



# The Holy See

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**JOHN PAUL II**

*Homily at Mass and Canonization of Blessed Kinga*

*Wednesday, 16 June 1999, Stary Sacz*

1. *“Saints do not fade away. Saints draw life from other Saints and thirst for holiness”.*

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*

Almost thirty-three years ago I spoke these words at Stary Sacz, during the celebration of the Millennium. In doing so I made reference to a particular circumstance. Despite the inclement weather, the people of the territory of Sacz and the surrounding area had come to this city and that whole great assembly of the People of God, headed by the Cardinal Primate Stefan Wyszyński and the Bishop of Tarnów, Jerzy Ablewicz, prayed to God for the Canonization of Blessed Kinga. How then can I fail to repeat these words on the day when, by the decree of Divine Providence, it has been granted me to celebrate her Canonization, just as two years ago it was granted me to proclaim the sainthood of Queen Hedwig, the Lady of Wawel? Both came to us from Hungary, both entered into our history and have remained in the memory of the nation. Like Hedwig, Kinga has defied the inexorable law of time which erases everything. Centuries have passed, yet the splendour of her holiness has not only not faded, but it shines even more for successive generations. They have not forgotten this daughter of the King of Hungary, Princess of Malopolska (Little Poland), Foundress and Nun of the Convent of Sacz. And this day of her Canonization is a most magnificent proof of this. May God be praised in his Saints!

2. Before following in spirit the pathways of Princess Kinga’s holiness, as a means of thanking God for the work of his grace, I wish to greet all gathered here and the whole Church of the beautiful territory of Tarnow, together with Bishop Wiktor and his Auxiliary Bishops Wladyslaw and Jan, and the beloved Bishop Emeritus Piotr. I greet the President of Hungary and the members of

his entourage. I greet all the priests, men and women religious, and in a particular way the Poor Clare Nuns. My cordial greeting also goes to our hosts, the people of Stary Sacz. I know that this city is famous for its attachment to Saint Kinga. Your whole city seems to be a shrine to her. I also greet Nowy Sacz, a city by whose beauty and good functioning which I have always been struck. In my heart I embrace the whole Diocesan community, all families and individuals, all the sick, and everyone taking part in this Liturgy by radio and television. May you be granted every grace by the One who is the the source and goal of all our holiness!

### 3. *“Saints draw life from other Saints.”*

In the first reading we heard a prophetic proclamation: “You will shine with a glorious light to all parts of the earth; many nations shall come to you from afar, and the inhabitants of all the ends of the earth, drawn to you by the name of the Lord God” (*Tob 13:13, Vulg.*). These words of the Prophet refer first of all to Jerusalem, the city marked by the special presence of God in his temple. Yet we know that, by his death and resurrection, “Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (*Heb 9:24*), and that this prophecy has been fulfilled in all those who follow him on the same path to the Father. Henceforth it is no longer the light of the temple of Jerusalem, but the splendour of Christ that enlightens the witnesses of his resurrection and draws to God’s holy name the many nations and the inhabitants of all the ends of the earth.

Saint Kinga from birth had experienced in a remarkable way this saving radiance of holiness. For she came into the world in the royal Hungarian family of Bela IV, of the Arpad dynasty. This royal line was most fervent in the life of faith and gave rise to great saints. From it came Saint Stephen, the principal patron of Hungary and the son of Saint Emeric. A special place among the saints of the Arpad family belongs to women: Saint Ladislaa, Saint Elizabeth of Turin, Saint Hedwig of Silesia, Saint Agnes of Prague and finally the sisters of Kinga, Saint Margaret and Blessed Yolanda. Is it not obvious that the light of holiness in her family led Kinga to God’s holy name? How could the example of her saintly parents, brothers and sisters and relatives, not leave a trace in her soul?

The seed of holiness sown in Kinga’s heart in her family home found in Poland good soil for its growth. When she first arrived in Wojnicz in 1239, and then in Sandomierz, she established a warm relationship with the mother of her future husband, Grzymislawa, and with Grzymislawa’s daughter Salomea. Both women were distinguished by deep piety, a life of asceticism and love of prayer, and the reading of Scripture and the lives of the saints. Their friendly company, especially in the first, difficult years of her stay in Poland, had a great influence on Kinga. The ideal of holiness increasingly matured in her heart. Seeking models to imitate, corresponding to her rank, she chose as a special patroness her saintly relative Princess Hedwig of Silesia. She also wanted to hold up to Poland a saint who could become a teacher of love of country and Church to every state and region. Therefore, together with the Bishop of Kraków, Prandota of Bialaczew, she

worked tirelessly for the canonization of the martyr of Kraków, Bishop Stanislaus of Szczepanów. A great influence on her spirituality was undoubtedly exercised by Saint Hyacinth, who lived during that time, Blessed Sadok, Blessed Bronislawa, Blessed Salomea, Blessed Yolanda, the sister of Kinga, and all those who created a particular faith-filled environment in the Kraków of those days.

4. In speaking today of sanctity, of the desire for and the pursuit of holiness, we need to ask ourselves how we can create environments which favour the aspiration to holiness. What can be done to make the family, the school, the workplace, the office, the villages and the cities, and finally the whole country a dwelling-place of saints, who can influence others by their goodness, their fidelity to Christ's teaching and the witness of their everyday lives, and thus foster the spiritual growth of all people? Saint Kinga and all the Saints and Blessed of the thirteenth century reply: it requires witness. It requires courage not to put your faith under a bushel-basket. And in the end it requires that in the hearts of believers there should abound that desire for holiness which not only shapes one's private life but also influences society as a whole.

In my Letter to Families I wrote that "the history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family. The family is placed at the centre of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, to unleash the forces of good, the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man. *Every family unit needs to make these forces their own*, so that, to use a phrase spoken on the occasion of the Millennium of Christianity in Poland, the family will be "strong with the strength of God" (No.23). Today, drawing upon the age-old experience of Saint Kinga, I repeat these words here among the inhabitants of the territory of Sacz, who for centuries, often at the cost of personal sacrifice, have given proof of their devotion to the family and of their great love for family life. Together with the Patroness of this land, I appeal to all my countrymen: May Polish families preserve their faith in Christ! Stand with firm perseverance at the side of Christ, so that he will remain in you! Do not allow the light of holiness to grow dim in your hearts, in the hearts of fathers and mothers, of sons and daughters! May the splendour of that light shape future generations of saints, for the glory of God's name! *Tertio millennio adveniente!*

Brothers and Sisters, do not be afraid to aspire to holiness! Do not be afraid to be saints! Make of this century now drawing to a close and of the new millennium an era of saintly men and women!

5. "*Saints thirst for holiness*". This thirst was alive in the heart of Kinga. With this desire she meditated on the words of Saint Paul which we have heard today: "Concerning the virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is" (1 Cor 7:25-26). Inspired by this counsel, she sought to consecrate herself to God whole-heartedly by a vow of virginity. And so, when the circumstances of the time dictated that she was to marry Prince Boleslaus, she convinced him to live a life of virginity for the glory of God, and after a waiting-period of two years the spouses made a vow of perpetual chastity in the hands of Bishop

Prandota.

This way of life, perhaps difficult to understand nowadays, yet deeply rooted in the tradition of the early Church, gave Saint Kinga that inner freedom which enabled her to be concerned first of all with the things of the Lord and to lead a profound religious life. Today let us reconsider this great testimony. Saint Kinga teaches us that both marriage and virginity lived in union with Christ can become a path to holiness. Today Saint Kinga rises to safeguard these values. She reminds us that the value of marriage, this indissoluble union of love between two persons, cannot be brought into question under any circumstances. Whatever difficulties may arise, one may not abandon the defence of this primordial love which has united two persons and which is constantly blessed by God. Marriage is the way of holiness, even when it becomes the way of the Cross.

The walls of the Convent of Stary Sacz, which Saint Kinga founded and where she came to the end of her life, seem today a testimony of how much she esteemed chastity and virginity, rightly seeing in this state an extraordinary gift whereby man experiences in a special way his own freedom. He can make of this inner freedom a place of encounter with Christ and with others on the path of holiness. Standing before this Convent, together with Saint Kinga, I speak in a special way to you young people: defend your inner freedom! Let no false shame keep you from cultivating chastity! And may the young men and women called by Christ to preserve life-long virginity know that this is a privileged state, which manifests most clearly the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

There is yet another characteristic of the spirit of Saint Kinga, associated with her desire for holiness. As a princess she knew how to be about her Father's business even in this world. At her husband's side she shared in his rule, showing firmness and courage, generosity and concern for the good of the country and her subjects. During unrest within the state, during the struggle for power in a kingdom divided into regions, during the devastating invasions of the Tartars, Saint Kinga was able to rise to the needs of the moment. She worked zealously for the unity of the Piast heritage, and in order to raise the country from ruin she did not hesitate to give away the entire dowry received from her father. Linked to her name are the rock salt mines of Wieliczka and Bochnia near Kraków. First and foremost, however, she was attentive to the needs of her subjects. The old biographies written on her confirm this, testifying that the people called her their "comforter", "physician", "nurse", "holy mother". Having renounced natural motherhood, she became a true mother to all.

She was also concerned for the cultural development of the nation. She herself and the local Convent are linked to the birth of true monuments of literature, such as the first book written in the Polish language: *Zoltarz Dawidów*, the Psalter of David.

All this is associated with her sanctity. And when we ask today how to go about becoming saints and living the life of holiness, Saint Kinga seems to reply: You need to be concerned with the

things of the Lord in this world. She bears witness that carrying out this task consists in a constant effort to preserve harmony between the faith we profess and the life we lead. Today's world needs the holiness of Christians who in the ordinary conditions of family and professional life take on their proper daily duties, and who, in their desire to do the will of the Creator and to serve others each day, respond to his eternal love. This is true of the various areas of life such as political, economic, social and legislative activity (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, 42). These sectors must never lack the spirit of service, honesty, truth, and concern for the common good, even at the cost of an unselfish sacrifice of one's individual good, following the example of the holy Princess of these lands! In these areas too, may there be an abundant thirst for holiness, quenched by effective service in the spirit of love of God and neighbour!

6. *"Saints do not fade away."* As we look to the figure of Kinga, a fundamental question arises: What made her a figure which in a certain sense has not passed away? What enabled her to survive in the memory of the Polish people and, in particular, in the memory of the Church? What is the name of that power which defies the inexorable law that says, "everything fades away". The name of this power is love. Today's Gospel of the ten wise virgins speaks precisely of love. Kinga was certainly one of the wise virgins. Like them, she went out to meet the Divine Bridegroom. Like them, she kept watch with her lamp of love burning bright in order not to miss the moment of the Bridegroom's coming. Like them, she met him at his coming and she was invited to take part in the wedding banquet. The love of the Divine Spouse in the life of Princess Kinga found expression in countless acts of love of neighbour. It was truly because of that love that the "fading away" to which everyone on earth is subject has not erased her memory. Today, after so many centuries, the Church in Poland expresses that same love.

*"Saints draw life from other Saints and thirst for holiness"*. Once more I repeat these words, here in the territory of Sacz. Kinga received this land as a gift in exchange for the dowry which she donated for the relief of the country, and this land has never ceased to be her special property. She always watches over the faithful people who live here. How can we fail to thank her for her care of families, especially the many local families with numerous children which we look upon with admiration and respect? How can we fail to thank her for imploring for this ecclesial community the grace of so many priestly and religious vocations? How can we fail to thank her for gathering us here today, uniting in common prayer brothers and sisters from Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Ukraine, reviving the tradition of spiritual unity which she herself was so concerned to shape?

Filled with gratitude, let us praise God for the gift of the holiness of the Lady of this land, and let us pray that the splendour of this holiness will continue in all of us. In the new millennium, may this magnificent light shine to all the ends of the earth, so that peoples may come from afar to God's holy name (cf. *Tob 13:13, Vulg.*) and see his glory.

*"Saints do not fade away"*.

Saints call upon holiness.  
Saint Kinga, Lady of this land,  
Obtain for us the grace of holiness!