



The Holy See

HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER FOR POLISH NATIONAL JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE

Thursday, 6 July 2000

1. "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you!" (*Ps 66 [67]: 4*). This cry resounds from here, from the open door of the Great Jubilee year. Not only do individuals respond to it, but also entire peoples and nations.

National pilgrimages are coming from various parts of Europe and the world to glorify and honour God here in the heart of the Church. Today the pilgrimage from Poland is a guest in Rome.

I cordially greet you all. I greet the Cardinal Primate, the Cardinals from Kraków and Wrocław, the Archbishops, Bishops, priests, women religious and faithful of the many parishes and communities. I greet the representatives of the State and territorial authorities, led by the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament and the President of the Senate. May all the pilgrims present here receive an abundance of Jubilee graces! May they also be received by your families and loved ones at home and throughout the world.

2. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (*Heb 13: 8*). We want to bind our future to him. He alone is the Door and only he has the words of eternal life. This is the most profound meaning of the Great Jubilee: it is a time for returning to the roots of faith and at the same time for entering the future through the Door that is Christ. For in him, the incarnate Son of God, is fulfilled the eternal mystery of God's choice of man - the mystery which the Apostle Paul unveils before our eyes today when he writes: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (*Eph 1: 3-4*). Following the Apostle's thought, we know what God's eternal plan is for man, whom he made in his own image and likeness. By creating him as such, from the very beginning God conformed man to his Son and joined him to him. If in this Jubilee Year we are recalling in a special way the birth of the Son of God 2,000 years ago, the greatest event in human history, we find ourselves on the threshold of the mystery which involves each and every one: the Son of God became man so that in him and through him we might become the adopted children of God. For when "the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (*Gal 4: 4-5*). These are St Paul's

words in the Letter to the Galatians. If today we are making our pilgrimage to the Holy Door of the Great Jubilee, we are doing so first of all to thank God for the great grace of being his adopted children, which became man's lot through the birth of Christ.

As St Paul writes, we have received this grace from God in order to be "holy and blameless before him" (*Eph* 1: 4) and to "live for the praise of his glory" (*Eph* 1: 12). It is impossible to attain holiness, it is impossible to live for God's glory except through Christ, with Christ and in Christ. In him "we have redemption through his Blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace" (*Eph* 1: 7). Therefore in this Jubilee Year the Church leads us in a special way on the path of penance and reconciliation, so that we may approach Christ with trust and draw from the inexhaustible springs of his mercy. "He forgives all our iniquity, heals all our diseases, redeems our life from the pit and crowns us with steadfast love and mercy" (cf. *Ps* 102 [103]: 3-4). If today the Church appeals to and recommends the ancient practice of the indulgence, she does so precisely because the Jubilee period offers men and women a particularly favourable opportunity to open their hearts to the action of this grace which flows from the pierced Heart of the Redeemer.

St Paul writes: Christ "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the raise of his glory" (*Eph* 1: 14). Therefore, how could we not avail ourselves of the grace of this time, which brings us closer to Christ and enables us to share more fully in the inheritance which God has prepared for us in his glory!

3. Once in Nazareth Christ said of himself, as we heard in today's Gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.... Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (*Lk* 4: 18-19, 21). This "today" has continued without interruption since the day that the Son of God came to earth. After his Death and Resurrection, this "today" continues in the Church, where Christ is present until the end of the world. This "today" is fulfilled in each of us, who have been joined to Christ through Baptism.

In the Great Jubilee year we must be particularly mindful of this truth. We should remember that this "today" of Christ must continue in future centuries until his second coming. This awareness must determine the programme of the Church's life and of each of our lives in the new millennium.

In recent years this evangelical programme has been a reference-point for the individual Dioceses in their local pastoral synods and for the whole Church in Poland in the Plenary Synod, in an effort to identify the challenges that the present and the future pose to believers and the way to confront them. Asking for the light of the Holy Spirit, pastors and faithful examined the phenomena occurring in the present-day Church in Poland, attempted to discern the tasks facing our generation in view of the new millennium and marked out the paths on which the Church must enter the new century. All this was written down as a programme of evangelization for the third millennium. In a particular way the open door of the Great Jubilee reminds all of us and the whole Church in Poland that this programme cannot remain a dead letter but must be accepted by everyone and carried out with dedication and perseverance.

It concerns many areas of Church life. But today, listening to the Gospel which we have just heard, I would like to point to

the two dimensions of the pastoral activity of the clergy and the apostolate of the laity in our country. Here is what Christ says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (*Lk 4: 18*). Thus the first task for which he was sent was to proclaim the Gospel. It was also the first task of the Apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk 16: 15*). This call is always timely and impelling. It concerns all the faithful - clergy and laity.

We are all called to bear witness in everyday life to the Gospel of salvation. As we enter the new millennium, we must answer this call with total fervour. May parents be Gospel witnesses to children and young people! May young people bring the Good News to their peers, who often lose the meaning of life from being misled by whatever the world offers. Pastors should not forget that a missionary spirit, concern for each person who is seeking Christ and for those who turn away from him, is essential to their pastoral mission.

In the same spirit I ask all the faithful of Poland to pray for the intentions of missionaries and for missionary vocations. I do so all the more gladly because today is the liturgical memorial of Bl. Maria Teresa Ledóchowska, known as the "Mother of Africans", patroness of the Church's Missionary Cooperation in Poland and foundress of the Sisters of St Peter Claver. This year we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of her beatification. The Church in Poland has great spiritual riches and possibilities. It is necessary to draw from this treasure to offer effective help to her Sister Churches in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. I pray God to inspire the hearts of many priests and religious in our country with the spirit of this particular apostolate. The universal Church needs servants of the Gospel from Poland.

When we hear Christ's words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (cf. *Lk 4: 18-19*), we realize that the Jubilee, as a time when we have a special experience of God's mercy, turns us to those who need our mercy. The Church's "today", lived as a "today" in which Christ's messianic mission is fulfilled, must be lived as the "today" of the poor, the oppressed, the lonely, the sick - of all those particularly chosen by Christ as the ones to whom he would "proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". May this "acceptable year of the Lord" be proclaimed to them through works of active love, through the effort to create a culture of solidarity and collaboration. May the spectre of the loss of work, of a roof over one's head, of health or of the possibility of education not cast its shadow over the joy of experiencing the Jubilee Year, which opens the prospect of a new millennium. It is necessary that everyone responsible for the form of social life in our country should make every effort to see that just economic reforms are introduced for the benefit of all, especially the poorest. I ask this particularly of all those who base their plan of action on Christian values.

The duty to meet the needs of the unfortunate, however, is not only the responsibility of politicians, businessmen or charitable organizations, but also of all who can in any way alleviate the poverty of others. The Jubilee Year is a particular occasion for all the members of the Church community - clergy and laity - to undertake works of mercy for their brethren. In preparing pastoral programmes in the country, diocese or parish, we must constantly return to the idea of the preferential option for the poor and needy. Thinking of large families, the elderly, the sick and the lonely, I ask you, dear brothers and sisters, and all the faithful in Poland, together with St Paul: "Your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who

gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor 8: 14-15).

4. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever" (*Heb* 13: 8). This truth speaks to us with particular force, as we stand on the threshold of the door of the Great Jubilee, in order to enter the new millennium with the faith, hope and charity we have received together with the grace of holy Baptism. "To pass through that door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us" (*Incarnationis mysterium*, n. 8). He alone is the Door to the life of communion with God: "This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it" (*Pss* 117 [118]: 20).

May this Polish national pilgrimage for the Great Jubilee bring us all closer to Christ the Redeemer.

To Christ, who is the source of life and hope for the third millennium now beginning. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever".

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