



The Holy See

SOLEMN CONCELEBRATION WITH THE POLISH BISHOPS IN HONOR OF SAINT STANISLAUS

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

20 May 1979

1. The joy of the paschal period in today's liturgy dictates to the Church words of deep gratitude. Here they are: "The love of God was made manifest among us" (1 Jn 4:9); it was manifested in this way, that "God sent his only Son into the world" (1 Jn 4:9). He sent him "so that we might live through him" (1 Jn 4:9). He sent him "to be the expiation for our sins" (1 Jn 4:10).

This sacrifice offered on Calvary on Good Friday was accepted. And lo, Easter Sunday brought us certainty of Life. He who broke the seals of the tomb, manifested victory over death, and thereby revealed the Life that we have "through him" (1 Jn 4:9).

All men are called to this Life: "God shows no partiality" (Acts 10:34; cf. Gal 2:6). And the Holy Spirit, as St Peter testifies in today's liturgy, "fell on all who heard the word" (Acts 10:44).

The work of salvation carried out by Christ has no limit in space and in time. It embraces one and all. Christ died on the cross for everyone and he won for everyone this divine life, the power of which was manifested in his Resurrection.

With this great and universal paschal joy of the Church I wish to associate particularly, today, the joy of my fellow-countrymen, the joy of the *Church in Poland*, expressed by the presence of so many pilgrims from all over the world, with the illustrious and beloved Primate of Poland, Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński, with the Archbishops and Metropolitans of Krakow and of Wroclaw, and with so many representatives of the Polish Episcopate. Celebrating this Holy Sacrifice, we wish to express to God, who is "Love", our gratitude for the millennium of faith and permanence of the union with the Church of Christ; for the millennium of the presence of Poland, always faithful, at

this spiritual centre of catholicity and universality which is St Peter's tomb in Rome as also this splendid Basilica built on it.

2. This reason for our special joy is, this year, the jubilee of St Stanislaus, Bishop of Krakow, and Martyr. Nine hundred years have passed since this Bishop was martyred at the hands of King Boleslaus. He exposed himself to death by reprimanding the king and asking him to change his attitude. The royal sword did not spare the Bishop; it reached him during the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice and immediately deprived him of life. The *precious relic* of the Bishop's skull, on which the signs of the mortal blows are still visible, has remained a witness to this moment. This relic, preserved in a valuable reliquary, has for many centuries been carried in the month of May from Wawel cathedral to St Michael's Church at Skalka (Rupella) when the solemnities of St Stanislaus are celebrated in Poland. Throughout the centuries, *there took part* in this procession *the Polish kings*, successors of that Boleslaus who had inflicted death on the Bishop and who, according to tradition, ended his life as a converted penitent.

The liturgical hymn in honour of St Stanislaus was sung as the solemn hymn of the nation which took the martyr as its own patron saint. Here are the first words of this hymn:

"Gaude mater Polonia / Prole fecunda nobili / Summi Regis magnalia / Laude frequenta vigili."

3. Today I, the first Pope in the history of the Church of the race of Poles and Slav Peoples, celebrate with gratitude the memory of St Stanislaus, since up to a few months ago I was his successor in the episcopal see at Krakow. And together with my fellow-countrymen gathered here, I express deep gratitude to all those who take part in this solemnity here. In two weeks I shall have the fortune to go on a pilgrimage to Poland, to thank God there for the millennium of faith and of the Church which is founded on St Stanislaus as on a cornerstone. And even if this event is, above all, the jubilee of the Church in Poland, we express it also in the dimension of the universal Church; because the Church is a large family of peoples and nations, all of which have contributed, at the right moment, to make it a community by means of their own testimony and their own gift, and have thus highlighted their participation in universal unity. Such a gift was, nine hundred years ago, the sacrifice of St Stanislaus.

The Holy Father then delivered section 4 in Polish:

4. *Beloved Fellow-Countrymen!*

We cannot present the great mystery of St Stanislaus after 900 years, other than by going back to the Paschal Mystery of Christ. This is what the Polish Hierarchy did in their pastoral letter to prepare all Poles at home and abroad for the celebration of his feast this year.

Here is an extract from the letter:

"Dwelling prayerfully on his martyrdom, we have still in mind the recent Lenten memories of the Passion of our Saviour Jesus Christ: 'he who wishes to be my disciple, let him take up his cross... and follow me'. If, beginning from Christ's death and resurrection, the Lord's disciples will shed their blood down the ages as a witness of faith and love, this will always happen with him and in him. He will draw them to his pierced Heart, and thus they will be united in the death of Christ.

"The cross in the life of St Stanislaus and his death as a martyr were essentially very close to the Cross and Death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. They had a similar significance. Christ defended the truth of his Father, the Eternal God; he defended the truth of himself as the Son of God. He defended man who, indeed, lives under the temporal power, but lives in an incomparable manner under the divine power.

"Let the fruit of this holy jubilee be our fidelity to the Blood which Christ shed on Calvary for man's salvation, for the salvation of each one of us; fidelity to Christ's Mother of Sorrows; fidelity to the sacrificial martyrdom of St Stanislaus."

I read these words with great joy. They give us the best understanding of what is proclaimed in the liturgy of St Stanislaus: *vivit Victor sub gladio!* In fact, the weighty sword fell on the head of the Bishop of Krakow, Stanislaus of Szczepanowa in 1079 and terminated his life. Beneath that sword the bishop was conquered. Boleslaus had removed his adversary. The great drama had concluded within the short frontiers of time. However, even though the power of the sword had achieved its end at the moment of the sacrifice of death, yet the power of the Spirit, which is Life and Love, began to reveal itself and to grow at the same time. It irradiated from his relics, embracing the peoples of the lands of the Piasts and uniting them. Even though the sword and its material power can kill and destroy, yet only love and the spiritual power can revivify and unite in a lasting way. Love is revealed even in death—"when a man lays down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).

We rejoice that today we can praise God for the revelation of his love in the death of the Servant of the Eucharist and the Servant of the People of God in the see of Krakow, St Stanislaus.

5. The Church in Poland is grateful to Peter's See, because in 966, by means of Baptism, it accepted the nation into the great community of the family of Peoples.

The Church in Poland is grateful to St Peter's See, because the Bishop and Martyr St Stanislaus of Szczepanow was raised to the altars and proclaimed Patron Saint of the Poles.

The Church in Poland, by means of the memory of its Patron Saint, confesses the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of Love, which is stronger than death.

And with this confession it wishes to serve the men of our time. It wishes to serve the Church in

her universal mission in the modern world. It wishes to contribute to the strengthening of faith, hope, and charity not only in its people, but also in the other nations and peoples of Europe and of the whole world.

Let us pray with the deepest humility at St Peter's tomb that this witness and this readiness to serve *may be accepted* by means of the Church of God, which is "all over the earth". Let us pray with humility, love, and with the deepest veneration that they may be accepted by Almighty God, the Searcher of our hearts and Father of the time to come.

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