



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)
**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT HIS DEPARTURE FROM POLAND**

Krakow Airport - 10 June 1997

1. My pilgrimage to my beloved native land now draws to a close. I return once more in my heart and in my thoughts to its individual stages, to the local Churches and towns which I have been able to visit. I have a vivid picture of the crowds of the faithful at prayer who accompanied me in every place I visited. *At the moment of our farewell, dear fellow-countrymen, I wish to greet all of you once more.* I do not want to overlook anyone! I particularly greet the young people of Poland, who in all the stages of this visit were present in such numbers, especially at Poznan. I greet the families of Poland who have always found in God the power and the strength which unites them. I greet those whom I have been able to meet personally, those who have followed the progress of this visit by radio and television, in a special way the sick and the elderly.

In my heart I once more embrace all of you who work - each in your own way - for the good of our native land, that it may become an ever more comfortable and secure home for all Poles, that it may offer its own creative contribution to the common treasure of the great family of European countries, to which it has belonged for more than a thousand years.

As I followed the route of this pilgrimage from Lower Silesia, through Wielkopolska to Malopolska, all the way to the Tatra Mountains, I have been able to admire once more *the beauty of this land*, especially the beauty of the Polish mountains to which I have been so attached since the days of my youth. *I have seen the changes taking place in my homeland.* I have admired the enterprise of my countrymen, their initiative and their willingness to work for the good of the country. Obviously there are also many problems needing to be solved. I am convinced that Poles will find in themselves *the wisdom and perseverance* necessary for building a just Poland which can

guarantee a worthy life for all its citizens - *a Poland capable of uniting around common goals and the values fundamental for every man and woman.*

2. Above all I thank Divine Providence that I have been enabled once more to serve the Church in Poland, my country, and all my fellow countrymen. I came here in order to serve you, dear fellow-countrymen, in the name of Christ the Redeemer of the world! This is the mission of the Church, and she strives to be faithful to it.

With gratitude to God for the gift of this visit, I must also thank the people who made it possible and because of whom it has been so successful. To *the President of the Republic of Poland* I express once more my thanks for the invitation made to me in the name of the State Authorities, and also for his contribution to the positive outcome of this pilgrimage. Thank you so much for all the manifestations of generous cooperation and readiness to help where help was needed. I also thank the *representatives of the local authorities* who have spared no effort and expense to ensure that the visit could take place in an efficient and dignified way. Here I should name the local authorities of all the cities through which I have passed during this journey: Wrocław , Legnica, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Gniezno, Poznań, Kalisz, Czestochowa, Zakopane, Ludzmiierz, Kraków, Dukla and Krosno. I also thank the radio and television, the journalists and all who helped to provide the public with full and accurate information about the papal pilgrimage to Poland. I offer thanks for every gesture of good will and for your readiness to cooperate. May God reward you for such an hospitable welcome!

3. At this moment I address special words of appreciation *to the whole Church in Poland*, offering my thanks to the Polish Episcopate here present under the leadership of the Cardinal Primate. I thank them once again for inviting me back to my native land, and for all the pastoral and organizational work involved in the preparation and progress of my pilgrimage. Every stage of this visit has been notable for much deep religious seriousness and commitment. Behind all these gatherings of prayer there was a joint pastoral effort by Bishops, priests, men and women Religious and the whole Catholic laity. I congratulate you for your hard work and I express my hope that it will bear lasting fruits in the life of the Church and of Poland.

I think that this visit has in a way been different from my previous ones, but that at the same time *it has confirmed the spiritual continuity of this nation and this Church.* During my visit *the Church in Poland has shown itself once more to be a Church conscious of its own mission, a Church making great efforts to evangelize* in the new conditions in which it happens to be living.

Among these expressions of thanks, a special mention must be made of the *Church in Wrocław* , which was host to the 46th International Eucharistic Congress. To the Pastor of the Archdiocese of Wrocław I offer my heartfelt thanks for the work involved in organizing this Congress, which enabled the Church in Poland to be of service to the universal Church.

4. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever"* (Heb 13:8). These words of the Letter to the Hebrews have been the constant theme of this visit to my homeland. This year the Church as she prepares for the Great Jubilee fixes her eyes with faith on the figure of Christ the Redeemer of Man. At each of the stages of this visit we have sought to interpret together the place which Christ occupies in the life of individuals and in the life of the nation. This was brought home to us by the Eucharistic Congress in Wrocław and the historic gathering in Gniezno, at the tomb of Saint Adalbert, where we celebrated the millennium of his martyrdom. Adalbert has reminded us of *our duty to build a Poland faithful to her roots*. We have also been reminded of this by the Jubilee of the Jagiellonian foundation of the University of Krakow and especially of its Theology Faculty.

Fidelity to roots does not mean a mechanical copying of the patterns of the past. Fidelity to roots is always creative, ready to descend into the depths, open to new challenges, alert to the "signs of the times". It also expresses itself in a concern for the development of our native culture, in which the Christian element has been present since the beginning. Fidelity to roots means above all the ability to create *an organic synthesis* of perennial values, confirmed so often in history, and the challenge of today's world, faith and culture, the Gospel and life. My wish for my countrymen and for Poland is that she will be able in this precise way to be faithful to herself and to the roots from which she has grown. *A Poland faithful to her roots. A Europe faithful to its roots*. In this context historic importance attaches to the fact that the Presidents of the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, Lithuania, Ukraine and Poland have taken part in the celebrations for Saint Adalbert, and for this I am most grateful to them.

During this pilgrimage I have celebrated *the canonization and the beatification of Polish saints and beati*: Queen Saint Hedwig, Saint John of Dukla, Blessed Maria Bernardina Jablonska and Blessed Maria Karłowska. The Church's saints are a particular revelation *of the loftiest horizons of human freedom*. They tell us that the definitive destiny of human freedom is holiness. For this reason the canonizations and beatifications which I have celebrated in the course of this visit are so very eloquent.

5. At the moment of my farewell I have wished to share these thoughts with all of you, dear brothers and sisters. The depth of spiritual meaning contained in this meeting with you, in my meeting with the Church in Poland, obviously overflows the limits of this brief address. As I take my leave of you, I pray that this seed will bear abundant fruit in accordance with the will of the Lord of the harvest. The Lord of the harvest is Christ, and we are all his "unworthy servants" (cf. Lk 17:10).

Moments of farewell are always difficult. I take my leave of you, my beloved countrymen, with a profound awareness that this farewell does not signify a breaking of the bond which unites me with you - which unites me to my beloved native land. As I return to the Vatican, I carry in my heart all of you, your joys and your cares, I carry my whole native land. I would like you to remember that in the *"geography of the Pope's prayer"* for the universal Church and for the whole world *Poland*

occupies a particular place. At the same time, following the example of the Apostle Saint Paul, I ask you to make room for me in your hearts (cf. 2 Cor 6:11-13) and in your prayers, that I may be able to serve the Church of God for as long as Christ requires it of me.

May God reward you for your hospitality!

May he bless my homeland and all my fellow-countrymen!