



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE TO POLAND

DEPARTURE CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

*Kraków – Balice Airport
Monday, 19 August 2002*

1. "Poland, my dear homeland, [...] God raises you up and treats you with special care, but you must show him gratitude" (*Diary*, 1038). With these words from Saint Faustina's Diary I wish to bid you farewell, dear Brothers and Sisters, my Compatriots!

The time having come when I must return to the Vatican, I look out once more upon you all with great joy, and I thank God who has permitted me to visit my Homeland yet again. My thoughts turn to the different stages of this three-day pilgrimage: Łagiewniki, Błonie in Krakow, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. I shall not forget the crowds of the faithful gathered in prayer – living testimony of the faith of the Church in Poland and of your trust in the power of God's mercy. Taking leave of Poland, I wish to bid you all farewell, dear Compatriots. Many have waited for my coming. Many have wished to meet me, although not all were able to do so. Maybe next time...

I pray that the families of Poland will find in prayer the light and the strength needed to fulfil their duties and to spread in their surroundings the message of love and mercy. May God, the source of life, bless you each day. I greet those whom I have met personally on this pilgrimage and those who, through the media, have participated in the events of this Apostolic Visit. In particular, I thank the sick and the elderly who have supported me by offering up their prayers and their sufferings. May their spiritual union with the merciful Christ be a source of relief in their physical and spiritual suffering.

In my spirit, I embrace the whole of my beloved Homeland. I rejoice in its successes, in its positive

aspirations and in its courageous undertakings. With a certain preoccupation, I have spoken of the difficulties and the cost of the changes that weigh upon the neediest and the weakest, on the unemployed, the homeless and those who are forced to live in increasingly difficult conditions and with uncertainty concerning the future. As I take my leave, I wish to entrust all these difficult situations in our native land to God's Providence and I encourage all those who exercise responsibility in the running of the State to be mindful of the good of the Republic and of its citizens. May the spirit of mercy, of fraternal solidarity, of concord in authentic concern for our homeland reign among you. While Polish society cultivates all these values, I hope that Poland, which has belonged to Europe for centuries, will find its proper place in the structures of the European community. Not only will it not lose its own identity, but it will enrich the continent and the world with its tradition.

2. The days of this brief pilgrimage have been an occasion to relive memories and to reflect intensely. I thank God for this opportunity to visit Krakow and Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. I thank him for the Church in Poland, which – in a spirit of fidelity to the Cross and to the Gospel – has for a thousand years shared in the fortunes of the Nation, serving it with zeal and supporting it in its positive intentions and aspirations. I thank God that the Church in Poland has remained faithful to this mission and I pray that she may always continue to do so.

I wish to express my gratitude to all who have contributed to making this pilgrimage possible. One more I thank the President of the Republic for his invitation and for the care taken in the preparation and carrying out of this visit. I am grateful for the cooperation between the civil authorities and the Church's representatives. I am grateful to the Prime Minister for every gesture of goodwill.

I am grateful to the territorial, regional and city authorities – especially those of Krakow and Kalwaria – for their goodwill, their attention and all their efforts.

May God repay all who were involved in the Church services, those involved in the areas of television, radio and the press, journalists, those responsible for public order – the military, the police, firefighters, health service personnel – and all those who in any way have helped to make this pilgrimage a success. I do not want to omit anyone; and so, from the bottom of my heart, I say once more to everyone: May God reward you!

3. My special gratitude goes to all the People of God in Poland. I thank the Polish Episcopal Conference, and above all the Cardinal Primate, for the invitation to visit our homeland, for the spiritual preparation of the faithful and for all the organizational efforts made in view of this pilgrimage. I address a special word of thanks to the priests, seminarians and religious. Thank you for your preparation of the liturgies and for assisting the faithful at our meetings. I am grateful to the whole Church in Poland for its common perseverance in prayer, for its warm welcome and for all its demonstrations of goodwill. May the merciful Christ abundantly reward your generosity with

his blessing.

As I express my gratitude, I cannot fail to add a special word addressed to the beloved Church in Krakow. My wholehearted gratitude goes in a special way to Cardinal Franciszek, Metropolitan of Krakow, for his hospitality and for having prepared the city so magnificently for the important events of the last few days. Profound thanks go to the Sisters of the Merciful Mother of God in Łagiewniki and to those who every day, before the image of the merciful Jesus, offer prayers for the intentions of my apostolic mission. I congratulate the Archdiocese of Krakow and all of Poland for the church which I had the opportunity to dedicate. I am convinced the Shrine of Łagiewniki will become a significant point of reference and a powerful centre of devotion to the Divine Mercy. May the rays of light coming down from the tower of the temple of Łagiewniki, reminiscent of the rays emanating from the image of the merciful Jesus, cast their spiritual reflection on the whole of Poland – from the Tatra Mountains to the Baltic Sea, from the Bug River to the Oder – and on the whole world!

4. "God, rich in mercy". These are the words that sum up this Visit. We have heard them as a call to the Church and to Poland in the new millennium. I pray that my Compatriots will welcome with open hearts this message of mercy and will succeed in carrying it to wherever men and women are in need of the light of hope.

I cherish in my heart every good thing that has happened and in which I have taken part during these days of my pilgrimage. Grateful for everything, and with the entire ecclesial community in Poland, I repeat before the merciful Jesus: "Jesus, in you I trust!" May these heartfelt words bring comfort to future generations in the new millennium. May God who is rich in mercy bless you!

What can I say in the end? I am sorry to leave.