



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

Homily at Mass

Sunday, 6 June 1999, Pelplin

1. “Blessed are those . . . who hear the word of God and keep it” (*Lk 11:28*). Today this blessing of Christ goes with us as we journey through our Polish land. I joyfully utter this blessing at Pelplin, greeting all the faithful of this Church, with Bishop Jan Bernard, whom I thank for his words of welcome. I greet as well Auxiliary Bishop Piotr, all the Bishops gathered here, with the Cardinal Primate at their head, the priests, the religious men and women, and all you dear Brothers and Sisters. May this blessing be with you!

2. “Blessed are those . . . who hear the word of God and keep it”. For more than a thousand years, many people in these lands have heard the word of God. They welcomed it from the lips of those who proclaimed it. They received it first from the lips of the great missionary of these lands, Saint Adalbert. They were witnesses to his martyrdom. Later generations sprang from that sowing of the seed, thanks to the ministry of other missionaries – Bishops, priests and religious. The procession of apostles of the word of God. Some confirmed the Gospel message by suffering a martyr’s death, others through slow self-immolation in apostolic toil in keeping with the spirit of the Benedictine *Ora et Labora* – pray and work. The word proclaimed gained special power as a word confirmed by the witness of life.

In this land, there is a long tradition of listening to the word of God and of witness given to the Word, who in Christ became Incarnate. From century to century that tradition continued. This tradition is alive in our own century as well. An eloquent and tragic symbol of this continuity was the so called “Autumn of Pelplin”, the sixtieth anniversary of which occurs this year. At that time, twenty- four courageous priests, teachers at the Major Seminary and members of the Bishop’s staff, bore witness to their faithful service of the Gospel by the sacrifice of suffering and death. In the time of the occupation, 303 pastors were taken from the land of Pelplin and at the cost of their lives heroically testified to the message of hope in the dramatic period of the war and the occupation. If today we remember these martyred priests, it is because it was from their lips that our generation heard the word of God and, thanks to their sacrifice, experienced its power.

We need to recall this historic sowing of the seed by word and witness, especially now as we approach the end of the second millennium. This centuries- long tradition must continue in the third millennium. Yes, given the new challenges confronting the individual and entire societies today, we must constantly renew our awareness of what the word of God is, of how important it is in the life of the Christian, in the life of the Church and of all humanity.

3. What does Christ say in this regard in the Gospel we have heard today? At the end of the Sermon on the Mount he said: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded upon the rock” (*Mt 7:24-25*). The opposite of the man who built on the rock is the man who built upon sand. The house he built could not stand. Faced with trials and difficulties, it fell. This is what Christ teaches us.

A house built upon rock. The building that is one’s life. How should it be built so that it does not collapse under the pressure of this world’s events? How should this building be built so that from being an “earthly dwelling” it may become “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (*2 Cor 5:1*)? Today we hear the reply to these fundamental questions of faith: at the basis of the Christian building there is the hearing and keeping of the word of Christ. And in speaking of “the word of Christ” we have in mind not only his teaching, the parables and promises, but also his works, the signs, the miracles. And above all his Death, the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit. Further still: we have in mind the Son of God himself, the eternal Word of the Father, in the mystery of the Incarnation: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (*Jn 1:14*).

With this Word – Christ living and risen – Saint Adalbert came upon Polish soil. For centuries there came with Christ other heralds who bore witness to him. The witnesses of our own times, clergy and laity, gave their lives for him. Their work and their sacrifice have become for later generations the sign that nothing can destroy a building which has Christ as its foundation. These witnesses have journeyed through the ages saying with Saint Paul: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (*Rom 8:35, 37*).

4. “Blessed are those . . . who hear the word of God and keep it”. If, at the threshold of the third millennium, we ask how the future will be, we cannot avoid the question of the foundation that we set beneath this building, which will be carried on by generations to come. Our generation must build prudently for the future. The prudent builder is the one who hears the word of Christ and keeps it.

Since the day of Pentecost, the Church has guarded these words of Christ as a precious treasure.

Written on the page of the Gospel, they have endured to our own day. Now we have the responsibility of passing them on to future generations not as a dead letter but as a living spring of knowledge of the truth about God and man – a spring of true wisdom. In this context, the Council's exhortation to all the faithful becomes especially pertinent – “to learn 'the surpassing knowledge of Jesus Christ' (*Phil 3:8*) by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures. 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (Saint Jerome)’” (*Dei Verbum*, 25). Therefore, when in the liturgy I take the Book of the Gospels in my hands and raise it in blessing over the assembly and the entire Church, I do so in the hope that it will continue to be the Book of Life for every believer, every family and for entire societies. In the same hope, I urge you today: Cross into the new millennium with the Book of the Gospels! Let there be one in every Polish home! Read and meditate upon it! Let Christ speak! “O that today you would listen to his voice. Harden not your hearts” (*Ps 95:8*).

5. Through twenty centuries, the Church has turned to the pages of the Gospels in order to read as precisely as possible what God has wished to reveal in them. The Church has penetrated the deepest meaning of the words and events, has formulated the truths contained in them, declaring them to be sure and salvific. The saints have put these truths into practice and have communicated the experience of their encounter with the word of Christ. Thus the Tradition of the Church develops, founded upon the witness of the Apostles. When we read the Gospel today, we cannot detach it from this centuries-long heritage.

I mention this because there is the temptation to interpret Sacred Scripture apart from the Church's long tradition of faith, using modes of interpretation proper to contemporary literature or journalism. That creates the danger of over- simplification, of falsification of revealed truth, and even the adaptation of that truth to the demands of an individualist philosophy of life or an ideology, accepted a priori. Saint Peter the Apostle opposed attempts such as this when he wrote: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation” (*2 Pt 1:20*). “The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God . . . has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone, whose authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (*Dei Verbum*, 10).

I am glad that the Church in Poland is effectively helping the faithful to know the contents of Revelation. I know what importance pastors attach to the Liturgy of the Word at Mass and to catechesis. I give thanks to God that in parishes, communities and ecclesial movements, biblical circles and discussion groups are emerging and growing all the time. But those who assume responsibility for an authoritative explanation of revealed truth must trust not in their own, often fallible, intuition but in sound knowledge and unyielding faith.

How can we fail at this point to express our thanks to all the pastors who, with dedication and humility, do the work of proclaiming the word of God! How can we not mention the countless host of Bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women and lay catechists, who fervently, and often despite difficulties, give themselves to this prophetic mission of the Church? How can we not

say thanks to the exegetes and theologians who with admirable commitment explore the sources of Revelation, offering competent help to pastors. Dear Brothers and Sisters, may the good God reward your apostolic toil with his blessing! “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who announce peace, who bring tidings of good, who proclaim salvation” (*Is 52:7*).

6. Blessed also are those who with an open heart benefit from such a service. They are truly “those . . . who hear the word of God and keep it”. In fact they experience this special grace by which the seed of the word of God falls not among thorns but on fertile soil and brings forth abundant fruit. This is the action of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, who precedes and assists, touching hearts and turning them to God, opening the eyes of the mind and making it “easy for all to accept and believe the truth” (*Dei Verbum*, 5). They are blessed because, discerning and doing the Father’s will, they endlessly find the solid foundation for the building of their lives.

To those who must cross the threshold of the third millennium, we want to say: Build your house upon rock! Build on rock the house of your personal and social life! And rock is the Christ – Christ living in his Church. The Church has been in this land for a thousand years. It came to you with the ministry of Saint Adalbert. It grew on the foundation of his martyr’s death and it survives still. The Church is Christ living in each one of us. Christ is the vine and we are the branches. He is the foundation and we are the living stones.

7. “Stay with us, Lord” (*Lk 24:29*), said the disciples who met the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, and their hearts burned within them while he talked to them and opened to them the Scriptures (cf. *Lk 24:32*). Today we want to repeat their words: “Stay with us, Lord!” We have met you on the long journey of our history. Our forebears met you in one generation after another. You strengthened them with your word through the life and ministry of your Church.

Lord, stay with those who will come after us! We want you to be with them, as you have been with us. This is our desire and this is what we ask.

Stay with us when evening comes! Stay as the time of history approaches the end of the second millennium.

Stay with us and help us walk always along the path that leads to the Father’s house.

Stay with us in your word – in that word that becomes sacrament: the Eucharist of your presence.

We wish to hear your word and do it.

We wish to live in your blessing.

We wish to be among the blessed who “hear the word of God and keep it”.

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