



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE BENEDICT XVI
IN POLAND

HOMILY BY THE HOLY FATHER

MASS IN KRAKOW - BŁONIE

28 May 2006

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up to heaven?” (*Acts* 1:11).

Brothers and Sisters, today in Błonie Park in Kraków we hear once again this question from the Acts of the Apostles. This time it is directed to all of us: “Why do you stand looking up to heaven?” The answer to this question involves the fundamental truth about the life and destiny of every man and woman.

The question has to do with our attitude to two basic realities which shape every human life: earth and heaven. First, the earth: “Why do you stand?” - Why are you here on earth? Our answer is that we are here on earth because our Maker has put us here as the crowning work of his creation. Almighty God, in his ineffable plan of love, created the universe, bringing it forth from nothing. Then, at the completion of this work, he bestowed life on men and women, creating them in his own image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26-27). He gave them the dignity of being children of God and the gift of immortality. We know that man went astray, misused the gift of freedom and said “No” to God, thus condemning himself to a life marked by evil, sin, suffering and death. But we also know that God was not resigned to this situation, but entered directly into humanity’s history, which then became a history of salvation. “We stand” on the earth, we are rooted in the earth and we grow from it. Here we do good in the many areas of everyday life, in the material and spiritual realms, in our relationships with other people, in our efforts to build up the human community and in culture. Here too we experience the weariness of those who make their way

towards a goal by long and winding paths, amid hesitations, tensions, uncertainties, in the conviction that the journey will one day come to an end. That is when the question arises: Is this all there is? Is this earth on which “we stand” our final destiny?

And so we need to turn to the second part of the biblical question: “Why do you stand looking up to heaven?” We have read that, just as the Apostles were asking the Risen Lord about the restoration of Israel’s earthly kingdom, “He was lifted up and a cloud took him out of their sight.” And “they looked up to heaven as he went” (cf. *Acts* 1:9-10). They looked up to heaven because they looked to Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One, raised up on high. We do not know whether at that precise moment they realized that a magnificent, infinite horizon was opening up before their eyes: the ultimate goal of our earthly pilgrimage. Perhaps they only realized this at Pentecost, in the light of the Holy Spirit. But for us, at a distance of two thousand years, the meaning of that event is quite clear. Here on earth, we are called to look up to heaven, to turn our minds and hearts to the inexpressible mystery of God. We are called to look towards this divine reality, to which we have been directed from our creation. For there we find life’s ultimate meaning.

Dear brothers and sisters, I am deeply moved to be able to celebrate this Eucharist today in Błonie Park in Kraków, where Pope John Paul II often celebrated Mass during his unforgettable Apostolic Visits to his native land. Through his liturgical celebrations he met the People of God in almost every corner of the world, but surely his celebration of Holy Mass in Błonie Park in Kraków was always something special. Here he returned in mind and heart to his roots, to the sources of his faith and his service to the Church. From here he could see Kraków and all Poland. In his first Apostolic Visit to Poland, on 10 June 1979, at the end of his homily in this Park, he said with nostalgia: “Allow me, before leaving you, to look out once again on Kraków, this Kraków whose every stone and brick is dear to me. And to look out once again from here on Poland.” During the last Mass he celebrated here, on 18 August 2002, he said in his homily: “I am grateful for the invitation to visit my Kraków and for the hospitality you have given me” (no. 2). I wish to take up these words, to make them my own and repeat them today: I thank you with all my heart “for the invitation to visit my Kraków and for the hospitality you have given me.” Kraków, the city of Karol Wojtyła and of John Paul II, is also *my Kraków!* Kraków has a special place in the hearts of countless Christians throughout the world who know that John Paul II came to the Vatican Hill from this city, from Wawel Hill, “from a far country”, which thus became a country dear to all.

At the beginning of the second year of my Pontificate, I have felt a deep need to visit Poland and Kraków as a pilgrim in the footsteps of my predecessor. I wanted to breathe the air of his homeland. I wanted to see the land where he was born, where he grew up and undertook his tireless service to Christ and the universal Church. I wanted especially to meet the living men and women of his country, to experience your faith, which gave him life and strength, and to know that you continue firm in that faith. Here I wish to ask God to preserve that legacy of faith, hope and charity which John Paul II gave to the world, and to you in particular.

I cordially greet all those gathered in Błonie Park, for as far as my eyes can see and even farther. I wish I could meet each of you personally. I embrace all those who are taking part in our Eucharist by radio and television. I greet all of Poland! I greet the children and young people, individuals and families, the sick and those suffering in body or spirit, who are deprived of the joy of life. I greet all those whose daily labours are helping this country to grow in prosperity. I greet the Polish people living abroad, everywhere in the world. I thank Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków, for his warm words of welcome. I greet Cardinal Franciszek Macharski and all the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and consecrated men and women, as well as the other guests who have come from many lands, particularly the neighbouring countries. My greetings go to the President of the Republic and to the Prime Minister, and to the representatives of the national, territorial and local Authorities.

Dear brothers and sisters, I have taken as the motto of my pilgrimage to Poland in the footsteps of John Paul II the words: "Stand firm in your faith!" This appeal is directed to us all as members of the community of Christ's disciples, to each and every one of us. Faith is a deeply personal and human act, an act which has two aspects. To believe means first to accept as true what our mind cannot fully comprehend. We have to accept what God reveals to us about himself, about ourselves, about everything around us, including the things that are invisible, inexpressible and beyond our imagination. This act of accepting revealed truth broadens the horizon of our knowledge and draws us to the mystery in which our lives are immersed. Letting our reason be limited in this way is not something easy to do. Here we see the second aspect of faith: it is trust in a person, no ordinary person, but Jesus Christ himself. What we believe is important, but even more important is the One in whom we believe.

Saint Paul speaks of this in the passage from the Letter to the Ephesians which we have heard today. God has given us a spirit of wisdom and "enlightened the eyes of our hearts, that we may know what is the hope to which he has called us, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and the immeasurable greatness of his power in us who believe, according to the working of his great power in Christ" (cf. *Eph* 1:17-20). Believing means surrendering ourselves to God and entrusting our destiny to him. Believing means entering into a personal relationship with our Creator and Redeemer in the power of the Holy Spirit, and making this relationship the basis of our whole life.

Today we heard the words of Jesus: "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (*Acts* 1:8). Centuries ago these words reached Poland. They challenged, and continue to challenge all those who say they belong to Christ, who consider his to be the greatest cause. We need to be witnesses of Jesus, who lives in the Church and in human hearts. He has given us a mission. On the day he ascended to heaven, he said to his Apostles: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation ... And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that attended it" (*Mk*

16:15,20). Dear brothers and sisters! When Karol Wojtyła was elected to the See of Peter in order to serve the universal Church, your land became a place of special witness to faith in Jesus Christ. You were called to give this witness before the whole world. This vocation of yours is always needed, and it is perhaps even more urgent than ever, now that the Servant of God has passed from this life. Do not deprive the world of this witness!

Before I return to Rome to continue my ministry, I appeal to all of you in the words spoken here by Pope John Paul II in 1979: “You must be strong, dear brothers and sisters. You must be strong with the strength that comes from faith. You must be strong with the strength of faith. You must be faithful. Today, more than in any other age, you need this strength. You must be strong with the strength of hope, the hope that brings perfect joy in life and which prevents us from ever grieving the Holy Spirit! You must be strong with love, the love which is stronger than death ... You must be strong with the strength of faith, hope and charity, a charity that is conscious, mature and responsible, and which can help us at this moment of our history to carry on the great dialogue with man and the world, a dialogue rooted in dialogue with God himself, with the Father, through the Son in the Holy Spirit, the dialogue of salvation” (*Homily*, 10 June 1979, no. 4).

I too, Benedict XVI, the Successor of Pope John Paul II, am asking you to look up from earth to heaven, to lift your eyes to the One to whom succeeding generations have looked for two thousand years, and in whom they have discovered life’s ultimate meaning. Strengthened by faith in God, devote yourselves fervently to consolidating his Kingdom on earth, a Kingdom of goodness, justice, solidarity and mercy. I ask you to bear courageous witness to the Gospel before today’s world, bringing hope to the poor, the suffering, the lost and abandoned, the desperate and those yearning for freedom, truth and peace. By doing good to your neighbour and showing your concern for the common good, you bear witness that God is love.

I ask you, finally, to share with the other peoples of Europe and the world the treasure of your faith, not least as a way of honouring the memory of your countryman, who, as the Successor of Saint Peter, did this with extraordinary power and effectiveness. And remember me in your prayers and sacrifices, even as you remembered my great Predecessor, so that I can carry out the mission Christ has given me. I ask you to stand firm in your faith! Stand firm in your hope! Stand firm in your love! Amen!

