



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BERNARDINE FRANCISCANS
ON THE 550th YEARS OF PRESENCE IN POLAND**

Tuesday, 11 February 2003

Venerable Fathers,

Dear Brothers,

My cordial welcome to you. You have come to Rome, on your way visiting the tombs of St Francis and St Bernardine of Siena, to thank God here, at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, for the 550 years of the presence of the Friars Minor (Bernardines) in Poland. I willingly join you in your thanksgiving, for I know how much good it has brought and how deeply engraved it is in our local spirituality and culture.

This Jubilee is connected with the foundation of the friary in Kraków. The friary, and the basilica in Bernardynska Street are close to my heart. When I was young, I used to go there often, and later, as a priest, and also when I was Bishop of Kraków. I had many meetings with your community; one in particular stands out in my mind, the meeting and scientific symposium organized during the Jubilee of St Francis in April 1976. I remember that I said, introducing the Symposium: "We must pray intensely to obtain a Francis in our own times. Perhaps not one, but many! We live in an age in which the Second Vatican Council has revealed to us the dimension of the people of God. So perhaps today, in our democratic times, it is necessary that Francis should become the portrait of us all and of the whole Church in Poland".

It would seem that these words have lost none of their timeliness. Indeed, one might well have the impression that humanity and the world at the beginning of the third millennium more than ever stand in need of the spirit of St Francis. Contemporary men and women need the faith, hope and charity of Francis; they need the joy that flows from his poverty of spirit, that is, from inner freedom; they desire to learn again the love for all God has created; lastly, they need peace and

good to reign in families, societies and among nations: Poland needs it, Ukraine needs it, the whole world needs it.

Therefore while your community - celebrating the Jubilee - looks back at the past and gives thanks to God for all the good it has received throughout its history, it is also and especially called to turn its eyes to the future. You are called to ask God to make you ever more perfect witnesses of the spirit of Francis. I pray with you to obtain this; and since it is the Year of the Holy Rosary, I do so through the intercession of Mary, invoking the man who was extraordinarily devoted to her, your founder and patron, St Bernardine of Siena.

I also thank God for the 10 years of your Custody of St Michael the Archangel in Ukraine. It is not an important Jubilee yet it is an invitation to give thanks for every good which has come to the beloved people of God in Ukraine, thanks to your persevering and deeply dedicated ministry.

Once again I thank you for the welcome I was given at the Shrine of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska by the Province of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I hope that your community will grow in numbers and in grace, and that the intercession and example of your holy patrons, Francis and Bernardine, will sustain you on the path of holiness.

God bless you!