



The Holy See

BENEDICT XVI

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Wednesday, 31 May 2006

Apostolic Journey to Poland

"Stand firm in your faith!"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today, I would like to review with you the stages of the Apostolic Journey that I was able to make to Poland in the past few days.

I thank the Polish Bishops and particularly the Metropolitan Archbishops of Warsaw and Krakow for their enthusiasm and care in preparing for this Visit. I renew the expression of my gratitude to the President of the Republic and to the different Authorities of the Country, as well as to all those who worked together for the success of this event.

Above all, I want to say a big "thank you" to the Catholics and to the entire Polish People; I felt them clustered round me in an embrace full of human and spiritual warmth. And many of you saw me on television. It was a true expression of catholicity, of the Church's love expressed in love for the Successor of Peter.

After my arrival at Warsaw Airport, the Cathedral of this important metropolis was the venue of my first Meeting, reserved for *priests*, on the very day of the 50th anniversary of the ordination to the priesthood of Cardinal Józef Glemp, the Pastor of that Archdiocese. Thus, my pilgrimage began under the banner of the *priesthood*.

It continued with a testimony of *ecumenical concern* in the Lutheran Church of the Most Holy Trinity. On this occasion, united with representatives of the different Churches and Ecclesial Communities living in Poland, I reasserted my firm determination to consider as a priority of my ministry the commitment to the reconstitution of full and visible unity among Christians.

Next came the *Solemn Eucharist* in Piłsudski Square in the centre of Warsaw that was filled to overflowing. This place, where we solemnly and joyfully celebrated the Eucharist, has already acquired symbolic value as the site of historical events such as the Holy Masses celebrated by John Paul II, the funeral of the Cardinal Primate Stefan Wyszyński and, following my venerable Predecessor's death, it was packed at the celebrations of prayers for the repose of his soul.

A visit to the shrines that marked the life of the priest and Bishop Karol Wojtyła could not have been omitted from my itinerary: *Częstochowa, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska* and *Divine Mercy*.

I will not be able to forget my stop at the famous Marian Shrine of Jasna Góra. On that "Bright Mount", the heart of the Polish Nation, as in a spiritual Upper Room, vast numbers of the faithful, especially men and women religious, seminarians and representatives of the Ecclesial Movements, gathered round the Successor of Peter to listen, together with me, to Mary.

Drawing inspiration from the marvellous Marian meditation that John Paul II presented to the Church in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, I wanted to repropose faith as a fundamental attitude of the spirit, not merely something intellectual or sentimental; true faith involves the entire person: thoughts, affections, intentions, relations, bodiliness, activity and daily work.

Then, visiting the wonderful Shrine of *Kalwaria Zebrzydowska*, not far from Krakow, I asked the Sorrowful Virgin to sustain the faith of the Ecclesial Community in times of hardship and trial. My next stop, at the *Shrine of Divine Mercy* in Łagiewniki, gave me the opportunity to stress that Divine Mercy alone illumines the mystery of man. It was here at the neighbouring convent that Sr Faustina Kowalska, contemplating the shining wounds of the Risen Christ, received a message of trust for humanity which John Paul II echoed and interpreted and which really is a central message precisely for our time: Mercy as God's power, as a divine barrier against the evil of the world.

I wanted to visit other symbolic "shrines": I am referring to *Wadowice*, a place that became famous because it was here that Karol Wojtyła^{3a} was born and baptized. Visiting it gave me an opportunity to thank the Lord for the gift of this unflinching servant of the Gospel. The roots of his vigorous faith, his humanity, so sensitive and open, his love for beauty and truth, his devotion to Our Lady, his love for the Church and especially his vocation to holiness are found in this small town where he received his first education and formation.

In Krakow, *Wawel Cathedral* is another place that was dear to John Paul II. It is a symbolic place for the Polish Nation: it was here in the cathedral crypt that Karol Wojtyła^{3a} celebrated his First

Mass.

Another beautiful experience was my *Meeting with young people* that took place in Krakow's large B³onie Park. I symbolically consigned the "Flame of Mercy" to the crowds of young people who had come, so that they might be heralds of Love and Divine Mercy in the world. With them, I meditated on the Gospel parable of the house built upon rock (cf. Mt 7: 24-27) that was also read today at the beginning of this Audience.

I also paused to reflect on the Word of God on Sunday morning, the Solemnity of the Ascension, during the *Celebration to conclude* my Visit. It was a liturgical meeting enlivened by an extraordinary participation of the faithful in the same Park where the youth meeting had taken place the previous evening. I made the most of the occasion to renew among the Polish People the wonderful proclamation of the Christian truth about man, created and redeemed in Christ; that truth which John Paul II proclaimed vigorously so many times, to spur everyone to be strong in faith, hope and love.

Stand firm in your faith! This was the message I left with the children of beloved Poland, encouraging them to persevere in faithfulness to Christ and to the Church, so that Europe and the world will not lack the contribution of their Gospel witness.

Preventing another "Auschwitz"

All Christians must feel committed to bearing this witness in order to prevent humanity of the third millennium from once again experiencing horrors similar to those tragically called to mind by the extermination camp of *Auschwitz-Birkenau*. It was precisely in that place, sadly famous throughout the world, that I chose to stop before returning to Rome.

Hitler had more than 6 million Jews exterminated in the camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau and in other similar camps. About 150,000 Poles and tens of thousands of men and women of other nationalities died at Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the face of the horror of Auschwitz there is no other response than the Cross of Christ: Love descended to the very depths of the abyss of evil to save man in his core, where human freedom can rebel against God.

May contemporary humanity never forget Auschwitz or the other "death factories" where the Nazi regime attempted to eliminate God in order to replace him! May it not succumb to the temptation of racial hatred which is at the root of the worst forms of anti-Semitism! May people recognize once again that God is the Father of all and calls us all, in Christ, to build a world of justice, truth and peace together!

Let us ask this of the Lord through the intercession of Mary, whom today, as we end the month of May, we contemplate in her zealous and loving visit to Elizabeth, her elderly relative.

To special groups

I greet all the English-speaking visitors, especially the many pilgrims from England, Wales, Ireland, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and the United States. I also greet the Patrons of the Arts in the Vatican Museums visiting Rome for the 500th anniversary of the Museums. Dear friends, I am most grateful for your efforts to preserve the Vatican's artistic heritage, which testifies to the Church's faith, the beauty of God's creation and the highest aspirations of the human spirit. Upon all present at today's Audience I cordially invoke an abundance of joy and peace in the Risen Lord.

Lastly, I address an affectionate thought to the *young people*, the *sick people* and the *newly-weds*. Dear brothers and sisters, on today's Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin the Church commemorates Mary, who paid a visit to her elderly relative Elizabeth in order to help her. She thus becomes for us an example and model of concern for those in need.

Dear *young people*, learn from Mary to grow in faithful attachment to Christ and in helpful love for the brethren.

May the Blessed Virgin help you, dear *sick people*, to make your suffering an offering to the heavenly Father, in union with the Crucified Christ.

Sustained by the motherly intercession of Our Lady, may you, dear *newly-weds*, always let yourselves be guided by the Gospel in your married life.

My thoughts now go to the beloved Nation of East Timor, which in these days has fallen prey to tensions and violence that have claimed victims and caused destruction. As I encourage the local Church and Catholic organizations, together with other international organizations, to persevere in the commitment to assist the evacuees, I ask you to pray to the Blessed Virgin to support with her maternal protection the efforts of all who are contributing to the pacification of souls and the return to normalcy.