



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Poznan — 3 June 1997

Dear Young Friends!

1. "This is the day which the Lord has given us. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!"

Everywhere on my pilgrimage this year in my homeland I am met with expressions of great warmth and joy. That is how it was at Wrocław, at Legnica, at Gorzów, at Gniezno, and that is how it is here too, at Poznan.

I thank you with all my heart for this meeting and for coming in such great numbers, even though this is time of exams and final marks. I greet each of you, one by one, and through you I wish to greet all the young people of Poland, and also your parents, teachers, chaplains and professors, and the whole university world. I extend words of cordial greeting to the Archbishop of the Church in Poznan, to his Auxiliary Bishops and to the People of God of this beloved Archdiocese. I greet also Archbishop Jerzy Stroba, who for many long years exercised his pastoral ministry in this Archdiocese. I thank him for all that he has done for the universal Church and especially for the Church in Poland.

"This is the day which the Lord has given us . . ."

2. The passage from Matthew's Gospel which we have just read takes us to the Lake of Gennesaret. The Apostles had got into the boat to go before Jesus to the other side. And it came to pass that as they rowed in the chosen direction they saw Jesus walking on the lake. Christ was

walking on the water as though it were solid ground. The Apostles were afraid, thinking it was a ghost. Jesus, hearing their cry, spoke: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt 14:27). And then Peter said: "Lord if it is you, bid me come to you on the water". And Jesus answered, "Come!" (Mt 14:28-29). So Peter stepped out of the boat and began to walk on the water. He was just about to come to Christ when there was a strong gust of wind and he became afraid. As he began to sink he called out: "Lord, save me!" (Mt 14:30). The Jesus reached out his hand, caught him and kept him from sinking and said: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt 14:31).

This Gospel event is full of profound meaning. It concerns the most important problem of human life, faith in Jesus Christ. Peter certainly had faith, as he later magnificently showed in the region near Caesarea Philippi, but at that moment his faith was not yet solid. When the wind began to blow more strongly Peter began to sink, because he had doubted. It was not the wind that made Peter sink into the lake but the insufficiency of his faith. Peter's faith had lacked one essential element — complete abandonment to Christ, total trust in him at the moment of great trial; he lacked unreserved hope in him. Faith and hope, together with love, constitute the foundation of the Christian life, the cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' death on the Cross and in his Resurrection from the tomb God's love for man and for the world was fully revealed. Jesus is the only way to the Father, the only way that leads to truth and life (cf. Jn 14:6). This message which the Church ever since the beginning has proclaimed to all men and all nations was proclaimed anew to our generation by the Second Vatican Council. Allow me to quote a brief passage from the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*: "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under heaven been given to man by which it is fitting for him to be saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history. The Church also maintains that beneath all changes there are many realities which do not change and which have their ultimate foundation in Christ, who is the same yesterday and today, yes and for ever" (No. 10).

Dear young people, follow Christ with the enthusiasm of your youthful hearts. He alone can calm man's fear. Look to Jesus from the depths of your hearts and minds! He is your inseparable friend.

This message about Christ, to which I devoted my first Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, I announce to the young people of every continent during my pastoral visits and on the occasion of the World Youth Days. It is also the theme of the August meeting that the youth will have with the Pope in Paris: I cordially invite you to this meeting. As Christians you are called to bear witness to faith and hope, so that people — as Saint Paul writes — "will not be without hope and without God in this world" but will "learn to know Christ" (cf. Eph 2:12; 4:20).

Faith in Christ and the hope which he teaches enables man to conquer himself, to conquer

everything in him that is weak and sinful; and at the same time this faith and hope lead him to victory over evil and the effects of sin in the world around him. Christ freed Peter from the fear which had seized him on the stormy lake. Christ enables us too to overcome the difficult moments in life, if with faith and hope we turn to him and ask his help. "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt 14:27). Strong faith, from which is born limitless hope, a virtue so needed today, frees man from fear and gives him the spiritual strength to resist all life's storms. Do not be afraid of Christ! Trust him completely! He alone "has words of eternal life". Christ never lets us down!

Here in this place, in Adam Mickiewicz Square, there once stood a monument to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the visible sign of the victory won by the Polish people thanks to their faith and hope in Christ. The monument was erected in 1932 with contributions from the whole of society as a testimony of gratitude for freedom regained. A Poland reborn gathered round the Heart of Jesus, to draw from this Fount of generous love the strength to build the country's future on the foundation of God's truth, in unity and harmony. After the outbreak of the Second World War that monument became such a dangerous symbol of the Christian and Polish spirit that it was destroyed by the invaders at the beginning of the Occupation.

3. Dear young people! How many times have the faith and hope of the Polish people been put to the test, a very difficult test, in this century which is about to end! We only need recall the First World War and, connected with it, the determination of all those who undertook the decisive struggle to regain independence. We only need recall the period of twenty years between the two wars, when everything had to be rebuilt. Then there came the Second World War and the terrible Occupation following the pact between Hitler's Germany and Soviet Russia, which decided upon the removal of Poland, as a State, from the map of Europe. What a radical challenge that period was for all Poles! Truly, the Second World War generation was in a certain sense immolated on the great altar of the struggle to maintain and ensure the freedom of the homeland. How many human lives it cost, young and promising lives! What a high price the Poles paid, first on the fronts in September 1939 and then on all the fronts where the Allies were fighting against the invaders.

At the end of the War there came a long period, of almost fifty years, of a new danger, this time not warlike but peaceful. The victory of the Red Army brought Poland not only freedom from Hitler's occupation but also a new oppression. If during the Occupation men died at the front, in the concentration camps, in clandestine political and military resistance, the last cry of which was the Warsaw Uprising, the first years of the new regime were a constant series of mistreatment of numberless Poles. The new power-holders did everything to subjugate the Nation, to make it submit to them politically and ideologically.

The following years, beginning with October 1956, were not as bloody; but that battle against the Nation and against the Church lasted until the 1980. It was the consequence of the challenge to the faith and hope of the Poles, who continued to spare no effort to avoid surrendering, to defend those religious and national values exposed to a particular danger.

My dear friends, this had to be said here, in this place. It was necessary to say it once again to you, the young people who will take on responsibility for the future of Poland in the Third Millennium. Awareness of our past helps us to take our place in the long line of generations, so that we can pass on to generations to come the common good, our homeland.

It would be difficult not to mention here still another monument, the Monument to the Victims of June 1956. It was erected in this Square by the people of Poznan and Wielkopolska on the 25th anniversary of the tragic events in which the great popular protest against the inhuman system of the oppression of human hearts and minds was expressed. I wanted to come to this Monument in 1983 when I made my first visit to your city as Pope, but on that occasion I was denied permission to pray beneath the Crosses of Poznan. I am pleased that today, together with you — the young Poland — I am able to kneel before this Monument and pay homage to the workers who gave their lives in defence of truth, justice and the independence of our homeland.

4. We look once more to the Lake of Gennesaret on which Peter's boat is sailing. The lake evokes the image of the world, also the modern world in which we are living and in which the Church is carrying out her mission. This world is a challenge for man, just as the lake was a challenge for Peter. For him it was so close and familiar, as the place of his daily work as a fisherman, and on the other hand it was the element of nature which he had to face with his own strength and experience.

Man has to enter this world, in a certain sense immerse himself in it, for he has received from God the command to "subdue the earth" by work, study, creative effort (cf. Gen 1:28). On the other hand, man cannot shut himself up exclusively within the limits of the material world, neglecting the Creator. For this is against man's nature, against his inner truth, since the human heart, as Saint Augustine says, is restless until it rests in God (cf. *Confessions*, I,1,1). The human person, created in the image and likeness of God, cannot become a slave to things, to economic systems, to technological civilization, to consumerism, to easy success. Man cannot become the slave of his inclinations and passions, sometimes deliberately aroused. We must defend ourselves against this danger. We need to know how to use our freedom, choosing what is the true good. Do not let people make you slaves! Do not let people tempt you with false values, half-truths, the fascination of illusions, which you will later leave behind with disappointment, hurt and perhaps with your life ruined.

In the address which I once gave to UNESCO, I said that the first and essential task of culture is to educate man. And that education "consists in fact in enabling man to become more man, to 'be' more and not just to 'have' more and consequently, through everything he 'has', everything he 'possesses', to 'be' man more fully. For this purpose man must be able to 'be more' not only 'with others', but also 'for others'" (*Address to UNESCO*, Paris, 2 June 1980, No.11; in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition, 23 June 1980, p. 10).

This truth has a fundamental significance for self-education, self-realization, for developing in oneself the humanity and the divine life given in Baptism and strengthened in the Sacrament of Confirmation. Self-education aims precisely at "being" more human and more Christian, at discovering and developing in oneself the talents received from the Creator and realizing the vocation to holiness.

Sometimes the world can be something threatening, it is true; but someone who lives by faith and hope has in himself the power of the Spirit to face the dangers of this world. Peter walked on the waves of the lake, even though it was against the laws of gravity, because he was looking Jesus in the eye. When he doubted, when he lost personal contact with the Master, he began to sink and was rebuked: "O man of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Mt 14:31).

From the example of Peter we learn how important in the spiritual life is the personal bond with Christ: it has to be constantly renewed and deepened. How? Above all by prayer. My dear friends, pray and learn to pray, read and meditate on the Word of God, strengthen the bond with Christ in the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, study the problems of the interior life and of the apostolate in youth groups, Church movements and organizations, which are numerous in our country.

5. Dear young friends! We are celebrating the Jubilee of the millennium of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert. Today at Gniezno, at the Solemn Eucharist, I said that Saint Adalbert bore witness to Christ, suffering martyrdom for the faith. This martyrdom of the great Apostle of the Slavs challenges you: today too it calls for the witness of the life of each one of you. It calls for new men and women who will make manifest in the midst of this world the "power and the wisdom" (cf. 1 Cor 1:22-25) of the Gospel of God in their own lives. This world, which sometimes seems like an untameable element, like a stormy sea, at the same time has a profound thirst for Christ, such a thirst for the Good News. It has such need of love.

Be in this world bearers of Christian faith and hope by living love every day. Be faithful witnesses of the Risen Christ, never turn back before the obstacles that present themselves on the paths of your lives. I am counting on you. On your youthful energy and your dedication to Christ. I have known Polish youth. They have never disappointed me. The world needs you. The Church needs you. The future of Poland depends on you. Build and strengthen on Polish soil the "civilization of love": in personal, social and political life, in the schools, universities, parishes and families that one day you will form. For this purpose spare none of your youthful enthusiasm, energy and sacrifice. "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom 15:13).

I entrust to the protection of Mary, the Faithful Virgin, the Mother of Fairest Love, the Queen of Poland, each of you and all the youth of our homeland.

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