



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC VOYAGE TO POLAND

WELCOME CEREMONY

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Kraków – Balice Airport

Friday, 16 August 2002

*Mr President,
Your Eminence the Cardinal Primate,
Your Eminence the Cardinal Metropolitan of Kraków,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. Once again I greet Poland and all my countrymen. I do so with the very same sentiments of emotion and joy that I feel every time I return to my homeland. I am most grateful to His Excellency the President for the words of welcome he has spoken in his own name and on behalf of the civil authorities of the Republic. I am grateful to Cardinal Franciszek for the words of kindness addressed to me on behalf of the City of Kraków, so dear to me, as well as on behalf of the Polish Episcopate and the whole People of God in our country.

This time I shall stay only in Kraków, but with affection I embrace the whole of Poland and all its people. I greet His Eminence the Primate, the Cardinals, my Brother Bishops, the priests, the representatives of the men and women Religious, the seminarians and all the lay faithful. I extend a word of greeting also to the State and local authorities; to the members of the Diplomatic Corps, with their Dean, the Apostolic Nuncio; to the civil authorities of the city of Kraków, of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and of Wadowice.

In a special way I wish to greet my own city of Kraków and the whole Archdiocese. I greet the scientific and cultural communities, the universities, and all who by their intense work in industry,

agriculture and other sectors of public activity help to build the spiritual and material splendour of the city and the region.

I cordially greet young people and embrace the children. I thank the youth for the example of faith that they gave just recently in Toronto, Canada, at the unforgettable [Seventeenth World Youth Day](#). In a special way I salute all who bear the weight of suffering: the sick, people who are alone, the elderly, those who live in poverty and need. In these days I will continue to commend to God's Mercy your sufferings, and I ask you to pray that my apostolic ministry will be fruitful and meet every expectation.

I express my respect and recognition to our Brother Bishops and faithful of the Orthodox Church, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and to the Christians of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. I greet the Jewish community, the followers of Islam and all people of good will.

2. Brothers and Sisters! "God, rich in mercy". This is the motto of this pilgrimage. This is its proclamation. It comes from the Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, but its source is here, in Kraków, at Łagiewniki. Because from here, thanks to the humble efforts of an unusual witness, – Saint [Sister Faustina](#) – the Gospel message of God's merciful love rings out. That is why the first stage of my pilgrimage and its chief purpose is my visit to the Shrine of Divine Mercy. I am happy to be able to dedicate the new building, which is becoming a world centre of devotion to the merciful Christ.

The Mercy of God is reflected in human mercy. For centuries, Kraków has found glory in great figures who, trusting in God's love, bore witness to mercy through practical deeds of love of neighbour. It is enough to mention Saint Hedwig, Saint John of Kęty, Father Piotr Skarga or Saint Brother Albert. Today they will be joined by the Servants of God whom – with God's help – I shall have the joy of raising to the glory of the altars at Holy Mass in Błonie Park. The beatification of [Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński](#), [Jan Beyzym](#), [Sancja Szymkowiak](#) and [Jan Balicki](#) are the second reason for my pilgrimage. Already I hope that these new Beati, who have given an example of the practice of mercy, will remind us of the great gift of God's love and predispose us for the daily practice of love of our neighbour.

There is also a third reason for my pilgrimage which I wish to mention. It is the prayer of thanksgiving for the four hundred years of the Shrine of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, which I have been associated with from childhood. It was there, praying as I walked along its paths, that I sought inspiration for my service of the Church in Kraków and in Poland, there that I made various difficult pastoral decisions. It was precisely there, among the faithful people at prayer, that I came to know the faith that guides me also on the Chair of Peter. Through the intercession of Our Lady of Kalwaria I want to thank God for this gift.

3. My pilgrimage and meditation on the mystery of Divine Mercy cannot proceed without some

reference to the daily experience of those living in Poland. Therefore I wish to be very close to your concerns and to commend them to God, trusting that he will bless your efforts with success, and that with his help difficulties and problems will find a solution.

Events in Poland are very close to my heart. I am aware how much our homeland has changed since my first visit in 1979. This is a new pilgrimage, during which I can see for myself how Poles are managing their regained freedom. I am convinced that our Country is bravely marching towards new goals of development in peace and prosperity.

I am happy that many of my fellow countrymen, following the social teaching of the Church, are involved in building the common house of the nation on the foundations of justice, love and peace. I know that many observe and measure with a critical eye the system that seeks to govern the contemporary world with a materialistic view of man. The Church has always reminded society that a positive future cannot be built on the impoverishment of man, on injustice, on the suffering of our brothers and sisters. Those who work within the spirit of Catholic social ethics cannot remain indifferent to the fate of those who are without work, live in a state of increasing poverty, with no prospect of improvement for themselves or for their children's future.

I know that many Polish families, especially the largest ones, and many unemployed and elderly people are carrying the weight of social and economic change. I wish to tell all of them that I spiritually share their burden and their fate. I share their joys and their sufferings, their plans and their efforts directed towards a better future. Every day I support them in their good intentions through fervent prayer.

To them and to all my fellow countrymen I bring today the message of hope that springs from the Good News: God, rich in mercy, daily reveals his love in Christ. It is he, the Risen Christ, who says to each and every one of you: "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore" (Rev 1:17-18). This is the message of Divine Mercy that I bring today to the nation and to my countrymen: "Fear not!" Trust in God who is rich in mercy. Christ is with you, the unfailing Giver of hope.

I beg your pardon. The President is standing, the Cardinal is standing, but I am seated. I beg your pardon for this, but I have to admit that they have created a barrier for me here that does not allow me to stand.

Dear Brothers and Sisters! May these three days of my stay in my homeland lead to a rebirth in us of a deep faith in the power of God's mercy. May they unite us ever more closely in love; may they encourage responsibility for the life of every man and woman, and for their daily circumstances. May they dispose us to goodness, to mutual understanding, that in the spirit of mercy we may grow closer to one another. May the grace of hope fill your hearts!

Again I cordially greet everyone present, and I warmly bless all who share in our common pilgrimage.

God bless you.