



# The Holy See

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## APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (APRIL 25-27, 1997)

### **HOMILY OF THE HOLY FATHER DURING MASS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE**

*Saturday, 26 April 1997*

1. *Veni Creator Spiritus!* The readings which we have listened to, dear young people, speak of the *outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. According to the Gospel of John, this took place first of all on the very day of the Resurrection. Christ appears in the Upper Room where the disciples have shut themselves in and, after revealing himself to them, says this to them: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (Jn 20:22-23) What takes place at *Pentecost*, fifty days after the Resurrection, will be the confirmation and public manifestation of this outpouring on the evening of Easter Day. *The Apostles together with the Mother of Jesus await this moment gathered in prayer*, as the first reading has reminded us. (cf. Acts 1:13-14). They know that that event will bring a change in their lives and mission. And in effect, the experience of Pentecost marks *the beginning of the mission of the Church*, which from that moment publicly manifests herself and begins to proclaim the Gospel. The Church knows that she was born by the power of the Holy Spirit: just as Christ was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, so too the Church has at her beginning the life-giving power of the Spirit. And it is for this reason that *she does not cease to pray*: "*Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth*" (cf. Psalm 104:30). 2. Ever since the day of Pentecost the work of salvation accomplished by Christ has found, through the Church, ever new ways of spreading throughout the world. *In the ninth century, the Gospel, proclaimed by the Holy Brothers from Salonika, Cyril and Methodius, reached your land*, Great Moravia, and also the neighbouring Slav nations, finding there fertile soil. Your ancestors accepted Christianity from the "Apostles to the Slavs" and became apostles themselves. Thus for example the baptism of Poland is linked to the apostolic activity of the neighbouring Czechs. From Bohemia too comes *Saint Adalbert*, of the great Bohemian stock of the Slavniks, whose cradle was here, in the territory of the Diocese of Hradec Králové, where we are meeting. With today's Celebration *we thank God, on the occasion of the millennium of Saint Adalbert*, for his mission and for the witness which he bore to Christ even to the point of sacrificing his life. 3. Dear young people of the Dioceses of the Czech Republic! Young friends from other countries of Europe! Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood who have accompanied them here! Men and women religious, and all of you dear faithful people

here present! *I cordially greet you* in this marvellous square, over which rises the Cathedral, the only one dedicated to the Holy Spirit, as dear Bishop Karel Otčenášek of this Diocese loves to remind people; and with our long-standing friendship which he knows so well I thank him for the cordial words he has addressed to me. I wish to offer a special word of thanks also to the citizens of Hradec Králové for the great sense of hospitality which they have shown me on this occasion, giving up their places in the middle of the square to the young people from the various parts of the country who have come for this meeting dedicated to them. To all the faithful of the Diocese I owe a word of special appreciation for the generosity with which they have contributed, often at the cost of notable sacrifices, to the construction of the "Centre for New Evangelization and Inculturation" promoted by the Bishops. I am certain that they will also continue to support its effective functioning. But let us come back to you, the young people. In the context of the celebrations in honour of Saint Adalbert, *this is your day*, dear young people, and I am happy to see you here in such great numbers. Two years ago, in *May 1995*, I was with many of you at *Svatý Kopeček*. I still remember with joy that meeting, at which I commented on the "Our Father": one of the nicest gatherings of young people I have ever taken part in. A few months later there was the pilgrimage of young people to Loreto, where many of you came with your Bishops. Your representatives also took part in the world meetings in Denver and Manila. I greet you all with affection. A special thought goes to those who have not been able to be here with us. Particularly to you, young people who are ill and who are offering up your sufferings for your neighbour. And a special thought to you, young cloistered sisters who have chosen the contemplative life and pray so much for the people of your own age.<sup>4</sup> "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (Jn 20:21). Adalbert heard these words as though addressed to him personally. *As the first Bishop of Prague* of Bohemian blood, at the end of the first millennium, he was *heir to the traditions of holiness of the martyrs* who had gone before him, especially *Ludmilla* and *Wenceslaus*. At the same time he looked towards the future: he spared no effort for the spiritual rebirth of Prague and the homeland, sustained by ardent faith in Christ. *He fought for truth*. He did not accept that the spirit of the time should stifle truth. This is what he lived for, and he was determined not to give way to any pressure from the society of his time. On the threshold of the third millennium, of which you young people will be the first protagonists, *Saint Adalbert stands before you as a dauntless witness to faith*. Looking to him you will be able to find inspiration and light to meet with courage the challenges of the present moment. He teaches you *openness to others* through the generous gift of yourselves. You have great aspirations to freedom and fullness of life: none of this can be attained by a selfish search after personal advantage, but only in *openness to love*. The vocation to love is your fundamental vocation. Jesus is calling you to walk this path: say yes to him, as Saint Adalbert did. By overcoming the stifling limits of selfishness through the power of love of Christ, you will be the builders of the new Europe and of tomorrow's world.<sup>5</sup> "*Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth*". From the first Christian community gathered in the Upper Room we have received this invocation inspired by the Psalm, and today I have the joy of repeating it with you young people, on the threshold of the third millennium. You are living in a situation that, under certain aspects, is like the situation of the first Christians. The world around them did not know the Gospel. But they did not lose their way. Once they received the gift of the Holy Spirit, they kept close to the Apostles, with fraternal love for one another. They knew that they were the new leaven which the declining Roman world needed. United like this in love they overcame all resistance. You too be like them! *Be Church*, to bring to today's world the joyful news of the Gospel. Saint Adalbert was *a wholehearted servant of the Church*. You too be the same! The Church needs you! After forty years of attempts to silence her, she is experiencing here among you a wonderful revival, even in the midst of many difficulties. She is counting on your fresh energies, on the contribution of your intelligence and enthusiasm. Have confidence in the Church, just as she has confidence in you!<sup>6</sup> "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth". The Church which received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost brings the Spirit to the men and women of every age. She brings the Spirit also to you through her sacraments. These

recall the fundamental stages of your lives: you were *baptized* in water and the Spirit, and many of you have already received *Confirmation*, the sacrament by which the Spirit enables you to be and commits you to being witnesses of Christ. Ask the Holy Spirit to make his presence felt in your lives. *For me, it was my father who in a special way made me aware of the activity of the Holy Spirit*, precisely when I was your age. If I found myself in some difficulty, he would suggest that I pray to the Holy Spirit; and this teaching of his has shown me the path which I have followed to this day. I speak to you about this because you are young, as I was then. And I speak to you about it on the basis of many years of life, lived also in difficult times.<sup>7</sup> Let us return to the Upper Room. Jesus breathes on the Apostles and says to them: "*Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained*" (Jn 20:22-23). Dear young people, I want these words especially to remain in you: in your minds and in your hearts. The Holy Spirit is given as *the source of strength to conquer sin*. Only God has the power to forgive sins, because he alone sees right into the human person and can measure human responsibility completely. Sin remains, in its psychological depth, a secret which God alone has the power to enter, in order to say to a person the efficacious words: "Your sins are forgiven you, you are pardoned" (cf. Mt 9:2,5; Mk 2:5,9; Lk 5:20,23). Dear friends, I want you to remember this. There are, as we know, so-called "social sins", but in the end every sin *depends on the responsibility of an actual person*. This actual person fights against sin and either beats it or is beaten by it. The actual person, if he or she is beaten by sin, suffers. Yes, remorse of the conscience is a form of suffering. It cannot be got rid of. Sooner or later we have to seek forgiveness. If the evil which we have done involves other people, we have to ask their forgiveness too; but *for the guilt to be truly remitted, we always have to receive forgiveness from God*. In the *Sacrament of Reconciliation* Christ has given us a great gift. If we use it faithfully, it becomes an inexhaustible source of new life. Do not forget this! Draw with delight from this spring grace, healing, joy and peace, so as to share in the very life of Christ, who is the life of the Father given to us in the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Dear friends! *To you I entrust the task of making a decisive contribution to the evangelization of your country*. Take Christ into the third millennium. Trust him! His promise spans the centuries: "Whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel's will save it" (Mk 8:35). Do not be afraid! Life with Christ is a wonderful adventure. He alone can give full meaning to life, he alone is the centre of history. Live by him! With Mary! With your Saints! Ask Christ for the gift of the Spirit. For it is precisely he, the Spirit, the Divine Person who has the task of healing, purifying, sanctifying men's consciences, and thus renewing the face of the earth. With all my heart I want this to happen to you, to your nation, to all who share in the thousand year-old heritage of Saint Adalbert, and to the people of the whole world. May the words proclaimed so powerfully by the Church in today's Liturgy be fulfilled in you: *Veni Sancte Spiritus, Come, Holy Spirit!* In You is the source of light and life; in You the flame of eternal love; in You the secret of the hope that never disappoints. Come, Holy Spirit! Amen.