching for her distinctive and suitable path.

The task of Christianity and of the Church cannot be anything other than a creative participation in these efforts. Only in this way, and in no other, can there be expressed and, actuated our

solicitude for the preservation and defence of the Christian patrimony of Europe and of the individual European countries.

With these hopes I renew my sentiments of deep gratitude and I ask for you an outpouring of heavenly blessings. As a sign of my esteem and regard, I impart to you my Apostolic Blessing.

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