



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

Address at Arrival Ceremony

Saturday, 5 June 1999, Gdansk

Dear President of the Republic of Poland,

Dear Cardinal Primate,

Dear Metropolitan Archbishop of Gdansk,

1. I give thanks to Divine Providence for being able to come a seventh time, as a pilgrim, among my fellow countrymen and to experience thus the joy of visiting my dear homeland. I heartily embrace each and every one: the entire land of Poland and all who live here. Receive my greeting of love and peace, the greeting of a fellow Pole who comes among you to fulfil the need of his own heart and who brings the blessing of God who "is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

I greet the President and at the same time I thank him for the cordial words he has addressed to me in the name of the State Authorities of the Republic of Poland. I greet the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops. To the Cardinal Primate I offer sincere thanks for his words of welcome. I greet the Church in Poland: the priests, the consecrated men and women, the students of the major seminaries and all the faithful, especially those who are suffering, the sick and those who are alone. I ask you to pray that my service in our homeland will produce the hoped-for spiritual fruits.

2. This pilgrimage to my homeland is as it were an extension of my previous visit in 1997. I begin it on the Baltic Coast, in Gdansk where great works and important events in the history of our Nation have taken place. In fact, it was here in 997 that Saint Adalbert completed his apostolic mission. Two years ago I was privileged to begin the solemn celebration of the millennium of his death by martyrdom. He is the Patron of the Diocese of Gdansk, and for this reason I direct my first steps to this City.

The witness of Adalbert's martyrdom became a seed which produced holiness. For a thousand years the Church has faithfully served this mystery of grace in the land of the Piast and wishes to continue this effective service, in imitation of her one Master and Lord. Therefore she always strives to renew herself, so that in every age her face will show forth the image of Christ, "the supreme witness of patient love and of humble service" (*Tertio Millenio Adveniente*, 35). Such renewal was proposed by the Second Vatican Council, which under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit showed the Church the paths to follow at the end of the second millennium in order to bring to the modern world the eternal mystery of a God who loves. The task of the Second Plenary Synod of the Church in Poland, which began on 8 June 1991 at Warsaw and which will be brought to completion during this pilgrimage, is to make this teaching of the Council ever present, so that the interior renewal of the People of God in Poland — a renewal already under way — will continue and be brought to a fruitful conclusion, contributing to a new springtime of the Spirit in the future towards which we are journeying.

As she looks to the future, the Church confirms at the same time her own identity which has been formed over the course of two millennia by the obedience of her sons and daughters to the Holy Spirit. This identity takes on a particular expression in the lives of saintly witnesses to the mystery of God's love. The beatifications which will take place during this pilgrimage, in Warsaw and in Torun, and the canonization in Sacz, will show forth the grandeur and beauty of holiness of life and the power of God at work in people. Blessed be God who "is love" for all the fruits of this holiness, for all the gifts of the Spirit of this millennium which is drawing to an end.

There is still another reason, a very important one, for this pilgrimage. This year we celebrate the millennium of the establishment by Pope Sylvester II of the independent Metropolitan See of Gniezno, composed of four Dioceses: Gniezno, Kolobrzeg, Wroclaw and Kraków. In a certain sense, this was the first fruit on Polish soil of Saint Adalbert's death by martyrdom. The nation, only recently baptized, began its pilgrimage through history together with its Pastors — the Bishops of the new Dioceses. For the Church in Poland and for the whole nation this was a great event, the memory of which we shall celebrate in Kraków.

3. I am pleased that this pilgrimage to my homeland begins in Gdansk, a city which has a place for ever in the history of Poland, of Europe, and perhaps even of the whole world. In fact, it was here that the voice of consciences was heard in a particular way, calling for respect for human dignity, especially of workers, a voice calling for freedom, justice and solidarity between people. This cry of consciences roused from slumber rang out with such force as to make room for the yearned-for freedom, a freedom which has become and continues to be for us a great task and a challenge for today and the future. It was precisely in Gdansk that a new Poland was born, which gives us so much and of which we are so proud. I notice with joy that our country has made great progress on the path of economic development. Thanks to the efforts of all its citizens Poland can look to the future with hope. In the last few years our country has earned particular recognition and the respect of the other nations of the world. For all of this, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ! I pray unceasingly that Poland's material development will increase at an equal rate with its spiritual development.

4. I come among you on the eve of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. I come as a pilgrim to the sons and daughters of my homeland with words of faith, hope and love. At the end of this millennium and at the same time on the threshold of the new times to come, I wish to meditate together with my fellow countrymen on the great mystery of God's love, and to praise God who "is love". In fact, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn* 3:16). Together with you I bow before this ineffable mystery of divine love and divine mercy.

I earnestly desire that through my pastoral ministry, during the present pilgrimage, the divine message of love will reach every family, every home, and all my fellow countrymen who live in Poland or outside its borders, wherever they may be.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" (*2 Cor* 13:14) during these days of pilgrimage and always!