



The Holy See

VISIT TO THE ROMAN PARISH OF OUR LADY OF CZESTOCHOWA *HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II* 25 February 1979

1. I express my special joy at today's visit to this Roman parish of the suburb La Rustica, dedicated to Our Lady of Czestochowa. Coming here, I begin the canonical visitation which will then be completed by Bishop Giulio Salimei, who is particularly in charge of pastoral care for the East Sector of Rome. My joy is made even greater by the memory, so much alive in my mind and my heart, of the day on which I came here together with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński and other Polish Bishops who were taking part in the last sessions of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. At the same time the jubilee of the first millennium of the Baptism of Poland was approaching, and Pope Paul VI decided to highlight, also in Rome, that great event in the history of the people and Church in Poland. Just for this reason, he gave instructions that a Church dedicated to Our Lady of Czestochowa should be constructed on the territory of the parish, which had been planned in those months to meet the spiritual and pastoral requirements of this area, which at that time was cut off from the city and really corresponded to the name "Rustic". I remember that when we came to this place for the first time, during the Council, there were still spacious fields here, and the houses stood out against the horizon. But work on the parish church started at once; soon suspended, it was not resumed until 1969. Finally, in the October of 1971 the new church was consecrated by Cardinal Wyszyński, also with my participation. Beloved Brothers and Sisters, in today's reading St Paul addresses the Corinthians, calling them a "letter written on our hearts, to be known and read by all men" (2 Cor 3:2). Referring to these words I wish to say that also your parish and the church are such a letter written deeply on the heart of the late Pope Paul VI and of the whole Polish Episcopate. It was born from this extraordinary inscription "on hearts" and from great faith. Therefore my emotion is particularly deep, coming here for the first time as Successor of Paul VI and, at the same time, as a witness of the origins of your dear parish.

2. St Paul, addressing the faithful of Corinth, writes that they are "a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:3). Long beforehand, the Lord God had given the commandments to Moses on tablets of stone on Mount Sinai. But he had given them in order that they might be written continually on the tablets of flesh of your hearts, that is, on human hearts. For this reason God did not stop at revelation of his commandments to the People of God, but sent his Son to bear witness to his love for us. And it is just this love that the Son, Jesus Christ, writes on our hearts. He writes with the eloquence of his life, his Gospel, his mercy for sinners, his kindness to children and to suffering men. Jesus Christ writes on our hearts with the

power of the Holy Spirit, which he obtained for us on the cross, in order that we men may be sensitive and open to the action of the living God. Even if man were far from God, like that unfaithful bride of whom the prophet Hosea speaks today, God would not stop looking for him with his love. Jesus Christ looks for every lost sheep in order to show it the way and restore life to it. The words of the responsorial Psalm of today bear witness to this magnificently: "He forgives all your iniquity, he heals all your diseases, he redeems your life from the Pit, he crowns you with steadfast love and mercy..." The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love... He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities."3. The Church bears witness to the love that God has for every man, and therefore, like Christ the shepherd, goes to meet men wherever they may be. In this way she, too, continually goes to meet all the inhabitants of this district, both those who came first, and those who are now arriving from various parts. I know how most of you toil, workers in neighbouring industries or in building. I am well aware that the parish has been formed gradually, with imported inhabitants, in a district which, even today, unfortunately, does not enjoy all social services. My heartfelt desire is that your civic life will also grow fully and that the requests most in conformity with your human dignity may be carried out. An effort is already being made to do so, even if from a religious point of view, by the persons directly responsible for the parish apostolate: the well-deserving Sylvestrine Benedictine Fathers and all their worthy collaborators in catechesis, in contacts with families, in care of the sick. The preaching of the Gospel has always been accompanied by sound human advancement! In the Gospel of today we listened to two comparisons: "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; if he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wine-skins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but new wine is for fresh skins" (Mk 2:21-22). There is great practical wisdom and great prudence in these two comparisons. The Church is inspired by this principle in her pastoral activity. When a new human environment, a new district, is created, a new parish also comes into being; because one cannot "put new wine into old wineskins"; and "no one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment".4. Today the Bishop of Rome wishes to the Parish of Our Lady of Czestochowa in the suburb La Rustica — a young parish — that a new life in its fullness may develop in it. The men who came here have built houses; families have entered these houses. Pictures have been hung on the walls, perhaps also a favourite religious picture: of Jesus Christ, of his Mother. Human life necessarily needs the human house. The parish too is a family. Its house is this temple: "the dwelling of God with men" (Rev. 21:3). In the central place of this house there is the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa, a sign of the presence of the Mother beside the Son, close to his Tabernacle. Love the house of your family. Love this House, too, in which God dwells with you. May human life, which is developing in so many houses, find its central point here. Meet here in prayer! Meet at the Table of the Divine Word and the Eucharist. Meet before the Mother, whose eyes speak to you of this great love with which the Father loved you in Christ. "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." May the canonical visitation which I have begun today, and which will be carried out afterwards by Bishop Salimei, be of help to you for the unification of your parish and for the consolidation of Christian life in it.

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