



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)

***ADDRESS OF POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO HEADS OF STATE***

Tuesday, 3 June 1997

Your Excellencies,

Your presence here while we are celebrating the millennium of St Adalbert's martyrdom in Gniezno is highly significant. On this exceptional occasion, I respectfully greet and thank you for joining the Church in honouring this great saint at his tomb.

Ten years ago, venerable Cardinal Tomášek presented St Adalbert as "the symbol of Europe's spiritual unity". In fact, his memory is particularly vivid in Central Europe. This shows that many peoples on this continent are aware of being heirs to the evangelizers who vigorously implanted the Christian faith in their lands, and made the particular Christian conception of man penetrate their culture.

Born in Bohemia at a time still close to when Cyril and Methodius had begun to evangelize the Slavs, Adalbert, after the example of those illustrious predecessors, was able to combine the spiritual traditions of East and West. Educated in Magdeburg, priest and then Bishop of Prague, he was also familiar with the Rome of the Popes and Pavia. He was a pilgrim in France; he went to Mainz and became the friend of Emperor Otto III, before undertaking his last mission on the shores of the Baltic. A spiritual and missionary man, after a few years of activity he left his mark on several countries, even to the point of becoming one of the patrons of the Polish nation, which is happy to preserve his relics as one of its most valuable treasures.

Adalbert's lasting influence is largely due to the harmony he achieved between the different cultures he assimilated, to his independence as a man of the Church and to his tireless defence of human dignity, the quality of social life and

service to the poor, or again, to the spiritual depth of his monastic experience. For all these reasons he remains an incomparable source of inspiration today for those who are working to build a new Europe in fidelity to its cultural and religious roots.

Adalbert lived in troubled times; he experienced cruel misfortunes in his family and was hindered in his ministry; he came to suffer martyrdom because he could not give up preaching the message of salvation. During this sorely tried century the peoples of Central Europe have endured terrible trials. At the present time, new ways have been opened. Many Europeans are resolutely engaged in constructive co-operation in order to reinforce peace between them and around them! May they not leave any nation, even the weakest, out of the union they are forming!

Today, political leaders still have immense tasks before them. The strengthening of democratic institutions, the development of the economy and international co-operation do not reach their true goal unless they guarantee sufficient prosperity so that every aspect of the human personality can flourish. The greatness of the role of political leaders is to act always with respect for the dignity of every human being, to create the conditions of a generous solidarity which never marginalizes any citizen, to permit each individual to have access to culture, to recognize and put into practice the loftiest human and spiritual values, to profess and to share one's religious beliefs. By advancing in this direction, the European continent will strengthen its cohesion, will prove faithful to those who have laid the foundations of its culture and will respond to its age-old vocation in the world.

Your Excellencies, may St Adalbert's message be a source of fruitful inspiration for you in facing the magnitude and difficulty of your duties! As I thank you again for coming here today, I offer you my fervent wishes for the accomplishment of your noble tasks, for your persons and for all the peoples you represent. I ask God to grant you all the benefits of his blessing.