



The Holy See

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

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

*Airport of Legnica
2 June 1997*

1. "My soul magnifies the Lord" (Lk 1:46). The *Magnificat!* We have heard once again the words of the canticle in today's Gospel. Mary, after the Annunciation, went to visit her cousin Elizabeth. And Elizabeth, hearing Mary's greeting, experienced a special moment of illumination. In the depths of her heart she knew that her young relative was carrying in her womb the Messiah. Greeting Mary she therefore exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!" (Lk 1:42). Then, in response to Elizabeth's greeting, Mary gives praise to God with the words of the *Magnificat*:

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour . . ." (Lk 1:46-47).*

The Church never grows tired of going back to the words of this canticle. In particular she repeats them every day at vespers, giving thanks to God for the same reason that Mary thanked him: for the fact that the Son of God was made man and came to dwell among us. And we today, at this Liturgy of the Holy Mass in Legnica, sing with Mary the *Magnificat* in order to express our gratitude for the unending presence of Christ in the Eucharist. For we have come together in the context of the International Eucharistic Congress at Wrocław . With the words of Mary we give thanks for every good thing in which we share through the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

We raise this song of thanksgiving together with all the generations of believers throughout the world. And it is a particular joy for us that this universal hymn is being heard in Lower Silesia —

here in Legnica. I am pleased that I have been able to come here to meet the Christian community that for five years has been part of the new Diocese of Legnica. I offer words of cordial greeting to your Shepherd, Bishop Tadeusz, to his Auxiliary Bishop, to the priests, to the consecrated persons and to all the faithful of the Diocese. I greet also the pilgrims from Germany and from the Czech Republic, and the Sorbo-Lusatians. I thank them for their presence.

Your diocese is young, but Christianity in these lands has a long and rich tradition. We all know that Legnica is an historic place, the place where a Prince of the Piast Dynasty, Henry II the Pious, son of Saint Hedwig, put up resistance to the invaders from the East — the Tartars — halting their dangerous onslaught westwards. For this reason, although the battle was for the moment lost, many historians see it as one of the most important battles in the history of Europe. It also has exceptional importance from the point of view of faith. It is difficult to identify the main motives which prevailed in Henry's heart — the desire to defend his homeland and its tormented people, or to halt the Muslim army that was threatening Christianity. It seems that both motives were equally present in him. Henry, giving his life for the people entrusted to his rule, gave it at the same time for his faith in Christ. And that is a significant characteristic of his piety, which the generations of that time noted and preserved in the epithet attached to his name.

This historical circumstance linked to the place of our Liturgy today prompts a reflection on the mystery of the Eucharist from a particular perspective, the perspective of social life. In this regard, the Second Vatican Council rightly teaches: "No Christian community can be built up unless it has its basis and centre in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist"; from this, therefore, "all education in the spirit of community must originate" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6).

2. "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor 3:16). These words of Saint Paul were addressed to a specific Christian community — the one at Corinth — but they are valid for every community that develops in any city or village down the centuries. What did the first communities live by? Whence did they receive the Spirit of God? The Acts of the Apostles testify that Christians from the very beginning were assiduous in prayer, in listening to the word of God and in the breaking of the bread, that is, in the Liturgy of the Eucharist (cf. 2:42). Thus they would go back every day to the Upper Room, to the moment when Christ instituted the Eucharist. From then on the Eucharist became the beginning of a new structure.

The Eucharist became the source of a close link between Christ's disciples: it was to build up "communion", the community of his Mystical Body, rooted in love and permeated by love. The visible sign of this love was the daily concern for every person who was in need. The sharing of the Eucharistic Bread constituted for Christians an invitation and a commitment to share also their daily bread with those who were without it. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, there were also those who, having property and goods, "sold [them] and distributed them to all, as any had need" (2:45). This activity of the first ecclesial community in all the dimensions of social life was the continuation of Christ's mission to bring to the world a new justice — the justice of the Kingdom of

God.

3. Brothers and Sisters! Today, as we celebrate the Eucharist, it becomes clear also for us that we are called to live according to this same way of life and by the same Spirit. This is the great task for our generation, for all Christians of our day: to bring the light of Christ into daily life. To bring it into the "modern areopagi", into the vast territories of contemporary civilization and culture, of politics and economics. Faith cannot be lived only in the depths of the human soul. It must find external expression in the life of society. "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also" (1 Jn 4:20-21). This is the great task placed before us, people of faith.

Many times I have dealt with social questions in my talks, and above all in my Encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens*, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Centesimus Annus*. Yet, as long as there is an injustice in the world, no matter how small, we must return to these themes. Otherwise the Church would not be faithful to the mission entrusted to her by Christ — the mission of justice. Times in fact do change, circumstances change, but there are always in our midst those who need the voice of the Church and that of the Pope, to give expression to their anxiety, pain and misery. They must not be disappointed. They must know that the Church was and is with them, that the Pope is with them; that he embraces with his heart and with his prayer all who are affected by suffering. The Pope will speak out — and he cannot fail to speak out — on social problems, because here man is involved, concrete individuals.

I speak about this in Poland too, because I know that my Nation needs this message about justice. Today, in fact, in these times of the building of a democratic State, in these times of dynamic economic development, we see with particular clarity all the shortcomings in the social life of our country. Every day we become aware of how many families are suffering from poverty, especially large families. How many single mothers are struggling to take care of their children! How many old people there are who are abandoned and without means to live! In institutions for orphans and abandoned children there is no lack of those without enough food and clothing. How can we fail to mention the sick who cannot be given proper care because of a lack of resources? On the streets and in the squares the number of homeless people is increasing. We cannot pass over in silence the presence in our midst of all these brothers and sisters who are also members of the Mystical Body of Christ. As we approach the Eucharistic table to be fed with his Body we cannot remain indifferent to those who lack daily bread. We need to talk about them, but we must also meet their needs. This is an obligation that rests especially on those who exercise authority: those who are at the service of the common good have the obligation to establish appropriate laws and to guide the national economy in such a way that these painful phenomena of social life find a proper solution. But it is also a common duty of us all, a duty of love, to provide help according to our abilities to those who expect it. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Our Christian work is needed, our love, so that Christ present in our neighbour will not

suffer want.

In our country much has already been done about this. The Church in Poland too has done and is doing much in this regard. The Church's pastoral activity now includes regular programmes to help the needy, the sick and the homeless, not only in this country but also abroad. Volunteer associations and works of charity are developing. I therefore wish to express my appreciation to all those among the clergy, religious and laity who every day show sensitivity to the needs of others, the ability to share their assets generously and a great commitment to the well-being of others. Your service, often hidden, often passed over in silence by the media, remains a permanent sign of the pastoral credibility of the Church's mission.

Despite these efforts, there still remains a wide field for action. I encourage you, Brothers and Sisters, to become ever more sensitive to every kind of need and to work generously with others to bring hope to those who have none. May the Eucharist be for you an endless source of this sensitivity and of the strength necessary for putting it into action in daily life.

4. I would like to dwell for a moment on the question of human work. At the beginning of my Pontificate I devoted to this problem a whole Encyclical, *Laborem Exercens*. Today, sixteen years after its publication, many problems are still with us. Many of these are even more acute in our country. How can I fail to mention those who, following the reorganization of businesses and agricultural enterprises, have found themselves faced with the tragedy of the loss of their jobs? How many individuals and entire families have fallen into extreme poverty because of this! How many young people no longer see any reason to take up studies or to raise the level of their qualifications, because they are faced with the prospect of lack of employment in their chosen profession! I wrote in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* that unemployment is a sign of social and economic underdevelopment in States (cf. No. 18). Therefore everything possible should be done to prevent this situation. Work, in fact, "is a good thing for man — a good thing for his humanity — because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes 'more a human being'" (*Laborem Exercens*, 9). On the other hand, for Christians who own means of production it is also an obligation springing from faith and love to work for the creation of jobs, and thus contribute to the solution of the problem of unemployment around them. I pray earnestly to God that all who desire to earn an honest living by the work of their own hands will find the right conditions to do so.

Alongside the problem of unemployment there is also the attitude of those who consider the worker as a tool of production, with the result that man is insulted in his personal dignity. In practice, this phenomenon takes the form of exploitation. It is often manifested in conditions of employment in which the worker not only has no guaranteed rights but is subjected to such an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear of the loss of his job that he is in practice deprived of any freedom of decision. This exploitation is also often seen in the fixing of work schedules which

deprive the worker of the right to rest and to provide for the spiritual good of his family. This is often associated with inadequate pay, together with a negligence in the areas of insurance and health assistance. Nor are there lacking cases in which the right to personal dignity is denied, especially with regard to women.

Human labour cannot be treated merely as a resource necessary for production — the so-called "work force". Man cannot be regarded as a tool of production. Man is the creator of work and its craftsman. Everything must be done to ensure that work does not lose its proper dignity. The purpose of work — of all work — is man himself. By means of his work he should be able to perfect and deepen his own personality. It is not right to forget — and I want to emphasize this strongly — that work is "for man" and not man "for work". God places before us great tasks, demanding from us testimony in the social sphere. As Christians, as people who believe, we must sensitize our consciences to every kind of injustice and every form of exploitation, open or disguised.

Here I speak first of all to those brothers in Christ who give work to others. Do not let yourselves be deceived by visions of immediate profit, at the expense of others. Beware of any semblance of exploitation. Otherwise every sharing in the Eucharistic Bread will become for you an accusation. On the other hand, to those who undertake work, any type of work, I say: do it responsibly, honestly and accurately. Take on your duties in a spirit of cooperation with God in the work of the creation of the world. "Subdue the earth" (cf. Gen 1:28). Take on your work with a sense of responsibility for the promotion of the common good, which is to serve not only the present generation but all those who in the future will dwell in this land — our homeland — Poland.

5. "See, I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you this day, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his ordinances, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you" (Dt 30:15-16) — these words from the testament of Moses resound today with great force in our land. "Therefore choose life!" (Dt 30:19), Moses exhorts.

Which road shall we take into the Third Millennium? "I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil", the Prophet says. Brothers and sisters, I beg you: "Therefore choose life"! This choice is made in the heart, in the conscience of every person, but it is not without effect also in the life of a society — of a nation. Therefore, every believer is somehow responsible for the shape taken by life in society. A Christian who lives by faith, who lives by the Eucharist, is called to build his own future and the future of his Nation — a future based on the solid foundations of the Gospel. Have no fear therefore of accepting responsibility for the social life of our homeland. This is the great task placed before man: to go with courage to the world, to lay the foundations for the future; so that it may be a time of respect for man, a time of openness to the Good News! Do it with the unanimity that is born of love of man and love of country.

At the end of this century, what is needed is "a great act and a great work" — thus wrote one day Stanislaw Wyspianski (*Przy wielkim czynie i przy wielkim dziele*) — to fill the civilization in which we live with the spirit of justice and love. There is need of "a great act and a great work", in order that contemporary culture may open itself wide to holiness, that it may cultivate human dignity, teach contact with beauty. Let us build on the Gospel, in order to be able with successive generations of Poles living in a homeland which is free and prosperous to give thanks to God with the Psalmist:

"Every day I will bless you,
and praise your name for ever and ever.
Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised,
and his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall laud your works to another,
and shall declare your mighty acts" (Ps 145:2-4).

6. "My soul magnifies the Lord"! During the International Eucharistic Congress in Lower Silesia, with Mary let us give thanks for the Eucharist — the source of social love. May the crowning of the miraculous picture of Our Lady of Graces at Krzeszów be the expression of this unity.

The Shrine of Krzeszów was founded by Anna, the widow of Henry II the Pious, one year after the battle of Legnica. Already in the thirteenth century legions of pilgrims used to gather before the picture of Our Blessed Mother. And even then the shrine was called *Domus Gratiae Mariae*. Truly it was the House of the Grace generously distributed by the Mother of God, to which many pilgrims came from various countries, especially Bohemians, Germans, Sorbo-Lusatians and Poles. We are happy that today too the Mother of God has brought together numerous pilgrims from these neighbouring countries.

May this sign of the placing of the crowns on the heads of Mary and the Child Jesus be an expression of our gratitude for the divine benefits which have been so copiously received and are always received by those, devoted to Mary, who hasten to the House of Grace at Krzeszów. May it also be a sign of the invitation that we make to Mary and Jesus to reign in our hearts and in the life of our Nation: may we all become temples of God and courageous witnesses of his love for everyone.