



The Holy See

MESSAGE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II ON THE OCCASION OF THE RE-CONSECRATION OF MINSK CATHEDRAL

*To my Venerable Brother Cardinal Kazimierz Świątek
Archbishop of Minsk-Mohilev*

I am pleased to be able to be present, in the person of Cardinal Edmund Szoka, at the reconsecration ceremony for the cathedral of Minsk and thus to share in the joy of the faithful of Belarus. This church, dedicated to Jesus, Mary and St Barbara, whose construction was begun by the Jesuit Fathers in 1700, became a parish church after the dissolution of the Society of Jesus. With the erection of the Diocese of Minsk in 1798, it was chosen as the cathedral for the new jurisdiction, whose first Bishop was the Most Rev. Jakub Daderka.

In 1951 the communist regime closed it, requisitioned it and turned it into a physical education centre. Like so many other churches of this beloved nation, it underwent a period of profanation during which, according to the mysterious designs of Providence, it never ceased to be a symbolic reference point for the People of God in the long years of their persecution.

Finally, in 1994 the former cathedral was returned to the Catholic community and you, Your Eminence, immediately began the work of restoring it. Radical and expensive operations were necessary to restore it as much as possible to its original splendour. The loving care you have devoted to it, with the support of the faithful and benefactors, has fortunately made it possible to achieve your goal. In recalling these events, how can we fail to think of the trials of our fathers of the Old Covenant: exiles from Zion, deprived of worship in the temple, but later joyful at being able to return to the holy city and rebuild their sanctuary? The prophet's words sound more timely than ever for the members of this community: "Take courage, all you people of the land, says the Lord; work for I am with you.... The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, ... and in this place I will give prosperity" (Hg 2:4, 9).

The glory of the Church, Venerable Brother, is Christ the Lord: the Priest, Sacrifice, and Temple of the New Covenant. May this event be a providential opportunity for the faithful of this beloved country, journeying towards the third Christian millennium, to renew their commitment to be "like living stones ... built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5).

The new dedication of St Mary's Cathedral in Minsk reminds everyone of this vocation and mission. And may the Virgin Mother of God, image and model of the Church, Star of evangelization, be a guide for the faithful, so that they may respond to the divine plan with the ardour of faith, hope and charity, for the edification and comfort of every person of goodwill.

Venerable Brother, you will also be celebrating your 83rd birthday on this solemn occasion. Please accept my warm congratulations and heartfelt best wishes. I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, which I extend to the priests, religious and faithful of the whole Archdiocese.

From the Vatican, 15 October 1997.

IOANNES PAULUS PP. II

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