



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

Holy Father's visit to the Church of the Basilian Fathers

Friday, 11 June 1999, Warsaw

Praised be Jesus Christ!

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. To all here present I offer a cordial greeting. In a special way I greet Archbishop Jan, Metropolitan of Przemysl-Warsaw, as well as the Superior General of the Basilian Order of Saint Josaphat, the Protoarchimandrite Dionysius, together with the Provincial Superiors of Poland, Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania and Hungary. I express my joy at the elevation to the Episcopate of your Provincial, Father Vladimir, appointed to the See of Wroclaw-Gdansk. I greet him cordially, as well as the priests, the Women Religious, the Brothers and lay faithful of the Greek Catholic Church, all of whom are dear to me.

I am pleased to visit this Basilian church for the second time. I first came here as Pope in 1979, but those times were different and the meeting could not be announced beforehand. During that visit I wanted to express my immense gratitude not only to the Order of Basilian Fathers but to all the Greek Catholic Church, forced at that time into silence.

The large presence today of the hierarchy, clergy and representatives of religious communities and the lay faithful bears witness that you, once more, are able to profess your faith freely and give praise to the one Triune God. Together with you I thank Divine Providence for this meeting and exclaim joyfully with the Psalmist: "In you, O Lord, we seek refuge; let us never be put to shame . . . Be a rock of refuge for us, a strong fortress to save us . . . You have not delivered us into the hand of the enemy . . . How abundant is your goodness" (cf. *Ps* 31:1,2,8,19).

2. The Christian life is a continuous struggle for the coming of God's Kingdom, which entered human history and was definitively accomplished by Christ. But that Kingdom is not of this world; it

belongs to the Father and only the Father can make it present among men and women. To them is given the task of being fertile ground in which the Kingdom can develop and grow. Sometimes it is necessary to make great sacrifices and suffer persecution in order that this may happen. Down the centuries, your Church was subjected many times to such trials of fidelity, especially during the rule of the Tsars and under the atheist Communist regime.

I give thanks to God for the raising to the glory of the altars of these brothers of yours who bore the supreme witness at Pratulín. Today we are all gathered together before their remains and their icon, and we contemplate their shining example of simple, sincere and limitless faith. With great veneration we also remember the large numbers of our contemporary “martyrs and confessors of the faith of the Church in Ukraine . . . They knew the truth, and the truth set them free. Christians in Europe and throughout the world, pausing in prayer before the concentration camps and prisons, should be grateful for the light which they gave: it was the light of Christ, which they caused to shine in the darkness. For long years the darkness seemed in the eyes of the world to prevail, but it was not able to extinguish that light, which was the light of God and the light of man, wounded but not laid low” (Apostolic Letter for the Fourth Centenary of the Union of Brest, 4).

Encouraged by the example of these intrepid witnesses to the faith, you can and must courageously accept the great challenges which are placed before you. Today as never before, the nations need the light of the Gospel and the strength that comes from it, in order to bring about the Kingdom of God in the world and in people’s hearts. Our brothers and sisters who for long years were deprived of it need this light.

3. I address a special word to you, Fathers and Brothers of the Basilian Order of Saint Josaphat. In my Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* I wrote: “Monasticism has always been the very soul of the Eastern Churches” (No. 9). These same words can also refer to the Basilian Community, which throughout the course of its history has always been a small but dynamic part of the Greek Catholic Church.

Saint Basil the Great, one of the most eminent Fathers of the Eastern Church, showed to all those who wished to give themselves completely to God the way of monastic life, “where the precept of concretely lived charity becomes the ideal of human coexistence, where the human being seeks God without limitation or impediment” (cf. *Orientalis Lumen*, 9). Saint Basil is for you a model of perfect service of God and the Church. His whole life consisted in the harmonious exercise of the virtue of faith and in acts of practical love in the spirit of the evangelical counsels. Down the centuries the teaching of Saint Basil has borne mature fruits of religious life, especially in the East.

A song which you know well says: “*Rejoice, O Basil, holy hierarch, Patriarch of Caesarea, today we wish to honour you*”. Rejoice at the sight of the multitudes of disciples drawn for centuries by the example of your holy life and by your teachings on asceticism, left to us as a perpetual patrimony for all of Christianity. Rejoice in your many spiritual sons who by holiness of life became

witnesses to God's transforming grace, and who with great depth and insight knew and preached the life-giving and marvellous mysteries of the Father. They confirmed their fidelity to the Church in the course of the ages, courageously enduring persecutions, suffering and even death. Among these there were also Bishops, Priests and Brothers of your Order.

4. Dear Fathers and Brothers!

On the threshold of the third Christian millennium, Divine Providence is calling you to carry out important tasks. As persons consecrated to God, you must be the salt of the earth, a particular sign and model of fidelity to the Christian vocation on the path of the evangelical counsels: poverty, chastity and obedience. Men and women today have great need of models to imitate, especially in countries where the Church has been subjected to severe persecutions and suffered painful humiliation.

You are called to prayer. May it mark each part of every day of your lives. I am thinking first of all of the Eucharistic Liturgy, of prayer in choir, of private prayer with meditation on Sacred Scripture, of time spent reading the writings of the Eastern Fathers of the Church, especially the works of Saint Basil the Great. You need prayer because, thanks to it, you are sanctified and inwardly perfected. The world needs your prayer, especially those who are searching for meaning in life or for inner healing.

To you belongs the serious duty of faithfully observing your liturgical traditions. In the East, it was above all the monasteries that were the places where the liturgy was celebrated in all its beauty and majesty. This ancient tradition should be faithfully observed by you and handed on to the future generations of religious. This is "an integral part of the heritage of Christ's Church, [and] the first need for Catholics is to be familiar with that tradition, so as to be nourished by it and to encourage the process of unity in the best way possible for each" (*Oriente Lumen*, 1).

I would also like to draw your attention to the important problem of Church unity. The Basilian Order is very distinguished in this sphere. Your predecessors felt a deep responsibility for this unity, for which Christ so fervently prayed at the Last Supper: "Even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (cf. *Jn* 17:21). An eminent figure was Saint Josaphat Kuncewicz, Bishop and Martyr, who gave his life for the great cause of Church unity.

Efforts in favour of unity need prayer, which transforms our lives with light and truth and makes us icons of Christ. Therefore, one of the greatest tasks of all religious communities is sincere and unceasing prayer. Christians who yearn for unity must first of all turn their eyes heavenwards and implore God to enkindle ever anew the desire for unity, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Unity can be achieved only with the assistance of divine grace.

Throughout history you have demonstrated a profound commitment to the works of the apostolate, always showing a readiness to serve the Church. Today, especially in the East, including Ukraine, there is a great need for evangelization. The Church looks to you with hope and trust, and she counts on your cooperation. For this help to produce the hoped-for fruits, theological instruction and adequate spiritual formation are necessary. Only then will you be able to serve humanity well, showing by your lives the love of God that was made manifest in Jesus Christ.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters! Zealously guard your tradition as a unique spiritual patrimony. This is the strength of your lives and your work. Remember the great witness of fidelity to Christ, to the Church and to the Successor of Saint Peter borne by you confreres. They preferred to lose their lives rather than be separated from the Apostolic See. Their sufferings and martyrdom are an inexhaustible source of grace for your Church now and for the future. You must preserve in your hearts this great patrimony of faith, prayer and witness, in order to hand it on to the coming generations.

Responsibility for the Church falls not only to the Pope, Bishops, priests and Men and Women Religious. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, for which we are all — without exception — responsible.

Present in this house of worship are the representatives of your Church: clergy, consecrated men and women, lay faithful from Poland and other countries. Together we form a community united in Christ.

I pray to God that the Greek Catholic Church will flourish with authentic Christian life and will carry the Good News to all our brothers and sisters in Ukraine and in the diaspora, so that, in a spirit of responsibility, she will preserve the unity of the whole Church and actively support her through ecumenical commitment.

I entrust you to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church.

*Mother of God, venerated by the cherubim
and renowned much more than the seraphim.
Look kindly upon this Eastern Catholic Church.
Assist your children, heirs of the Baptism of Saint Vladimir,
that they may be able to profess faith in your Son courageously
and, filled with love, become witnesses
to the ineffable love of the one Triune God
before all who seek this love.
Strengthen their hope
on the road to the Father's house.*

With my Apostolic Blessing.

Praised be Jesus Christ!

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