



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)

CONSECRATION OF THE CHURCH OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Zakopane - 7 June 1997

1. Today on the liturgical memorial of the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we gather in Krzeptówki, in this parish church, in order to bless it, that is, to consecrate it. It is not enough for a church merely to be built; it needs to be dedicated, by a liturgical act, to the Most High. *I give thanks to God for being able to consecrate your church today.* I have been warmly invited to do so, and on several occasions. I thank Divine Providence that I am able to come among you today and accept your invitation. I greet you with a father's love. I greet all who live in Skalne Podhale.

What does it mean to dedicate or consecrate a Church? The best answer to this question is provided by the liturgical readings. The first reading, taken from the book of the Prophet Nehemiah, recalls the well-known event in the Old Testament when the Israelites, after returning from slavery in Babylon, set about rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. First built in the time of the great kings, it had shared in the Chosen People's periods of splendour and decadence; it had witnessed the deportation and enslavement of the sons and daughters of Israel; afterwards it had been destroyed and now needed to be rebuilt. The Chosen People experienced this moment intensely. With cries of lamentation they began the great work. And behold, their sadness was turned into joy (cf. Neh 8:2-11).

Against the background of this description we can understand even better the words of the second reading, taken from the First Letter of Saint Peter, and the words of the Gospel which has just been proclaimed. "On you I will build my Church", Christ says to Peter, when the Apostle

confesses his faith in the Son of God. "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Mt 16:17-18).

The Church is not only a sacred building. The Lord Jesus says that the Church is built on rock, and the rock is the faith of Peter. *The Church is a community of believers who profess their faith in the living God and bear witness - like Peter - to the fact that Christ is the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world.* You, dear brothers and sisters, are a small part of this great community of the Church built on the faith of Peter. Together with your Bishop, together with the Pope, you proclaim and profess faith in the Son of God and on this faith you base your whole personal, family and professional life. In this way you share in the Kingdom of Heaven. For Christ said to Peter: "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mt 16:19).

This shrine of yours, which today is being consecrated to God, must serve the Church - the community, living men and women. This is even more profoundly expressed in the passage from the Letter of Peter which we have heard. In it the Apostle speaks of the Church as a house built of living stones. We ourselves are this house, we ourselves are these living stones which make up the whole spiritual temple. *Its cornerstone is Christ: Christ Crucified and Risen.* He himself became the cornerstone of the Church, as the great community of the People of God in the New Covenant. That community, as the Apostle Peter writes, is a holy priesthood (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). United to Christ, it is "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people whom God has made his own, to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light" (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Your beautiful church, which you have built along with your pastors, is to serve the community of the Church, and therefore needs to be blessed, consecrated, devoted to God himself, as a space in which the People of God gather and pray. Not only God's People in Krzeptówki and Zakopane, but also those who come here from different places in Poland for a restful stay in the mountains. To all the tourists and summer residents I offer good wishes that your closer contact with nature will lead you to an encounter with God in prayer.

2. Looking at your church, so beautifully decorated, *I have before my eyes those wooden churches* - increasingly rare nowadays - which used to rise throughout Poland, but above all in Podhale and Podkarpacie: authentic treasures of popular architecture. All of them, like your own, were built with the cooperation of the pastors and faithful of the individual parishes. They were built by a common effort, so that the Holy Sacrifice could be celebrated there, so that Christ in the Eucharist would be together with his people day and night, at times of great joy and elation, and at times of trial, suffering and humiliation, and even on plain grey days. To the International Eucharistic Congress of Wrocław we need to add this whole great chapter of the sacramental presence of Christ which every church in Poland hides in itself.

Churches are also places where solemn celebrations are held: the Nativity of the Lord, Easter,

Pentecost, Corpus Domini, the Marian feasts. Here the faithful gather for the devotions of May and June, for the rosary. Finally, churches are places where the memory of the dead is preserved. Just as the beginning of the religious life of each believer is linked to the baptismal font, so too its end, death and the funeral, take place in its shadow. Often parish cemeteries are themselves right next to the church. These churches, then, are monuments to the history of the whole nation, of individual communities, parishes, families and individual men and women.

The Church is a place of memory and yet of hope: it faithfully preserves the past while constantly pointing people towards the future, not only the future of time but also that of the afterlife. In churches we profess our belief in the forgiveness of sins, in the resurrection of the body and in life eternal. Here we experience daily the mystery of the communion of saints: indeed, each church has its patron saint, and very many are dedicated to Our Lady. I rejoice that in Zakopane and Podhale new churches have risen, magnificent monuments to the living faith of the people of this area. Their beauty matches the beauty of the Tatra Mountains and is the reflection of the same beauty spoken of in the inscription on the Cross by Wincenty Pol in Kolcieliska Valley: "Nothing is greater than God".

3. Dear brothers and sisters! Your shrine in Krzeptówki is particularly near and dear to me. In it you honour the statue of Our Lady of Fatima. *The history of this shrine is also linked with the event which took place in Saint Peter's Square on 13 May 1981.* At that time I experienced mortal danger and suffering, but also the great mercy of God. By the intercession of Our Lady of Fatima my life was given back to me. During my stay in hospital I was the object of a great outpouring of human kindness from all parts of the world: it was expressed above all in prayer. At that time I had in my mind's eye a picture of the life of the first Christians who "raised prayers to God unceasingly" (cf. Acts 12:5) when the life of Peter was in grave danger.

I know that Zakopane too took part in the prayer of the Church throughout the world for my return to health and to the ministry of Peter. I know that you gathered in your parish churches and in the Chapel of Our Lady of Fatima in Krzeptówki to recite the rosary to obtain for me a recovery of health and strength. At that time plans were first made to build here, at the foot of Mount Giewont, a shrine to Our Lady of Fatima as a votive offering of thanksgiving for my life having been spared. I know that this shrine, which today I am able to consecrate, was built by many hands and many hearts united by hard work, sacrifice and love for the Pope. It is hard for me to speak of this without being moved.

Dear brothers and sisters! *I have come among you to thank you for your goodness, your thoughts and your continuing prayer.* I was your Pastor for twenty years; today I come among you as the Successor of Saint Peter. You have always helped me. You were with me and you understood my concerns. I felt this. It was a great support for me. Today I thank you from my heart for this attitude of faith and devotion to the Church. Here, in this land of Podhale, the Bishop always found support in you. Here too our homeland found support in you, especially in the difficult moments of her

history. I have come to say to you, for all of this, "Bóg zapła!" ("May God reward you!"). Here, together with you, I wish once more to thank Our Lady of Fatima for the gift of my life having been spared, as I did at Fatima fifteen years ago. *Totus tuus...* I thank you all for this church. It is filled with your love for the Church and for the Pope. In some sense it is the continuation of my gratitude to God and to his Mother. Together with you I rejoice greatly in this gift.

With words of profound gratitude I also address all my fellow countrymen and the faithful of the Church, especially the sick and suffering who pray for the Pope and offer their daily crosses for him. Suffering experienced together with Christ is a very great gift and a most effective help in the apostolate. "In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 27).

With gratitude for the gift of prayer and sacrifice, and from my heart, I ask all of you once more, as I did on the day of the inauguration of my pontificate: "Pray for me. Help me to serve you". I too pray for you daily.

4. This shrine in Krzeptówki is linked by close spiritual bonds with Fatima in Portugal. From there too came the statue of Our Lady which you venerate. *The message of Fatima*, which Mary gave to the world through three poor children, *consists in an exhortation to conversion, prayer, especially the rosary, and reparation for one's own sins and for those of all mankind*. This message flows from the Gospel, from the words which Christ spoke at the very beginning of his public ministry: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel!" (Mk 1:15). It aims at man's interior transformation, at the defeat of sin within him and the strengthening of goodness, and at the attainment of holiness. This message is addressed in particular to the people of our century, a century which has been marked by war, hatred, the violation of fundamental human rights, the immense suffering of individuals and nations, and finally by the struggle against God, carried even to the denial of his existence. The message of Fatima is an outpouring of the love of the Heart of the Mother, who is always open to her child, never loses sight of him, thinks of him always, even when he leaves the straight path and becomes a "prodigal son" (cf. Lk 15:11-32).

The Immaculate Heart of Mary, which we commemorate today in the Church's Liturgy, was opened to us on Calvary by the words of the dying Jesus: "Woman, behold your son!". Then he said to the disciple: Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home" (Jn 19:26-27). At the foot of the Cross Mary became the mother of all those redeemed by Christ. Under her maternal protection she took John and she takes every human being. From that time on, the greatest concern of her Immaculate Heart is the eternal salvation of all men and women.

From the beginning your shrine has proclaimed the message of Fatima and draws its life from it. You have a particular devotion to the Immaculate Heart of the Virgin Mary; you make the Family Rosary Crusade; in prayer you embrace the important problems of the Church, the Pope, the world, the homeland, the souls in purgatory and those who have abandoned God's love, breaking the covenant made with him at Holy Baptism. Pray perseveringly for the grace of their conversion. Turn with confidence to Mary, "Refuge of Sinners", that she may defend them from becoming hardened in sin and from the slavery of Satan. Pray with faith, that people may know and acknowledge "the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent" (cf. Jn 17:3). This prayer expresses your love for mankind, a prayer which desires the greatest good for everyone.

"At no time and in no historical period - especially at a moment as critical as our own - can the Church forget the prayer that is a cry for the mercy of God amid the many forms of evil which weigh upon humanity and threaten it" (*Dives in Misericordia*, 15).

Mother, plead for us! Mother, pray for us!
O Mary, Mother of God,
Intercede for us!

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