



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE PILGRIMS WHO HAD COME
FOR THE CANONIZATION OF**

JÓSEF SEBASTIAN PELCZAR

and

URSZULA LEDÓCHOWSKA

Monday 19 May 2003

My cordial welcome to my fellow countrymen present today in St Peter's Square. I greet the Cardinals, Bishops, Priests and Women Religious. In a special way I greet Cardinal Primate of Poland, who is absent, and thank him for the kind words he has communicated to me. I hope that he will speedily and fully recover his health. I cordially greet the President of the Republic of Poland and the representatives of the State and of the territorial Authorities. I thank the President for the greetings he has expressed to me on behalf of the Republic and for his important address. God bless him!

Lastly, I would like to offer a cordial greeting to all of you here who were willing to make the effort of coming on pilgrimage in these days, so important for the Polish Church - the days on which we are presenting to the universal Church *two new Polish Saints*: Bishop [Joseph Sebastian Pelczar](#) and [Ursula Ledóchowska](#). Remembering them, I would like in particular to greet the Sisters of the Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and of the Ursuline Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Agony.

Through the desire of Divine Providence I have accomplished these canonizations in the 25th year of my Pontificate and on my birthday. *Thanks be to God!* I thank you too, with all my heart! I am happy to be able to celebrate these events with such a large group of friends. I thank you for your kindness and for your sacrifices and prayers, for me and for the whole Church.

It would be hard to count how many meetings we have had within the span of the past years. We

have had some in Rome and in Castel Gandolfo, and others in various countries of the world; but the meetings which took place in our *homeland* are the ones most deeply etched upon my heart.

Perhaps this is because they were especially intense, marked by profound prayer and religious reflection on the temporal reality of each one of us and of the entire nation: it is in situations such as these that God's saving plan is implemented. These meetings have always been an extraordinary sharing of the witness of the faith that sprang from the faith of our ancestors and which creates a particular atmosphere of life and culture, understood on a broad scale, *which has determined our national identity*. So it was in 1979, when on behalf of all who had no right to speak, *I implored God for the gift of the Spirit, so that he might renew the face of the earth in our homeland*.

The year 1979. We were accompanied then by the great Pastor and guide of the Polish Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the Primate of the Millennium.

We supported one another with our common witness also in 1983, when in difficult circumstances for the nation we thanked God together for the 600th anniversary of Mary's presence in her image at Jasna Góra, and we prayed to obtain *faith in the power of dialogue* for "a prosperous and peaceful Poland... in the interest of tranquillity and good cooperation among the peoples of Europe", in the words of Pope Paul VI (*Address to State Authorities*, Warsaw, 17 June 1983, n. 1; *ORE*, 27 June, p. 4). In 1987, when the Polish nation was still battling against the powers of the hostile ideology, together *we revived within us the hope* which flows from the Eucharist instituted at the beginning "of the redeeming hour of Christ", which was "the redeeming hour of the history of humanity and of the world". The National Eucharistic Congress at that time reminded us once again that God "loved us to the very end".

In 1991, we had two particularly eloquent meetings. During the first one *we thanked God for the gift of freedom recovered*, and attempted to *outline a way to live this freedom nobly*, relying on the eternal law of God contained in the Decalogue. Already at that time, we tried to discern the dangers which freedom, cut loose from moral norms, might pose for the life of individuals and for society as a whole. These dangers are always present. Therefore, I never cease to pray *that the conscience of the Polish nation may be formed on the basis of the divine commandments*, and I believe that the Church in Poland will always be able to safeguard the moral order.

The second meeting of that year was linked to World Youth Day in Czestochowa. I will never forget that "Appeal of Jasna Góra", shared by young people from all over the world - *for the first time also from beyond our Eastern borders*. I give thanks to God because, standing at the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, I was able to entrust them to her powerful protection.

Then there was a brief one-day visit to Skoczów in 1995, on the occasion of the canonization of Jan Sarkander. That day, too, brought a wealth of unforgettable spiritual experiences.

In 1997, we had a pilgrimage full of significant events. The first was the *conclusion of the International Eucharistic Congress at Wroclaw*. All the celebrations of the congress, and especially the *statio orbis*, reminded us that the Eucharist is the most effective sign of Christ's presence "yesterday, today and forever". The second event of special significance was *the visit to the relics of St Adalbert* on the millennium of his martyrdom. From the religious viewpoint this was an opportunity to go back to the roots of our faith. From the international viewpoint the meeting was a *commemoration of the idea of the Congress of Gniezno*, which was held in the year 1000. In the presence of the Presidents of the neighbouring countries, I said on that occasion: "There will be no European unity *until it is based on unity of the spirit*. This most profound basis of unity was brought to Europe and consolidated down the centuries by Christianity with its Gospel, with its understanding of man and with its contribution to the development of the history of peoples and nations. This does not signify a desire to appropriate history. For the history of Europe is a great river into which many tributaries flow, and the variety of traditions and cultures which shape it is its great treasure. *The foundations of the identity of Europe are built on Christianity*" (*Homily*, 3 June 1997, St Adalbert Square, Gniezno, n. 4; *ORE*, 11 June, p. 4).

Today, while Poland and the other countries of the former "Eastern Bloc" are entering the structures of the European Union, I repeat these words, which I am not saying in order to discourage you but, on the contrary, to point out that these countries have a great mission to carry out on the Old Continent. I know there are many who are against this integration. I appreciate their concern to preserve the cultural and religious identity of our nation. I share their worries, as well as the economic arrangement of forces in which Poland - after years of unlimited exploitation by the former system - appears to be a country with great possibilities but also scarce means. I must stress, however, that *Poland has always been an important part of Europe* and today cannot abandon this community which, it is true, is living through crises at various levels but *constitutes a family of nations based on the common Christian tradition*. Poland's entry into the structures of the European Union, *with equal rights to the other countries*, is for our nation and for the neighbouring Slav nations an expression of historical justice and, on the other hand, can constitute an enrichment for Europe. *Europe needs of Poland*. The Church in Europe needs the Pole's witness of faith. *Poland needs Europe*.

The period from the Union of Lublin to the European Union represents a great synthesis, but this synthesis' content is rich and varied. Poland needs Europe. It is a challenge that we and all the nations are confronted with at present, and which, on the wave of the political transformations in the region of the so-called Central-Eastern Europe, are emerging from the spheres of influence of atheistic Communism. This challenge, however, imposes a task on believers - the task of actively building the *spiritual community*, on the basis of the values that have made it possible to withstand decades of programmed efforts to introduce atheism.

May the Patroness of this work be St Hedwig, the Lady of Wawel, the great precursor of the union of nations on the basis of the common faith. I thank God for allowing me to canonize her during

that very pilgrimage.

My long encounter with Poland and with its inhabitants which took place in 1999, was a common experience in faith of the truth that *"God is love"*. In a certain sense it was a great national preparation for all we have lived in this past year: the profound experience of the truth that *"God is rich in mercy"*. Is there another message which would bring such hope to the world of our day and to everyone at the beginning of the third millennium? I did not hesitate, at the site of a special manifestation of the merciful Christ in Lagiewniki-Kraków, *to entrust the world to Divine Mercy*. I ardently believe that that act of entrustment will meet with a trusting response on the part of believers on all the continents, and will bring them to inner renewal and consolidation in the work of building the civilization of love.

I recall these particular meetings with Poles, because *in their spiritual content is contained the history of Poland, of Europe, of the Church and of this Pontificate in the last quarter of the century*. Thanks be to God for that period, in which we experienced an abundance of his grace.

In the context of the mystery of Divine Mercy let us turn once again to the figures of the new Polish Saints. Not only did they both entrust themselves to the merciful Christ, but they became ever fuller *witnesses of mercy*. In the pastoral ministry of St Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, charitable activity had a special place. He was always convinced that *active mercy is the most effective defence of the faith, the most eloquent preaching and the most fruitful apostolate*. He himself supported the needy, and at the same time, took the trouble to ensure that care of them was organized and orderly, and not sporadic. He therefore appreciated charitable institutions and supported them with his own funds. Mother Ursula Ledóchowska *made her life a mission of mercy* for the most deprived. Wherever Providence took her, she found young people in need of instruction and spiritual formation, poor, sick or lonely people, battered by life in various ways, who expected of her understanding and concrete help. In accordance with her means, she never refused help to anyone. Her work of mercy will remain engraved for ever in the message of holiness, which yesterday became part of the whole Church.

Thus, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar and Ursula Ledóchowska, who have accompanied us today on this spiritual pilgrimage through Poland, have brought us back to Rome. I once again repeat my thanks to you for coming here. Yesterday afternoon I completed my 83rd year and entered my 84th year of life. I am aware ever more clearly that the day is drawing closer when I shall stand before God with my whole life; the period spent in Wadowice, that of Kraków and then my time spent in Rome: give an account of your ministry! I trust in Divine Mercy and in the protection of the Most Holy Mother each day, and especially on the day everything will be fulfilled: in the world, before the world and before God. I thank you once again for coming; I greatly appreciate your visit. Take my greeting to your families, to your loved ones and to all our fellow countrymen and women. I embrace you all with a grateful thought. May Almighty God Bless you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen. Praised be Jesus Christ. God bless you!

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