



The Holy See

***SPEECH OF THE HOLY FATHER
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE POLISH NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE***

6 July 2000

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I thank God and his Mother for this touching meeting at which we have continued our prayer together. I am delighted to be able to take part in this national Jubilee pilgrimage with you, my compatriots from Poland and the whole world. I greet all of you here and those who stayed behind in our homeland and are joining us in spirit or by radio and television. I offer a word of particular closeness to the sick and suffering. I wish to send everyone my cordial greeting.

This prayer meeting was preceded by a rich artistic programme. I thank the choirs, the artistic and musical groups and their directors, and also the individual artists and the organizers. God reward you for this Jubilee gift.

2. I am pleased that Poles have come to Rome in such large numbers during the Jubilee Year. I can still see the thousands of Poles who took part in the opening of the Holy Year, in the celebrations of the Easter Triduum and the canonization of Sr Faustina. Since the beginning of the year the sick, then workers, journalists, men and women of learning, etc. have come here. Polish priests have also come to observe their Jubilee with the Pope and priests from around the world.

All these pilgrims bring with them the still fresh memory of the Polish Millennium - the millennium of our nation's baptism. This Polish Millennium was associated with the figure of the great Primate, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, who led the Church and the nation across the threshold of their second millennium. It was also associated with the pilgrimage to the image of Jasna Góra. Finally it was associated with the great event of the Second Vatican Council. Since that Polish Millennium we have been strengthened in our awareness of being God's People, who from generation to generation are on pilgrimage through this world to their Father's house. Today we bring this awareness to the door of the Great Jubilee, through which the peoples and nations of the whole world have passed in pilgrimage.

History has been marked by the faith of the Polish people. Mindful of our Polish experiences of the Millennium, we

especially feel that our presence here is the fruit of the great pilgrimage of history begun by our nation when Prince Mieszko received Baptism and confessed his faith in Christ. We want this nation to take part today in our visit to the apostolic thresholds of the Great Jubilee, and all our millenary history and culture to be present with it, beginning with Adalbert's hymn "Mother of God". We wish to invite here all the Piasts who sat on the Polish throne from Mieszko to Casimir the Great. We want the Lady of Wawel, Queen Hedwig, to be here with all that she did for our nation and for Polish culture. May she be joined by the Jagiellonian era, the time of the Three-Nation Commonwealth, the period of our country's greatest historical splendour. We wish to summon here all those whose bodies lie in the crypt of Wawel - bishops, kings, commanders and poets - all those who marked the course of our noble and difficult history, characterized by victories and defeats, up to the greatest downfall of the three partitions and then the 19th-century uprisings and the heroic regaining of independence in this century.

All these forebears of our history are present here today and they testify that successive generations of the Church's sons and daughters in Poland have left on history a lasting mark of their faith, their love of God and man, and their concern to respect timeless values. May there always be this witness to the efforts of generation to generation to shape the Christian face not just of our nation but of all Europe. We accept their witness not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify the Lord, and then consciously to take this legacy and transmit it to future generations. May all that Poland represents pass with us here through the door of the third millennium, which opens to the future.

3. In this Great Jubilee year you have come on pilgrimage to Rome to the tombs of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, in order to renew and enrich your faith with the faith of the Apostles, through the experience of a shared journey, the offering of the difficulties endured and sincere prayer. As I wrote in the Bull *Incararnationis mysterium*: "Pilgrimages have always been a significant part of the life of the faithful.... A pilgrimage evokes the believer's personal journey in the footsteps of the Redeemer: it is an exercise of practical asceticism, of repentance for human weakness, of constant vigilance over one's own frailty, of interior preparation for a change of heart. Through vigils, fasting and prayer, the pilgrim progresses along the path of Christian perfection, striving to attain, with the support of God's grace, "the state of the perfect man to the measure of the full maturity of Christ' (Eph 4: 13)" (n. 7).

Prayer is an effective aid for enriching our faith and making it fruitful, a faith that possesses the power and capacity for the continual improvement of our personal, family and social lives. Therefore, your pilgrimage began this morning with the solemn Eucharist that I celebrated with the Bishops and priests, and now the day is being completed in a certain sense this evening with our shared prayer in St Peter's Square. Today the world, including our homeland, needs many men women of mature faith who courageously confess Christ in every place and situation. There is a need for true heralds of the Gospel and messengers of the truth. We need men and women who believe and love, and who express this love of God in an authentic service to man. The greatest wealth that we can pass on to the younger generation on the threshold of the third millennium is our faith. Blessed is the nation that walks in the light of the Gospel, that lives on divine truth and that draws knowledge from the Cross. I say these words to you here in Rome, in the Eternal City, where the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul lived, worked and died. Faith filled their lives till the end. Because of their faith Peter did not fear the cross nor Paul the sword. They became powerful witnesses to Christ and their testimony lasts for all time and bears fruit. "Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith" (1 Jn 5: 4). May these words from the First Letter of St John accompany you as you pass through the Holy Doors of St

Peter's Basilica and the other patriarchal basilicas. Let us say our Creed today on the tombs of the martyrs of the faith and let us forcefully confess that "Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (*Phil* 2: 11).

4. "Standing by the cross of Jesus was his mother" (cf. *Jn* 19: 25). These are the words of John's Gospel which we heard during this evening's liturgy. At the cross of the dying Jesus his Mother is there. His beloved Mother, faithful to him until the end. Her presence, her "standing" at the cross, shows her strength and extraordinary courage at this decisive moment. As the drama of Redemption unfolds on Calvary, faith is Mary's support. The Second Vatican Council says that "the Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith, and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son to the cross" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 58). For us, for all mankind, Mary will always be the perfect model of that faith which knows no fear or compromise, which inwardly compels us to persevere until the end, to the cross.

Let us pray to the Virgin Mother of God, Queen of Poland and Our Lady of Jasna Góra, to obtain a rich and mature faith for us from her Son, so that we may spread it and bear witness to it: a living faith expressed in our lives and shaping our everyday activities; a creative faith capable of transforming us and the world in which we live. May he complete it with love and make it sensitive to the signs of the times and the needs of our neighbour.

For the third millennium opening before us, let us implore the Mother of God's Son and our Mother to grant us the grace of fidelity to God, to the Cross, to the Gospel and to the Church. Let us place our trust in her protection, so that we may preserve the treasure of our holy faith without blemish forever.

Mary, you have long been the Queen of Poland!

Say a word on our behalf!

Protect the whole nation, which lives for your glory, that it may grow in splendour, Mary!

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