



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER POPE JOHN PAUL II TO POLISH PILGRIMS

Friday, 16 October 1998

1. "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy And I am sure he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel thus about you all, because I hold you in my heart" (cf. Phil 1:3-6). With these words I greet the pilgrims in St Peter's Square, those from Poland and from abroad, as well as all my compatriots wherever they may be. In a special way I greet the Cardinal Primate and thank him for his words; I cordially greet Cardinal Franciszek, Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków, Cardinal Andrzej Deskur, Cardinal Kazimierz Swiatek, Metropolitan Archbishop of Minsk-Mohilev, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Pinsk and the Archbishops, Bishops, priests and consecrated persons. I greet the President of the Republic of Poland, the presidents of the Parliament and Senate, the members of the Parliament, the senators, the representatives of the local authorities and especially those of the city of Kraków represented by the president of the province, the mayor and the authorities of the city of Warsaw.

2. Dear friends, you have come to the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles to give thanks to God with me for my 20 years of pastoral service to the universal Church. This meeting reminds me of that moment in the Sistine Chapel when, following the election carried out in accordance with canon law, I was asked: "Do you accept?". I then replied: "In the obedience of faith before Christ my Lord, abandoning myself to the Mother of Christ and the Church, and conscious of the great difficulties, I accept". The ways of divine Providence are inscrutable.

From Wawel Hill Christ called me to the Vatican Hill, from the tomb of St Stanislaus to the tomb of St Peter, so that I might lead the Church on the paths of conciliar renewal. At this moment I can see before my eyes the figure of the Servant of God Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who, during the Conclave, on the feast-day of St Hedwig of Silesia, came up to me and said: "If they elect you, I

beg you not to refuse". I answered: "Thank you very much. God reward you, Cardinal". Comforted by the grace and words of the Primate of the Millennium, I was able to say my *fiat* to the inscrutable designs of divine Providence. And today I want to repeat what I said to my compatriots in Paul VI Auditorium, the day after the inauguration of my Pontificate: "A Polish Pope would not be on Peter's Chair were it not for the faith and heroic hope of our great Primate, his boundless trust in the Mother of the Church. Were it not for Jasna Góra".

When I look back today at the past years of my ministry in the See of Rome, I thank God for having given me the grace to proclaim the Good News of salvation to many peoples and to many nations on every continent, including my compatriots in Poland. Evangelization is an essential element of the mission of St Peter's Successor, his daily labour of building the civilization of love, truth and life.

3. From the beginning, I have been supported in my apostolic ministry by the prayers and sacrifices of the entire People of God, and the Church in Poland has a special place among them. After my election to the See of St Peter, I asked my compatriots: "Do not forget me in prayer at Jasna Góra and throughout the 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". And I constantly experience the help of this prayer. It is your prayer that accompanies me every hour of every day on the paths of my papal ministry. I know it, and in my heart I feel the deep bond which is created through prayer when we remember one another, share our sentiments and our human problems, and put them in the hands of the almighty and good Father who is in heaven.

I am particularly grateful for that continuing prayer during my moments of suffering and illness, especially on that memorable day, 13 May 1981. I find it hard to speak of this without being deeply moved. You prayed for me throughout that period in close union with me in bonds of solidarity and spiritual closeness. How can we forget at this moment the "white march" in Kraków, which united a great multitude in prayer, motivated by faith in divine mercy and love for the Church, and bearing witness to their devotion to the Pope. Today I would like to remind you of all this, and say: "God reward you!". I too try to reciprocate with daily prayer for all my compatriots, for our entire nation, for Poland, my homeland where my life, my heart and my vocation have always been deeply rooted. My country's problems have been and always are very dear to me. Deep in my heart, I experience all that my nation is going through. I consider the good of my homeland as my own good, and what harms or dishonours it, all that threatens it, in a certain sense always becomes a part of me, a part of my heart, of my thoughts and of my feelings.

4. For many years I have been preparing with the whole Church to enter the third millennium. For me, the millennium of the Baptism of Poland, that extraordinary experience of my entire nation's struggle for fidelity to God, to the Cross and to the Gospel during the Church's persecution, was a historical preparation for the Great Jubilee!

When I began my Petrine ministry in the Church 20 years ago, I said: “Open the doors to Christ”. Today, at the threshold of the third millennium, these words acquire a special eloquence. Once again I address them to all my compatriots as my best wish. Open wide the doors to Christ — the doors of culture, of the economy, of politics, of the family, of personal and social life. There is no other name on earth by which we can be saved except that of the Redeemer of man (cf. Acts 4:12). Christ alone is our Mediator with the Father, the only hope which never disappoints. Without Christ man will never fully know himself; he will never really know who he is and where he is going.

Opening the doors to Christ means opening oneself to him and to his teaching: to become witnesses to his life, passion and death. This means being united with him through prayer and the holy sacraments. Without a bond with Christ all things lose their meaning and the boundaries between good and evil are blurred. Today Poland needs people of deep faith and upright conscience, trained in the Gospel and the Church’s social teaching; people for whom the things of God are the most important, who can make decisions in conformity with the divine commandments and the Gospel. It needs courageous and responsible Christians to participate in all the areas of social and national life, who are not afraid of obstacles or opposition. The time has come for a new evangelization. Therefore, dear friends, I turn to you with this cry: “Open the doors to Christ!”. Be his witnesses to the very ends of the earth (cf. Acts 1:8). Be his authentic disciples, who can “renew the face of the earth” and kindle in human hearts and in the whole nation the fire of love and justice.

5. On a day so important to me, I turn the eyes of my soul to Our Lady of Jasna Góra and place in her motherly hands all the problems of the Church in Poland and of my compatriots. Today, 16 October, as the Church recalls St Hedwig of Silesia — patroness of my election to the Chair of Peter — I ask you once again to pray “that I can accomplish the work which God gave me to do” (cf. Jn 17:4) for his glory in service to the Church and to the world. I cordially bless all of you present here, your families, your loved ones and all my homeland.

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