



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

*Warsaw*

*Sunday, 13 June 1999*

*"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7)* Dear Brothers and Sisters, I stop to reflect on the words of this beatitude of Christ as I continue my pilgrim journey among you, faithful people of Warsaw. I warmly greet all gathered here, the priests, men and women religious and lay faithful. I extend fraternal greetings to the Bishops, especially to the Cardinal Primate and the auxiliary Bishops of the Archdiocese of Warsaw. I greet the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the Senate and the President of the Diet, the representatives of State and local Authorities and invited guests. I give thanks to Divine Providence that I am able to be present here again, where twenty years ago, at the memorable Pentecost Vigil, we experienced in a special way the mystery of the Upper Room. Together with the Primate of the Millennium, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, with the Bishops and the People of God of the capital present in great numbers, we made an ardent invocation on that occasion for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In those difficult times, we asked that his power might be poured into the hearts of men and women, and that hope might be stirred in them. It was a cry which arose from the faith that God is active and that, with the power of the Holy Spirit, he renews and sanctifies all things. It was a supplication for a renewal of the face of the earth, of this land. How can we fail to thank the Triune God today for all that in the course of the last twenty years we see as his response to that cry! Is not all that happened at that time in Europe and the world, beginning with our own homeland, God's response? Before our eyes, changes of political, social and economic systems have taken place, enabling individuals and nations to see anew the splendour of their own dignity. Truth and justice are recovering their proper value, becoming a challenge for all those who are able to appreciate the gift of freedom. For this we give thanks to God, looking towards the future with confidence. We especially give glory to him for what has happened in the life of the Church during these twenty years. In thanksgiving, therefore, we join with the Churches of the Western and Eastern tradition, with our neighbouring peoples who have emerged from the catacombs and are openly carrying out their mission. Their vitality is a magnificent witness to the power of Christ's grace which enables weak men to become capable of heroism, frequently to the point of martyrdom. Is this not the fruit of the activity of the Holy Spirit? Is it not thanks to this breath of the Spirit in our most recent history that today we have the unique opportunity to experience the universality of the Church and our responsibility to bear witness to Christ and to proclaim his Gospel "to the ends of the earth"? In the light of the Holy Spirit the Church in Poland rereads the signs of the times and takes up her duties free from the external limitations and pressures which were experienced up to a short time ago. How can we not give thanks to God today for the fact that the Church is now able to engage in a creative dialogue with the world of culture and knowledge in a spirit of mutual respect and love! How can we not give thanks for the fact that the faithful can approach the sacraments unhindered and can

listen to the word of God in order to be able to bear witness openly to their faith! How can we not give glory to God for the many churches recently built in our country! How can we not give thanks that children and young people can come to know Christ in the tranquility of school, where the presence of a priest, a nun or a catechist is seen as a precious help in the work of educating the younger generation! How can we not give praise to God, who with his Spirit enlivens church communities, associations and movements, inspiring ever wider groups of laity to embark on the mission of evangelization! During my first pilgrimage to our homeland, when I was in this place, I became intensely mindful of the prayer of the Psalmist: *"O Lord, remember me out of the love you have for your people.*

*Come to me, Lord, with your help*

*that I may see the joy of your chosen ones*

*and may rejoice in the gladness of your nation*

*and share the glory of your people"* (106:4-5). Today, as I look back over the last twenty years of this century, I am reminded of the exhortation of the same Psalm: *"O give thanks to the Lord for he is good; for his love endures for ever.*

*Who can tell the Lord's mighty deeds?*

*Who can recount all his praises?*

*Blessed be the Lord . . .*

*For ever, from age to age"* (106:1-2, 48).<sup>2</sup> "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (*Mt 5:7*). This Sunday's liturgy gives our thanksgiving a particular aspect. It enables us to see all that is going on in the history of this generation from the perspective of God's eternal mercy, which was revealed more fully in the saving work of Christ. Christ "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (*Rom 4:25*). The Paschal mystery of the Death and Resurrection of the Son of God has given a new direction to human history. Though we see in this history the painful signs of the action of evil, we are certain that in the end evil will not prevail over the fate of man and the world. This certainty arises from faith in the mercy of the Father "who has so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (*Jn 3:16*). Hence today, as Saint Paul points to the faith of Abraham: "No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God" (*Rom 4:20*), we are able to discern the source of this strength, thanks to which not even the most difficult trials were able to separate us from the love of God. Faith in divine mercy made it possible for hope to endure in us. This hope did not concern social rebirth alone, or merely the restoration of dignity to man in the different world contexts. Our hope penetrates far deeper: it is directed in fact to the divine promises which go far beyond temporal realities. Its definitive object is the sharing in the fruits of the saving work of Christ. This can be reckoned to us as justice, if we "believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord" (*Rom 4:24*). Only the hope which comes from faith in the Resurrection can inspire us to give a worthy response in our daily lives to God's infinite love. Only with such hope can we go out to the "sick" (*Mt 9:12*) and be apostles of God's healing love. Twenty years ago I said that "Poland has become in our time a land of particularly responsible witness" (*Homily in Victory Square, 2 June 1979*). Today, it must be added that this should be a witness of active mercy built on faith in the Resurrection. Only this kind of witness is a sign of hope for contemporary man, especially for the younger generations; and if for some it is also a "sign of contradiction", this contradiction never distracts us from fidelity to the Crucified and Risen Christ.<sup>3</sup> *"Omnipotens aeternae Deus, qui per glorificationem Sanctorum novissima dilectionis tuae nobis argumenta largiris, concede propitius, ut, ad Unigenitum tuum fideliter imitandum, et ipsorum intercessione commendemur, et incitemur exemplo"*. This is the Church's prayer as she remembers the Saints in the Eucharist: "Ever-living God, the signs of your love are manifest in the honour you give your Saints. May their prayers and their example encourage us to follow your Son more faithfully" (*Common of Holy Men and*

*Women, Opening Prayer*). We raise this invocation also today, as we admire the testimony given by the Blessed who have just been raised to the glory of the altars. The living faith, unshakeable hope and generous love are reckoned to them as justice, because they were profoundly rooted in the Paschal mystery of Christ. Rightly, then, we ask to follow Christ faithfully, according to their example. Blessed Regina Protmann, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Catherine, a native of Braniewo, dedicated herself with all her heart to the work of renewal of the Church at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. She engaged in this activity, which arose from her love for Christ above all things, after the Council of Trent. She took an active part in the post-conciliar reform of the Church, carrying out a humble work of mercy with great generosity. She founded a Congregation, which united contemplation of the mysteries of God with the care of the sick in their homes and the instruction of young children and older girls. She gave particular attention to the pastoral care of women. With no thought of herself, Blessed Regina looked to the needs of the people and the Church, meeting them with foresight. The words "As God wills" became the motto of her life. Ardent love urged her to fulfil the Heavenly Father's will, following the example of the Son of God. She did not shrink from the cross of daily service in giving witness to the Risen Christ. The apostolate of mercy also filled the life of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski. Despite delicate health, this landowner from Wielkopolska, endowed with many talents and a particular depth of religious life by God, undertook and inspired a vast activity on behalf of the rural population, with perseverance, prudence and generosity of heart. Guided by a discernment that was very sensitive to people's needs, he launched numerous educational, charitable, cultural and religious works aimed at the material and moral support of the rural family. He remained in the lay state and founded the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy and Immaculate Virgin, which is well-known in Poland. He was inspired in every initiative by the desire that everyone should have a share in the Redemption. He is remembered as a good man with a big heart, who for love of God and neighbour was able to bring different sectors together, effectively rallying them around a common good. In his many-faceted activity, he anticipated much of what the Second Vatican Council said about the apostolate of the laity. His was an exceptional example of generous and industrious work for man, the homeland and the Church. The work of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski is continued by the Handmaids, whom I warmly greet and thank for their silent service, filled with the spirit of sacrifice on behalf of their neighbour and the Church.<sup>4</sup> *"Munire digneris me, Domine Iesu Christe . . . , signo sacratissimae Crucis tuae: ac concedere digneris mihi . . . ut, sicut hanc Crucem, Sanctorum tuorum reliquiis refertam, ante pectus meum teneo, sic semper mente retineam et memoriam passionis, et sanctorum victorias Martyrum:* this is the prayer recited by the Bishop as he puts on the pectoral cross. Today I make of this invocation the prayer of the entire Church in Poland which, bearing for a thousand years the marks of the Passion of Christ, is constantly regenerated by the seed of the blood of the martyrs and draws life from the memory of their victory on earth. Today we are celebrating the victory of those who, in our time, gave their lives for Christ, in order to possess life forever in his glory. This victory has a special character, since it was shared by clergy and laity alike, by young people and old, by people from different classes and states. Among them are Archbishop Antoni Julian Nowowiejski, Pastor of the Diocese of Plock, tortured to death at Dzialdowo; Bishop Wladyslaw Goral of Lublin, tortured with particular hatred simply because he was a Catholic Bishop. There are diocesan and religious priests who died because they chose not to abandon their ministry and because they continued to serve their fellow prisoners who were sick with typhus; some were tortured to death because they defended Jews. In the group of Blessed there are religious brothers and sisters who persevered in the service of charity and in offering their torments for their neighbour. Among the blessed martyrs there are also lay people. There are five young people formed in the Salesian oratory; a zealous activist of Catholic Action, a lay catechist tortured to death for his service and an heroic woman, who give up her own life in exchange for that of her daughter-in-law who was with child. These blessed martyrs are today inscribed in the history of holiness of the People of God on pilgrimage for over a

thousand years in the land of Poland. If we rejoice today for the beatification of one hundred and eight martyrs, clergy and lay people, we do so above all because they bear witness to the victory of Christ, the gift which restores hope. As we carry out this solemn act, there is in a way rekindled in us the certainty that, independently of the circumstances, we can achieve complete victory in all things through the One who has loved us (cf. *Rom 8:37*). The blessed martyrs cry to our hearts: Believe in God who is love! Believe in him in good times and bad! Awaken hope! May it produce in you the fruit of fidelity to God in every trial! Rejoice, Poland, for the new Blessed: Regina Protmann, Edmund Bojanowski and the 108 Martyrs. It pleased God "to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness" towards your sons and daughters in Jesus Christ (cf. *Eph 2:7*). This is "the richness of his grace", this is the foundation of our unshakeable confidence in the saving presence of God along the paths of man in the Third Millennium! To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen!

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