



The Holy See

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

Czestochowa, Jasna Góra
4 June 1997

1. *Hail Jesus, Son of Mary!*

The International Eucharistic Congress which has taken place at Wrocław is now having a vast effect throughout Poland. Here at Czestochowa, at Jasna Góra, the Congress is accompanied by this Eucharistic hymn which at the same time is Marian:

*"We greet you, O living Host,
in which is concealed the divinity of Jesus Christ.
Hail Jesus, Son of Mary,
in the Blessed Host you are true God".*

The following verses of this hymn contain a wealth of theology. Let us dwell though on this first verse, which is connected in a special way to the Gospel passage read at today's meeting. We know this passage well, it is one of the texts most often used in the liturgy: the one in which the Evangelist Luke describes the main events of the Annunciation. The Archangel Gabriel sent by God to Nazareth, to the Virgin Mary, greets her with the words which will make up the beginning of the prayer which is perhaps the one most frequently said, the *Hail Mary*: "Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" (Lk 1:28). The Angel continues: "You have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" (Lk 1:30-31). And when Mary asks: "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" (Lk 1:34), the Angel replies: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you;

therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Lk 1:35). Mary's response: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38).

In this way the Eternal Word became flesh. The only Son of God became man, taking on our nature in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin of Nazareth. Mary, accepting with faith the gift of God, the gift of the Incarnate Word, is for that very reason located at the beginning, the source of the Eucharist. The faith of the Mother of God brings the whole Church into the mystery of the Eucharistic presence of the Son. In the Church's liturgy, of both West and East, the Mother of God always leads the faithful to the Eucharist. It was good, therefore, that, a year before the Eucharistic Congress at Wrocław, here at Jasna Góra the Marian Congress took place on the theme: "Mary and the Eucharist". In this very sequence of events the truth about Mary who leads to the Son, about the Mother of the Church who leads her children to the Eucharist, is symbolically highlighted. In fact, for us who believe in Jesus Christ, Mary is the most perfect Teacher of that love that enables us to unite ourselves most completely to the Redeemer in the mystery of his Eucharistic Sacrifice and his Eucharistic presence.

2. Jasna Góra is the place where our Nation down the centuries has come together to bear witness to its faith and to its attachment to the community of the Church of Christ. Many times we used to come here, asking Mary for help in the struggle to preserve fidelity to God, the Cross, the Gospel, the Holy Church and her Shepherds. Here we accepted the duties of the Christian life. At the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Góra we found the strength to remain faithful to the Church, when she was persecuted, when she had to keep silent and suffer. We always said "yes" to the Church, and this Christian attitude has been a great act of love for her. For the Church is our spiritual mother. It is thanks to her that "we should be called children of God; and so we are" (cf 1 Jn 3:1). The Church is inscribed for ever in the history of our Nation, keeping careful watch over the destiny of her children, especially in times of humiliation, war, persecution or loss of independence.

Here, at the feet of Mary, ever anew we "learn the Church", entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and to all of us. The mystery of Mary is linked inseparably to the mystery of the Church, from the moment of the Immaculate Conception, through the Annunciation, the Visitation, Bethlehem, Nazareth, up to Calvary. Together with the Apostles Mary remained in prayer in the Upper Room, waiting, after the Ascension of her Son, for the fulfilment of the promise. She awaited the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would publicly make known the birth of the Church, and afterwards she watched over the development of the first Christian community.

Saint Paul says that "the Church is the Body of Christ" (cf 1 Cor 12:27). This means that she is formed according to Christ's plan as a community of salvation. The Church is his work, and is being endlessly built up in Christ, because he continues to live and work in her. The Church belongs to him and will remain his for ever. We must be faithful children of the Church which we ourselves make up. If by our faith and our lives we say "yes" to Christ, we cannot fail to say "yes"

also to the Church. Christ told the Apostles and their successors: "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects the one who sent me" (Lk 10:16). It is true that the Church is also a human reality, that she bears in herself all the limits and imperfections of the human beings who make her up, sinful and weak beings. Was it not Christ himself who desired that our faith in the Church should face this difficulty? Let us always seek generously and in a spirit of trust to accept what the Church proclaims and teaches. The path shown to us by Christ, living in the Church, leads us to goodness, truth, eternal life. For it is Christ who speaks, who forgives and who sanctifies. A "no" said to the Church would at the same time be a "no" said to Christ.

At this point I wish to use the words of my Predecessor in the See of Peter, Paul VI, the Pope who loved Poland and wanted to take part in the ceremonies of the Millennium at Jasna Góra on 3 May 1966, but to whom the authorities of that period did not grant permission. Here are his words: "Love the Church! The hour has come to love the Church with a strong and renewed heart . . . the very defects and misfortunes of those who belong to the Church ought to make our charity all the more powerful and solicitous. At least, such will be the case with whoever aims at being a living, healthy and persevering member of the Church. Such is the attitude of good sons and of the Saints . . . To love the Church is to esteem her and to be happy to belong to her. It means to obey and serve her, to help her with joy and sacrifice in her arduous mission" (*General Audience at Castelgandolfo*, 18 September 1968; in *L'Osservatore Romano*, English-language edition, 26 September 1968, p. 8).

"Hail Jesus, Son of Mary", we sing today at Jasna Góra and then we add: "In the Blessed Host you are true God". We profess our belief that when we receive Christ in the Eucharist under the appearance of bread and wine we receive the true God. It is he who becomes the supernatural food of our souls, when we are united to him in Holy Communion. Let us give thanks to Christ for the Church instituted by him, which lives by his redeeming Sacrifice made present on the altars throughout the world. Let us give thanks to Christ, because he shares with us his divine life, which is eternal life.

3. It is good that my visit to Poland includes this time also a stop in Jasna Góra. I wish to greet cordially the whole Archdiocese of Czestochowa with its Pastors, with the Monks of Saint Paul the First Hermit, and also the pilgrims from all over Poland, gathered today at the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Góra. I have said many times that Jasna Góra is the shrine of the Nation, the confessional and the altar. It is the place where Poles find spiritual transformation and renewal of life. May it remain so for ever. I wish to repeat the words which I spoke during my first pilgrimage to my homeland: "So many times we came here to this holy place with attentive pastoral ear, to listen to the beating of the heart of the Church and of that of the motherland in the heart of the Mother . . . For her heart beats, we know, together with all the happenings of history, with all the events of our national life . . . But if we want to know how this history is interpreted by the heart of the Poles, we must come here, we must attune our ear to this shrine, we must hear the echo of the life of the

whole nation in the heart of its Mother and Queen. And if her heart beats with a tone of disquiet, if it echoes with solicitude and the cry for the conversion and strengthening of consciences, this invitation must be accepted. It is an invitation springing from maternal love, which in its own way is shaping the historical processes in the land of Poland" (*Homily at Mass, Jasna Góra*, 4 June 1979; in *L'Osservatore Romano* English-language edition, 11 June 1979, pp. 10- 11). This perhaps is also the best place to recall the most ancient Polish hymn:

*"O Mother Divine,
O Virgin by God glorified,
Mother elect, to us send
Your Saviour Son.
O Son of God, by your Baptist,
Hear our voices,
Fulfil our human thoughts.*

This is how our ancestors prayed and today the pilgrims who come to Jasna Góra continue to pray: "Hear our voices, fulfil our human thoughts". I too ask this during the pilgrimage that I am making on the occasion of the millennium of Saint Adalbert. Standing here today at this point of the millenary celebrations, I cannot fail to recall another man of God whom Providence gave to the Church in Poland at the end of the Second Millennium, a man who prepared this Church for the celebrations of the millennium of her Baptism and who is commonly called the Primate of the Millennium. How often the Servant of God, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the great devotee of the Mother of God, stayed here; how many graces he obtained kneeling motionless before the image of Jasna Góra. It was precisely here, on 3 May 1966, that the Cardinal Primate read the Act of Jasna Góra of complete service of the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church, for the freedom of the Church of Christ. Remembering that historic act, I wish today to entrust anew to the Queen of Jasna Góra all the prayers of my fellow countrymen and all the needs and intentions of the universal Church and of all people throughout the world, both known and unknown to me, especially the sick, the suffering and those who have no hope. Here too, at the feet of Mary, I wish to give thanks for all the graces of this year's Eucharistic Congress — for all the good that it has brought about in people's hearts and in the life of the Nation and the Church.

Mother of the Church at Jasna Góra, pray for us all. Amen.