



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY  
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II  
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)  
1000 YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF ST ADALBERT

## **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

*Gniezno - 3 June 1997*

### **1. *Veni, Creator Spiritus!***

Today we are at the tomb of Saint Adalbert in Gniezno. We are thus at the centre of the Millennium of Adalbert. A month ago I began this journey in honour of Saint Adalbert in Prague and in Libice, in the Diocese of Hradec Králové, whence he came. And today we are in Gniezno, at the place — it can be said — where he ended his earthly pilgrimage. I give thanks to the Triune God that at the end of this Millennium I have been granted the opportunity to pray once again before the relics of Saint Adalbert, which are one of our greatest national treasures.

*We are here to follow the spiritual journey of Saint Adalbert, which in a sense begins in the Upper Room.* Today's Liturgy leads us precisely to the Upper Room, to which the Apostles returned from the Mount of Olives after Christ's Ascension into heaven. For forty days after the Resurrection he appeared to them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of Heaven. He told them not to leave Jerusalem but to await the promise of the Father: "which, he said, you heard from me. John baptized with water, but before many days... you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8).

The Apostles thus receive the missionary mandate. By virtue of the words of the Risen Lord they must go into all the world to teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mt 28:14-20). But for now they return to the Upper Room and remain in prayer, awaiting the fulfilment of the promise. On the tenth day, the feast of Pentecost, Christ sent them the Holy Spirit, who transformed their hearts. They were made strong and ready to assume the missionary mandate. And so they began the work of evangelization.

The Church continues this work. *The successors of the Apostles continue to go forth into all the world to make disciples of all nations.* Towards the end of the first millennium, there first set foot on Polish soil the sons of various nations which had already become Christian, especially the nations bordering Poland. Among them a central place belongs to Saint Adalbert, who came to Poland from neighbouring and closely-related Bohemia. He was at the origin, in a certain sense, of the Church's second beginning in the lands of the Piast. The baptism of the nation in 966, at the time of Mieszko I, was confirmed by the blood of the Martyr. And not only this: with him *Poland became part of the family of European countries.* Before the relics of Saint Adalbert, the Emperor Otto III and Boleslaw the Brave met in the presence of a legate of the Pope. This meeting was of great historical significance — the Congress of Gniezno. Obviously it had political significance, but ecclesial significance as well. At the tomb of Saint Adalbert, the first Polish metropolitan see was announced by Pope Silvester II: Gniezno, to which the episcopal sees of Krakow, Wrocław and Kolobrzeg were joined.

2. The seed which dies bears much fruit (cf. Jn 12:24). These words of the Gospel of John, spoken one day by Christ to the Apostles, are singularly applicable to Adalbert. By his death, he bore the supreme witness. *"He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life"* (Jn 12:25). Saint Adalbert also bore witness to the apostolic service. For Christ says: *"If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if anyone serves me, the Father will honour him"* (Jn 12:26). Adalbert followed Christ. He made a long journey which took him from his native Libice to Prague, and from Prague to Rome. Then, after facing resistance from his fellow countrymen in Prague, he left as a missionary for the Pannonian Plain and from there, through the Moravian Gate to Gniezno and the Baltic. His mission in a sense was the crowning point of the evangelization of the lands of the Piast. And this was precisely because Adalbert bore witness to Christ by undergoing a martyr's death. Boleslaw the Brave ransomed the body of the Martyr and had it brought here, to Gniezno.

In him the words of Christ were fulfilled. Above love of earthly life Adalbert had placed love of the Son of God. He followed Christ as a faithful and generous servant, bearing witness to him at the cost of his own life. And the Father honoured him indeed. The People of God surrounded him on earth with the veneration reserved to a saint, in the conviction that a Martyr of Christ in heaven is surrounded with glory by the Father.

*"The grain of wheat which dies, bears much fruit"* (cf. Jn 12:24). How literally were these words fulfilled in the life and death of Saint Adalbert! His death by martyrdom, mingled with the blood of other Polish martyrs, is at the foundation of the Polish Church and the Polish State itself. *The shedding of the blood of Adalbert continues to bear ever fresh spiritual fruit.* All Poland, from its origins as a State and throughout the centuries that followed, has continued to draw upon it. The Congress of Gniezno opened to Poland the path of unity with the whole family of the states of Europe. On the threshold of the Second Millennium the Polish nation acquired the right to take part, on a par with other nations, in the formation of a new face of Europe. Saint Adalbert is thus a

great patron of our continent, then in the process of unification in the name of Christ. Both by his life and his death, the Holy Martyr laid the foundations of Europe's identity and unity. Many times have I walked in these historic footsteps, at the time of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, coming from Krakow to Gniezno with the relics of Saint Stanislaus, and I thank Divine Providence that today I am able to make this journey once more.

We thank you, Saint Adalbert, for having brought us together today here in such great numbers. Among us are distinguished guests. I think first of the Presidents of the countries linked to the person of Wojtech-Adalbert. For their presence here I thank President Kwasniewski of Poland, President Havel of the Czech Republic, President Brazauskas of Lithuania, President Herzog of Germany, President Kovac of the Slovak Republic, President Kuczma of Ukraine, and President Göncz of Hungary.

Your Excellencies: your presence here in Gniezno today has a particular significance for the whole continent of Europe. As was the case a thousand years ago, so too today, such a presence testifies to the desire for peaceful coexistence and the building of a new Europe, united by bonds of solidarity. I ask you kindly to convey my cordial greetings to the nations which you represent.

I express my gratitude also to the Cardinals who have come from the Eternal City, beginning with the Cardinal Secretary of State Angelo Sodano, and the Cardinals of the countries linked to the figure of Saint Adalbert, led by Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, the successor of Saint Adalbert in the episcopal see of Prague. I am pleased that among us are Cardinals from distant parts of the world, from America to Australia. I cordially greet and thank for their presence the Polish Cardinals, with the Cardinal Primate at their head, and the Archbishops and Bishops. I thank also the Orthodox Bishops and the Heads of the Communities of the Reformation, as well as the leaders of other Ecclesial Communities. I address a cordial word of greeting to Archbishop Muszynski, Metropolitan of Gniezno, and to you, dear brothers and sisters, who have come from all over Poland for this meeting.

3. Deeply impressed upon my memory is the meeting in Gniezno in June 1979, when, for the first time, the Pope, a native of Krakow, was able to celebrate the Eucharist on the Hill of Lech, in the presence of the unforgettable Primate of the Millennium, the whole Polish Episcopate and many pilgrims not only from Poland but also from the neighbouring countries. Today, eighteen years later, we should return to that homily in Gniezno, which in a certain sense became the programme of my pontificate. But first of all it was a humble reading of God's plans, linked with the final twenty-five years of our millennium. I said then: *Is it not Christ's will, is it not what the Holy Spirit disposes, that this Polish Pope, this Slav Pope, should at this precise moment manifest the spiritual unity of Christian Europe? We know that the Christian unity of Europe is made up of two great traditions, of the West and of the East...* Yes, it is Christ's will, it is what the Holy Spirit disposes, that what I am saying should be said in this very place and at this moment in Gniezno" (*Homily at the Cathedral of Gniezno*, 3 June 1979).

From this place there flowed forth at that time the power and strength of the Holy Spirit. Here reflection on the new evangelization began to take shape in concrete terms. In the meantime great transformations took place, new possibilities arose, other people appeared on the scene. The wall which divided Europe collapsed. Fifty years after the Second World War began, its effects ceased to ravage the face of our continent. A half century of separation ended, for which millions of people living in Central and Eastern Europe had paid a terrible price. *And so here, at the tomb of Saint Adalbert, today I give thanks to Almighty God for the great gift of freedom granted to the nations of Europe,* and I do so in the words of the Psalmist:

"Then they said among the nations,  
 'The Lord has done great things for them'.  
 The Lord has done great things for us;  
 and we are glad" (Ps 126:2-3).

4. Dear brothers and sisters, after so many years I repeat the same message: a new openness is needed. For we have seen, at times in a very painful way, that the recovery of the right to self-determination and the growth of political and economic freedom is not sufficient to rebuild European unity. How can we not mention here the tragedy of the nations of the former Yugoslavia, the drama experienced by the Albanian people and the enormous burdens felt by all the societies which have regained their freedom and with great effort are liberating themselves from the yoke of the Communist totalitarian system?

Can we not say that after the collapse of one wall, the visible one, another, invisible wall was discovered, one that continues to divide our continent — the wall that exists in people's hearts? It is a wall made out of fear and aggressiveness, of lack of understanding for people of different origins, different colour, different religious convictions; it is the wall of political and economic selfishness, of the weakening of sensitivity to the value of human life and the dignity of every human being. Even the undeniable achievements of recent years in the economic, political and social fields do not hide the fact that this wall exists. It casts its shadow over all of Europe. The goal of the authentic unity of the European continent is still distant. *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. And its present lack of spiritual unity arises principally from the crisis of this Christian self-awareness.

5. Brothers and sisters, it was Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8) who revealed to man his dignity! He is the guarantee of this dignity! It was the patrons of Europe — Saint Benedict and Saints Cyril and Methodius — who grafted on to European culture

the truth about God and about man. It was the ranks of missionary saints, recalled to us today by Saint Adalbert, Bishop and martyr, who brought to the peoples of Europe the teaching about love of neighbour, even love of enemies — a teaching confirmed by the gift of their lives for the sake of others. This Good News, the Gospel, has sustained our brothers and sisters in Europe over the course of the centuries, down to the present day. This message was repeated by the walls of churches, abbeys, hospitals and universities. It was proclaimed by books, sculpture and painting, by poetry and musical compositions. Upon the Gospel were laid the foundations of Europe's spiritual unity.

*From the tomb of Saint Adalbert, then, I ask: are we allowed to reject the law of Christian life, which states that abundant fruit is borne only by those who offer their lives for the love of God and of their brothers and sisters, like a seed cast upon the ground? Here, from this place I repeat the cry which I made at the beginning of my pontificate: Open the doors to Christ! In the name of respect for human rights, in the name of liberty, equality and fraternity, in the name of solidarity among mankind and in the name of love, I cry out: Do not be afraid! Open the doors to Christ! Without Christ it is impossible to understand man.* For this reason, the wall which today is raised in people's hearts, the wall which divides Europe, will not be torn down without a return to the Gospel. For without Christ it is impossible to build lasting unity. It cannot be done by separating oneself from the roots from which the countries of Europe have grown, and from the great wealth of the spiritual culture of past centuries. How can a "common house" for all of Europe be built, if it is not built with the bricks of men's consciences, baked in the fire of the Gospel, united by the bond of a fraternal social love, the fruit of the love of God? This was the reality for which Saint Adalbert strove, and for this future he gave his life. He reminds us today that a new society cannot be built without a renewed humanity, which is society's firmest foundation.

6. On the threshold of the third millennium the witness of Saint Adalbert is ever present in the Church and constantly bearing fruit. *We need to take up with fresh vigour his work of evangelization.* Let us help those who have forgotten Christ and his teaching to discover him anew. This will happen when ranks of faithful witnesses to the Gospel begin once more to traverse our continent; when works of architecture, literature and art show in a convincing way to the people of our time the One who is "the same yesterday and today and for ever"; when in the Church's celebration of the Liturgy people see how beautiful it is to give glory to God; when they discern in our lives a witness of Christian mercy, heroic love and holiness.

Dear brothers and sisters, *what an extraordinary hour of history we have been granted to live in!* What important tasks Christ has entrusted to us! He is calling each of us to prepare the new springtime of the Church. He wishes the Church — ever the same from the time of the Apostles and of Saint Adalbert — to enter the new millennium full of freshness, overflowing with new life and evangelical zeal. In 1949 the Primate of the Millennium exclaimed: "Here, at the tomb of Saint Adalbert, we will light torches which will proclaim to our land the 'light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people' (Lk 2:32)" (*Pastoral Letter upon entering the See*). Today we raise

this cry anew, imploring the light and fire of the Holy Spirit to kindle our torches and make us heralds of the Gospel to the farthest limits of the earth.

7. Saint Adalbert is always with us. He has remained in Gniezno of the Piast and in the Universal Church, surrounded by the glory of martyrdom. And from the perspective of the Millennium he seems to speak to us today with the words of Saint Paul: *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponent"* (Phil 1:27-28). Yes, in one spirit, striving side by side for the faith.

Today we re-read once more, after a thousand years, this testament of Paul and Adalbert. We ask that their words may be fulfilled in our own generation too. For in Christ we have been granted the grace not only to believe in him but also to suffer for his sake, since we too have sustained the conflict of which Adalbert has left us his witness (cf. Phil 1:29-30).

We entrust ourselves to Saint Adalbert, asking him to intercede for us, as the Church and Europe prepare for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

And we invoke the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and fortitude:

*Veni, Creator Spiritus! Amen.*

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