



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II AT THE CEMETERY OF MONTE CASSINO

18 May 1979

Mr Prime Minister! Gentlemen!

I thank you sincerely for your presence, and I thank you, Mr Prime Minister, for the noble words you have wished to address to me at the moment when I am about to visit these places sacred to *human suffering* and to Christian hope.

The Pope comes, in the first place, on a sad pilgrimage to pray and to remember those who shed their blood in this area during one of the most tragic periods of the second world war. There are thousands of them; they belonged to various nations, various races, and various religions: they were *men*, that is, sons of God and, therefore, brothers in Christ! Their relatives still mourn them, and ask themselves the reason for the violent end of these young men, who certainly dreamed of life, not death, of love, not hatred, of joy, not suffering, of peace, not war!

With the depth of my being as man, Christian, priest, Bishop and Pope, I come therefore to join in the ardent prayer, the agonizing memory and the still keen grief of those who were left with a great void that could not be filled in their hearts and in their homes.

But I come, too, to *listen to* and *transmit* to everyone the message of those who rest in this Polish military cemetery, as also in the British, German, Italian and French cemeteries. They tell us that the sacrifice of their young lives cannot have been useless; that their blood must have contributed to making men better, more open, more united in solidarity with others; that their extreme suffering, incomprehensible on the human plane, has acquired full significance since it was united with that of Christ, who took upon himself also pain and death.

I call upon everyone to join in my prayer for the souls of the soldiers buried under the soil of these cemeteries, but also for the soldiers who fell in all wars, doing their duty for their homeland, and who live, for ever, in God.

In this perspective, my stop at Monte Cassino Abbey takes on almost a symbolic meaning. Completely destroyed by the fury of war and reborn from its ruins, it continues to be for Europe and for the world a centre of spirituality and civilization. On this solemn day, in the name of God and in the name of man, I repeat to everyone: "Do not kill! Do not prepare destruction and extermination for men! Think of your brothers and sisters who are suffering hunger and misery! Respect each one's dignity and freedom!" (Enc. *Redemptor Hominis*, n. 16).

To all, my Apostolic Blessing.

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