



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND

HOLY MASS CELEBRATED FOR WOMEN RELIGIOUS OF JASNA GORA

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Czestochowa, 5 June 1979

1. *Dear Sisters,*

I rejoice with all my heart at this meeting, disposed for us by Divine Providence, today at the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Gora. You have come in such great numbers from all over Poland to participate in the pilgrimage of your fellow-countryman whom Christ in his inscrutable mercy has called, as he once called Simon of Bethsaida, and *has commanded him to leave his native land* to take upon himself the succession of the Bishops of Rome. Since he has now been given the grace to return again to these parts, he wishes to speak to you with the same words that he used in speaking to you more than once as successor of Saint Stanislaus at Krakow. Those words now take on a different dimension, a universal dimension.

The theme of "religious vocation" is one of the most beautiful of which the Gospel has spoken and continues to speak to us. The theme was given a particular incarnation in Mary, who said of herself: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). I think that these words have been echoed in the depths of the religious vocation and profession of each one of you.

2. While this opportunity to speak to you is being presented to me today, the splendid chapters of the Church's teaching in the last Council come to my mind, as do the very numerous documents of the last Popes.

I would like however, on the basis of all this wealth of teaching by the Church, to refer to *some modest statements made by myself*. I do so because these statements were echoes of my very numerous past meetings with religious in Poland. These meetings, as a "resource" of my personal experience, went with me to Rome. It will therefore be perhaps easier for you to find yourselves in those words, for, in spite of having been addressed in other surroundings, they speak in a way of you—of the Polish Sisters and of the *Polish religious families*.

3. Soon after my new ministry began I had the good fortune to meet almost twenty thousand *Sisters from the whole of Rome*. Here is a part of the talk that I gave them on that occasion:

Your "vocation is a special treasure of the Church, which can never cease to pray that the Spirit of Jesus Christ will bring forth religious vocations in souls. They are, in fact, both for the community of the People of God, and for the world, a living sign of the future life: a sign which, at the same time, is rooted (also by means of your religious habit) in the everyday life of the Church and of society, and permeates its most delicate tissues...

"(Your presence) must be a visible sign of the Gospel for all. It must also be the source of a particular apostolate. This apostolate is so varied and rich that it is even difficult for me to list here all its forms, its fields, its orientations. It is united with the specific charism of every Congregation, with its apostolic spirit, which the Church and the Holy See approve with joy, seeing in it the expression of the vitality of the Mystical Body of Christ! This apostolate is usually discreet, hidden, near to the human being, and so is more suited to a woman's soul, sensitive to her neighbour, and hence called to the task of a sister and mother.

"It is precisely this vocation which is at the very 'heart' of your religious being. As Bishop of Rome I beg you: be spiritually mothers and sisters for all the people of this Church which Jesus, in his ineffable mercy and grace, has wished to entrust to me" (*Address to Women Religious of the Diocese of Rome*, 10 November 1978, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 November 1978, page 16).

4. On 24 November last I had the occasion to meet the large *group of Superiors General* gathered in Rome under the leadership of the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes. I would like to repeat some phrases from the address I gave on that occasion.

"The religious vocation...belongs to that spiritual fullness which the Spirit himself—the Spirit of Christ—brings forth and moulds in the People of God. Without religious orders, without 'consecrated' life, by means of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the Church would not be fully herself... Your houses must be, above all, centres of prayer, meditation and dialogue—personal and of the whole community—with him who is and must remain the first and principal interlocutor in the industrious succession of your days. If you are able to nourish this 'climate' of intense and loving community with God, it will be possible for you to carry forward,

without traumatic tensions or dangerous confusion, that renewal of life and discipline, to which the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council committed you" (*Address to Superiors General of Men's Religious Orders*, 24 November 1978, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 November 1978, pages 12).

5. Finally, Mexico. The meeting I had in that country's capital, remains indelibly inscribed in my memory and my heart. It could not be otherwise, since Sisters always create in these meetings a particularly cordial atmosphere and receive with joy the words spoken to them. Here then are some thoughts from *the meeting in Mexico*:

"Your vocation is one that deserves the highest esteem on the part of the Pope and of the Church, today no less than yesterday. For this reason I wish to express my joyful confidence in you and to encourage you not to lose heart on the way that you have undertaken and which is worth continuing on with fresh spirit and enthusiasm... What a lot you can do today for the Church and for humanity! They are waiting for your generous gift, the giving of your free hearts, so that your hearts may broaden their unsuspected potentialities for love in a world that is losing the capacity for altruism, for self-sacrificing and disinterested love. Remember, in fact, that you are mystical brides of Christ and of Christ crucified" (*Meeting with the Women Religious of Mexico*, 27 January 1979, AAS 1979, p. 177).

Now let my thoughts and yours turn once again in this place to *Our Lady of Jasna Gora, who is the source of living inspiration for each one of you*. Let each one of you, as she hears the words spoken at Nazareth, repeat with Mary: "Behold, I am handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). These words contain in a way the prototype of every religious profession, the profession by which each one of you embraces with her whole being the mystery of the grace transmitted to her in her religious vocation. Each one of you, like Mary, chooses Jesus, the Divine Spouse. By fulfilling her vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, she wishes to live for him, for love of him. Through these vows each one of you wishes to give witness to the eternal life that Christ has brought us in his Cross and Resurrection.

Dear Sisters, *this living sign* that each one of you constitutes in the midst of humanity is beyond price. Embracing with faith, hope and charity your Divine Spouse, you embrace him in the many people you serve: in the sick, the old, the crippled, the handicapped, people of whom nobody but you is capable of taking care, because this demands a truly heroic sacrifice. Where else do you find Christ? In the children, in young people receiving catechetical instruction, in pastoral service with the priests. You will find him in the simplest service as well as in the tasks that at times demand deep preparation and culture. You will find him everywhere, like the bride of the Song of Solomon: "I found him whom my soul loves" (Song 3:4).

May Poland ever rejoice, in your evangelical witness. Let there be no want of warm hearts that bring evangelical love to their neighbour. As for you, rejoice always with the joy of your vocation, even when you will have to endure inward or outward suffering or darkness.

Pope John Paul II wishes to pray with you for all this during this Holy Sacrifice.

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