



# The Holy See

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JOHN PAUL II

## **GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Wednesday 4 July 2001*

1. Today I would like to review with you the stages of the *apostolic pilgrimage in Ukraine* that I was able to complete a few days ago. I thank God for enabling me to make this pilgrimage which was very close to my heart. I wanted it to be *a homage to those people*, to their long and glorious history of faith, witness and martyrdom.

I remember with deep affection my *Brother Bishops of Ukraine*, Eastern and Latin, whom I had the joy of embracing in their land. For the occasion, numerous cardinals and bishops came from other countries to express their spiritual closeness to that sorely tried people. Together with all these Brothers in the Episcopate, I thanked the Lord for the fidelity of the Ukrainian Church. I encouraged the Church to grow in communion and collaboration, because without it there can be no authentic or effective evangelization.

From here, near the tomb of the Apostle Peter, I would like to send another *respectful and fraternal greeting to the Orthodox Church*, which embraces a great number of faithful in Ukraine and which down the centuries has enriched the universal Church with the witness of fidelity to Christ of so many of her children.

I once again warmly thank the *President of the Republic*, Mr Leonid Kuchma, and the other State authorities who welcomed me with great cordiality and planned everything for the total success of this pilgrimage. I was also able to express these sentiments during the meeting with *representatives of the political, cultural, scientific and economic realms*, held at the Presidential Palace on the very evening of my arrival in Kyiv. Moreover, on that occasion, I pointed out the way to freedom on which I hope Ukraine has set out. After a century of the harshest trials, she is now called to consolidate her national and European identity even more, while remaining anchored to

her own Christian roots.

2. *Kyiv is the cradle of Christianity in Eastern Europe.* Ukraine, from which Christian faith and civilization spread to Eastern Europe more than two thousand years ago, is an important "laboratory", where the Eastern and Latin Christian traditions coexist.

It was an unforgettable experience for me in Kyiv and Lviv, to preside at *solemn Eucharistic celebrations* in the *Latin and Ukrainian Byzantine rites*. It was like living the liturgy "*with two lungs*". This is how it was at the end of the first millennium, after the Baptism of Rus' and before the unfortunate division between East and West. We prayed together so that the differences of the traditions will not stand in the way of communion in faith and in ecclesial life. "*Ut unum sint*": The words of Christ's heartfelt prayer rang out eloquently in that "frontier land" whose history records in blood the call to be a "bridge" between the separated brethren.

I was aware of this special ecumenical vocation of Ukraine when I met the *Pan-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations*. It is made up of representatives of the Christian Churches, of the Muslim and Jewish communities and of other religious confessions. It is an institution that promotes spiritual values, fostering a climate of understanding between the different religious communities. And this is particularly important in a country that has had a very bad experience of *the restriction of religious freedom*. How can we forget that, along with many Christians, a considerable number of Jews were victims of Nazi fanaticism and that many Muslims were harshly persecuted by the Soviet regime? Rejecting every form of violence, all believers in God are called to nourish the indispensable religious roots of every authentic humanism.

3. My pilgrimage was intended as *a homage to the holiness* of that land drenched in the blood of martyrs. In Lviv, the cultural and spiritual capital of the Western region of the country and the see of two archbishops, Cardinals Lubomyr Husar, for Greek Catholics, and Marion Jaworski, for Latins, I had the joy of *beatifying 30 sons and daughters of Ukraine, Latins and Greek Catholics*.

*They are: Bishop Mykola Charnetsky and 24 companions, martyrs*, among whom are seven additional bishops, 13 priests, three [religious] sisters, and one layman, heroic witnesses to the faith during the Communist regime; *Emilian Kovch*, a priest and a martyr under the Nazi occupation; Bishop *Theodore Romzha*, zealous pastor, who paid with his life for his unwavering fidelity to the See of Peter; *Jozef Bilczewski*, esteemed professor of theology and exemplary Archbishop of Lviv for Latins; *Zygmunt Horazdowsky*, a priest and a tireless apostle of charity and mercy; *Josaphata Hordashevskya*, a religious, foundress of the Sisters Servants of Mary Immaculate.

May Ukraine draw fresh apostolic enthusiasm from the legacy of holiness left by these exemplary disciples of Christ and by so many others who in some way they represent. Their legacy, especially that of the martyrs, must be firmly safeguarded and communicated to the new

generations.

This is primarily the task of the *priests* and *men and women religious*, who are actively committed to the apostolate. I hope that there will be a rich *flourishing of vocations* to ensure the necessary return to an effective pastoral service of the People of God.

4. In this perspective it is significant that the *meeting with young people* to which I had been looking forward took place between the two beatification ceremonies in Lviv. To young people who are the hope of the Church and of civil society, I pointed out Christ: He alone has "words of eternal life" (Jn 6,68) and leads to real freedom. I symbolically entrusted to "young" Ukraine the *divine law of the Ten Commandments* as an indispensable compass for their journey, alerting them to the idols of false material well-being and the temptations to shirk their own responsibilities.

While the images of this journey and its various stages are vivid in my mind and heart, I pray the Lord to bless the efforts of all those in that beloved nation who are dedicated to the service of the Gospel and the search for the true good of the person, of every person. I am now thinking of the many situations of suffering and difficulty, including that of prisoners, to whom I send my affectionate greetings, assuring them of my special remembrance in prayer.

I entrust the good reactions of each one to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, venerated with tender devotion in the country's many shrines.

Once again I wish the Ukrainian people prosperity and peace, gathering all in a great embrace of warmth and affection. May God heal every wound of that great people and guide it towards a new future of hope!

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Today I am especially pleased to welcome the Sisters from various religious institutes taking part in renewal programmes. Dear Sisters, may this experience strengthen you in your consecration and mission. A special greeting also goes to the participants in the School of Astrophysics of the Vatican Observatory. I wish to assure the members of the Long Tower Choir from Derry that in these days I am praying more intensely for peace in Northern Ireland. Upon all the English speaking visitors and pilgrims, especially from England, Ireland, Scotland, Malaysia, Canada and the United States, I invoke abundant divine blessings.