



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997) **ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II**

Wrocław - 31 May 1997

*Your Excellency the President of the Republic of Poland,
Your Eminence the Cardinal Metropolitan of Wrocław!*

1. I offer cordial thanks for the words of welcome spoken by His Excellency the President in the name of the State Authorities of the Republic of Poland. I express my gratitude also to the Metropolitan of Wrocław for greeting me in the name of this Archdiocese and of the whole Church in Poland. With all my heart I reciprocate the sentiments expressed.

And so, once more *I am here among you as a pilgrim*, dear Brothers and Sisters, sons and daughters of our common homeland. This is the sixth journey of the Polish Pope to his native country. But each time I am invariably filled once more with profound emotion. *Every return to Poland is like a return to the family home*, where the smallest objects remind us of what is closest and dearest to our hearts. How then can I fail *at this moment to thank Divine Providence* for having enabled me once more to accept the invitation of the Church in Poland and the State Authorities to come back to my homeland? I accepted this invitation with joy and today I wish once more to express my heartfelt thanks for it.

At this time *I embrace in my thoughts and in my heart my whole Country and all my fellow countrymen, with no exception*. I greet you all, dear brothers and sisters. I greet the Church in Poland, its Pastors, its priests, its families of men and women Religious and all believers, so deeply attached to the Catholic faith. I offer a special greeting to the young people of Poland, for they are the future of this land. I greet in particular those suffering from illness, loneliness and old age, or from poverty and need. I greet our brothers and sisters from the Orthodox Church of Poland and from the Communities of the Reformation, and also our elder brethren in the faith of Abraham, and those who profess Islam in this land. I greet all people of good will who are

sincerely seeking truth and goodness. *I do not want to omit anyone*, for I bear you all in my heart and I remember you all in my prayers.

2. *I greet you, Poland, my homeland!* Although I happen to live a long way away, still I do not cease to feel a son of this land, and nothing which concerns it is alien to me. Citizens of Poland, *I rejoice with you at your achievements and I share in your concerns!* There is certainly reason for optimism - for example - in the process, not an easy one, of "learning how to be a democracy" and the gradual consolidation of the structures of a democratic and constitutional state. To this must be added numerous achievements in the area of the economy and social reform, recognized by prestigious international bodies. But *there are also problems* and tensions, sometimes quite painful ones, which need to be resolved by a common and fraternal effort on the part of all, *with respect for the rights of each human being*, especially the most defenceless and weak. I am convinced that *Poles are a nation endowed with an enormous potential of talent and spirit, intelligence and will*; a nation capable of much, and one which can play an important role in the family of European countries. And precisely this is what I wish with all my heart for my homeland.

I come to you, dear fellow-countrymen, as *one who seeks to serve* - to render an apostolic service to each and every one. The service of the Successor of Saint Peter is the ministry of faith, in accordance with Christ's words: "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren" (Lk 22:32). This is the mission of Peter and this is the mission of the Church. *With her eyes fixed on the example of her Master, she desires only to serve humanity by proclaiming the Gospel.* "Man, in the full truth of his existence, of his personal being and also of his community and social being — in the sphere of his own family, in the sphere of society and very diverse contexts, in the sphere of his own nation or people..., and in the sphere of the whole of mankind — this man is the primary route that the Church must travel in fulfilling her mission: *he is the primary and fundamental way for the Church*, the way traced out by Christ himself, the way that leads invariably through the mystery of the Incarnation and the Redemption" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 14).

3. I come to you, dear fellow-countrymen, *in the name of Jesus Christ - of him who is "the same yesterday and today and for ever"* (Heb 13:8). This is the motto of my present visit. Along the itinerary of this apostolic pilgrimage I desire, together with you, *to profess faith in Him who is "the centre of the universe and of history"*, and especially the centre of the history of this Nation, baptized over a thousand years ago. We need to renew this profession of faith, together with the whole Church, which is spiritually preparing for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

The route of this pilgrimage is a significant one, and its principal stages are determined by three cities: Wroclaw, Gniezno and Krakow. First of all, Wroclaw, the site of *the 46th International Eucharistic Congress*. "Make a place for him, the Lord is coming from heaven...". I am convinced that this Eucharistic Congress will contribute effectively to enlarging the place in life given to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, Christ Crucified and Risen, Christ the Redeemer of the world, in the life

of this Church in Wrocław, in the life of the Church in Poland and in the whole world. This means making accessible all the treasures of faith and culture which unite us to the Eucharist. This means creating a spiritual space, a space in human thoughts and in the human heart, a space of faith, hope and love, and a space of conversion, purification and holiness. All this comes to mind when we sing: "*Make room for him...*".

The second stop is *the ancient city of Gniezno*. My visit takes place in the year when the Church in Poland is celebrating *the millennium of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert*. Our Czech neighbours, together with the Hungarians, Slovaks and Germans, are joining us in celebrating this event. In the context of this pilgrimage I would like to give thanks with you, dear brothers and sisters, for the gift of faith, consolidated in our history by the blood of the martyr Adalbert. This anniversary also has a clear *European dimension*. We are reminded of this by the historic Meeting of Gniezno in the year 1000, which took place at the relics of the Martyr. The figure of Saint Adalbert has left a profound mark on the spiritual history not only of Poland but also of Europe, and its message continues to be timely even today.

The final stop is *Krakow*, for *the 600th anniversary of the Jagiellonian foundation of the University* in Krakow and in particular of its Faculty of Theology, thanks to the efforts of Blessed Queen Hedwig. Here too we are speaking of an event decisive for the spirit of the Polish nation and of Polish culture.

Around these three principal stops the whole programme of this very vast and significant journey has been structured. *It comes together and finds its unity in the figure of Jesus Christ*, who is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8) — the figure of Christ who *so wondrously reveals his power in the lives of the saints and the beati* whom the Church has raised to the glory of the altars. This is the message of the canonizations and beatifications of great Polish men and women which I will celebrate in the course of my apostolic visit. We desire to confess together our faith in Christ and we wish to invite him anew into our families and into all the places where we happen to live and work — we want once more *to invite him into our common house called Poland*.

In conclusion, I thank you once again for welcoming me back so warmly to my homeland. I greet all present; I greet all who have come to take part in the International Eucharistic Congress; and I greet all my fellow-countrymen. From my heart, I bless you all.