



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
IN POLAND

ADDRESS BY THE HOLY FATHER

WELCOME CEREMONY

Warsaw Airport, Okęcie, 25 May 2006

*Mr President,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
My Brother Cardinals and Bishops,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,*

I am happy to stand in your midst today on the soil of the Republic of Poland. I have very much wanted to make this visit to the native land and people of my beloved Predecessor, the Servant of God John Paul II. I have come to follow in the footsteps of his life, from his boyhood until his departure for the memorable conclave of 1978. Along this journey I would like to meet and come to know the generations of believers who offered him to the service of God and the Church, as well as those who were born and matured for the Lord under his pastoral guidance as priest, Bishop and Pope. Our journey together will be inspired by the motto: "Stand firm in your faith". I mention this from the outset, in order to stress that this is no mere sentimental journey, although it is certainly that too, but rather a journey of faith, a part of the mission entrusted to me by the Lord in the person of the Apostle Peter, who was called to confirm his brothers and sisters in the faith (cf. *Lk 22:32*). I too wish to draw from the abundant fountain of your faith, which has flowed continuously for over a millennium.

I greet His Excellency the President, and I thank him heartily for his words of welcome on behalf of the Authorities of the Republic and the Nation. I greet my Brother Cardinals, Archbishops and

Bishops. I also greet His Excellency the Prime Minister and the members of the Government, the representatives of the Diet and the Senate, the members of the Diplomatic Corps with their Dean, the Apostolic Nuncio in Poland. I am pleased that the Regional Authorities are present, along with the Mayor of Warsaw. I also wish to greet the representatives of the Orthodox Church, the Augsburg Evangelical Church and the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. My greeting likewise goes to the members of the Jewish community and the followers of Islam. Lastly I offer a heartfelt greeting to the whole Church in Poland: to the priests, the consecrated persons, the seminarians and all the faithful, especially the sick, the young and the little children. I ask you to accompany me in your thoughts and prayers, so that this journey will prove fruitful for all of us, leading us to a deeper and stronger faith.

I said that in this visit to Poland my route would be inspired by the life and pastoral ministry of Karol Wojtyła and by his own itinerary as a pilgrim Pope in this, his native land. Consequently, I have chosen to stay mainly in two cities dear to John Paul II: Warsaw, the capital of Poland, and Kraków, his archiepiscopal see. In Warsaw I shall meet the priests, the different non-Catholic Churches and Ecclesial Communities, and the State Authorities. I trust that these meetings will bear abundant fruit for our shared faith in Christ and for the social and political life of today's men and women. A brief visit to Częstochowa is planned, as well as a meeting with representatives of men and women religious, seminarians and members of ecclesial movements. The loving gaze of Mary will accompany us as we join in seeking a deep and faithful relationship with Christ her Son. Then I shall travel to Kraków, and from there to Wadowice, Kalwaria, Łagiewniki and Wawel Cathedral. I am very much aware that these are the places that John Paul II most loved, for they were associated with his growth in faith and his pastoral ministry. There will also be a meeting with the sick and the suffering in what is perhaps the most fitting place for such an event - the Shrine of Divine Mercy in Łagiewniki. I shall certainly be present when the young people assemble for the prayer vigil. I shall gladly join them and I look forward to rejoicing in their witness of a young and lively faith. On Sunday we will gather at Błonie Park to celebrate a Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving for the Pontificate of my Predecessor and for the faith in which he always confirmed us by his words and by the example of his life. Finally, I shall go to Auschwitz. There I hope especially to meet the survivors of the Nazi terror who come from different countries, all of whom suffered under that tragic tyranny. Together we will pray that the wounds of the past century will heal, thanks to the remedy that God in his goodness has prescribed for us by calling us to forgive one another, and which he offers to us in the mystery of his mercy.

"Stand firm in your faith" - this is the motto of my Apostolic Visit. I would hope that these days will serve to strengthen all of us in faith - the members of the Church in Poland and myself as well. And for those who do not have the gift of faith, but whose hearts are full of good will, may my visit be a time of fraternity, goodness and hope. May these enduring values of humanity lay a firm foundation for building a better world, one in which everyone can enjoy material prosperity and spiritual joy. This is my prayer for all the Polish people. Once again I thank His Excellency the President and the Bishops of Poland for their invitation. I cordially embrace Polish people

everywhere and I ask them to accompany me in prayer along this journey of faith.

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