



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE LITHUANIANS WHO HAD COME TO ROME
TO COMMEMORATE THE FIVE-HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DEATH OF SAINT CASIMIR**

Monday, 5 March 1984

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am very pleased to greet you today, Lithuanians from around the world who have come to Rome to commemorate the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of the death of Saint Casimir, the Patron of Lithuania. Although you presently reside in countries outside Lithuania, you are united by a common ancestral heritage. And you stand in loyal solidarity with your brothers and sisters in your land of origin who are unable to be here with us. Many of them will be celebrating today, together with the bishops, in the City of Vilnius, where for centuries the remains of Saint Casimir have been venerated. In spirit and in prayer let us join with them, imploring Saint Casimir's special intercession for the Lithuanian people and nation.

Many Lithuanians, from the nineteenth century onwards, and in particular after the last World War, have had to leave their homeland for various reasons. As they emigrated to new lands, they carried with them their spiritual and cultural treasures, especially their veneration of Saint Casimir. Many are the religious and social foundations established under his name. Many are the churches which, with great effort and sacrifice, have been built and dedicated to this noble saint. Associations for Lithuanian young people, such as the Knights of Lithuania and the Lithuanian Boy Scouts, have chosen Saint Casimir as their patron. The Church has been blessed with the foundation of the Sisters of Saint Casimir, and provinces of the Marian Fathers and the Franciscan Friars have placed themselves under his special protection. Here in Rome there exists the Pontifical Lithuanian College, which under the title of Saint Casimir prepares young men of Lithuanian origin to serve the Church as priests. It is clear therefore that Saint Casimir has become a strong link between those still living in your homeland and Lithuanians throughout the

world.

Centuries ago, the Church proclaimed Casimir a saint and placed him before us not only to be venerated but also that we might imitate his heroic virtues and follow his example of holiness. His witness of great faith and fervent piety continues to have special meaning for us today. To the young he offers a challenging call.

His life of purity and prayer beckons you to practise your faith with courage and zeal, to reject the deceptive attractions of modern permissive society, and to live your convictions with fearless confidence and joy. His life also shows us the importance of the Christian family. For Casimir was one of twelve children, and from his earliest years he learned that each child is a unique gift from God and that a home built on the love of God is truly a pearl of great price.

Men and women religious can find in Saint Casimir an inspiration for their consecrated lives, as they recall how he embraced a life of celibacy, submitted himself humbly to God's will in all things, devoted himself with tender love to the Blessed Virgin Mary and developed a fervent practice of adoring Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. To all he was a shining example of poverty and of sacrificial love for the poor and needy.

Dear Lithuanian sons and daughters, as we celebrate the Five-Hundredth Anniversary of Saint Casimir's death, I make this special appeal to you: remain one in solidarity with the Church in your land of origin. Your brothers and sisters still living there eagerly look to you in their sorrows and joys, in the daily difficulties of life. They appreciate your support. They count on your prayers. Be firm in preaching the gift of the Christian faith which you have received, remembering how your ancestors preserved and defended it even to the shedding of their blood. And come to the aid of those living in Lithuania by making fervent petitions to God and commending them to the care of Saint Casimir. Above all, lift them up in prayer to our Lord and Redeemer, the source of all courage and hope.

I also urge you to preserve with care the many religious and cultural traditions which you have inherited. The very soul of Lithuania is reflected in your culture, and that culture has served greatly, in the course of history, to pass on the values of the Gospel from one generation to the next. Remain faithful then to your religious and cultural heritage. Be rightly proud of it. Make it the foundation of the education of your youth, as you seek to make them loyal sons and daughters of the Church. And I ask you to join me in praying for an increase in religious vocations. May the Lord call many of your young people to a life of joyful service in the priesthood or religious life.

This Fifth Centenary of the death of Saint Casimir happily occurs during the Holy Year of the Redemption, a time of grace for all in the Church, an event which calls us all to conversion and spiritual renewal. May you be inspired by Saint Casimir to receive in abundance the special graces of the Jubilee. May his example motivate you to an ever greater pursuit of holiness and an ever

deeper love of Christ our Redeemer.

To all of you here present today and to your families and relatives at home, and to all those striving to live the Christian faith in Lithuania, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.

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