



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II*Elblag*

Sunday, 6 June 1999

1. *“We honour your Heart, O Jesus . . .”*

I thank Divine Providence that together with all of you here present I am able to give praise and glory to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the most perfect revelation of the paternal love of God. I am glad that the devout practice of reciting or singing the Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus every day during the month of June is very much alive in Poland and continues to be followed.

I greet everyone gathered here this Sunday afternoon. In a special way I greet Bishop Andrzej, Pastor of this Diocese, his Auxiliary Bishop and the representatives of the Polish Bishops, the priests, consecrated men and women and all the People of God. I extend a cordial welcome to the pilgrims from Russia, from the District of Kaliningrad, who are present here with their Archbishop, Tadeusz. I also greet the faithful of the Greek Catholic Church. And I greet all the members of the young Church in Elblag, which is particularly linked to the figure of Saint Adalbert. Not far from here, according to tradition, he gave his life for Christ. In the course of history, the death of this martyr has produced in this land abundant fruits of holiness. In this place I wish to remember Blessed Dorota of Matowy, wife and mother of nine children, and also the Servant of God Regina Protmann, foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Catherine, whom — God-willing — the Church will raise to the glory of the altars during this pilgrimage through my ministry in Warsaw. Another one to be enrolled in the ranks of the Blessed will be a son of this land, Father Wladyslaw Demski, who gave his life in the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, publicly defending the cross which was sacrilegiously profaned by the executioners. You have received this magnificent spiritual heritage and you must care for it, develop it and build the future of this land and of the Church in Elblag on the solid foundation of faith and religious life.

2. *“Heart of Jesus, fount of life and holiness, have mercy on us”*.

Thus we invoke Jesus in the Litany. Everything that God wanted to tell us about himself and about his love he placed in the Heart of Jesus, and by means of that Heart he has told us everything. We find ourselves before an inscrutable mystery. In Jesus' Heart we read the eternal divine plan of the world's salvation. It is a plan of love.

We have come here today to contemplate the love of the Lord Jesus, his goodness which is compassionate towards every person; to contemplate his Heart blazing with love for the Father, in the fulness of the Holy Spirit. Christ loves us and reveals his Heart to us as the fount of life and holiness, the source of our redemption. In order to have a deeper understanding of this invocation we must turn to Jesus' meeting with the Samaritan woman in the little town of Sicar, at the well which had been there since the time of the Patriarch Jacob. She had come to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink", and she answered him: "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" She then received Jesus' response: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink', you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water . . . the water that I shall give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (cf. *Jn* 4:1-14).

Jesus is the source; it is from him that divine life in man finds its beginning. To have this life, we need only approach him and remain in him. And what is this life if not the beginning of human holiness, the holiness which is in God and which man can reach with the help of grace? All of us wish to drink from the divine Heart, which is the source of life and holiness.

3. *"Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times" (Ps 106:3).*

Brothers and Sisters, meditating on God's love, revealed in the Heart of his Son, requires a consistent response on our part. We have not been called only to contemplate the mystery of Christ's love, but take part in it. Christ says: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (*Jn* 14:15). He thus places before us a great calling and at the same time a condition: if you want to love me, keep my commandments, keep God's holy law, walk in the way that I have shown you.

God's will is that we keep the commandments, that is, the law of God given to Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses. Given to all people everywhere. We know the commandments. Many of you repeat them everyday in prayer. That is a very good and devout practice. Let us repeat them now, as they are found in the Book of Exodus, to confirm and renew what we remember:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house.

You shall not covet your neighbour's wife" (cf. *Ex 20:2-17*).

This is the foundation of the morality given to man by the Creator: the Decalogue, the ten commandments of God pronounced resolutely on Mount Sinai and confirmed by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, in the context of the eight Beatitudes. The Creator, who at the same time is the supreme law-giver, has inscribed on the human heart the whole order of truth. This order determines what is good, provides a foundation for the moral order and constitutes the basis of the dignity of man created in God's image. The commandments were given for the good of mankind, for man's personal good and the good of family and society. They are truly the way for all people. The material order by itself is not enough. It must be completed and enriched by the supernatural order. Thanks to this, life takes on a new meaning and man is made better. Life, in fact, needs the power that comes from divine, supernatural values; only then does it take on its full splendour.

Christ confirmed this law of the Old Covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount he spoke clearly to his hearers: "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them" (*Mt 5:17*). Christ came to fulfil the law, above all to give it its proper content and meaning, and to show its full significance and depth: the law is perfect when it is pervaded by love of God and love of neighbour. It is love that determines man's moral perfection and his likeness to God. "He who has my commandments and keeps them", says Christ, "he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him" (*Jn 14:21*). Today's liturgical celebration dedicated to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus reminds us of God's love, for which man yearns intensely. It shows us that the practical response to this love is the keeping of God's commandments in our daily lives. God does not intend that they should grow dim in our memory but that they should remain forever impressed on people's consciences so that, knowing and keeping the commandments, they "might have eternal life".

4. "*Happy are they who practise righteousness*".

The Psalmist refers thus to those who follow the path of the commandments and keep them to the end (cf. *Ps 119:32-33*). Keeping the divine law, in fact, is the basis for obtaining the gift of eternal life, that is, the happiness that never ends. To the question of the rich young man, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" (*Mt 19:16*), Jesus responds: "If you would enter life, keep the commandments" (*Mt 19:17*). This response by Jesus is particularly important in our modern reality, in which many people live as though there were no God. The temptation to organize the world and one's own life without God or even in opposition to God, without his commandments and without the Gospel, is a very real temptation and threatens us too. When

human life and the world are built without God, they will eventually turn against man himself. Breaking the divine commandments, abandoning the path traced out for us by God, means falling into the slavery of sin, and “the wages of sin is death” (*Rom 6:23*).

We find ourselves face to face with the reality of sin. Sin is an offence against God, it is being disobedient to him, to his law, to the moral norms which God has given to man, inscribing them on the human heart, confirming and perfecting them by Revelation. Sin pits itself against God’s love for us and turns our hearts away from him. Sin is “love of self carried to the point of contempt for God”, as Saint Augustine put it (*De Civitate Dei*, 14, 28). Sin is a great evil in all its many dimensions. Starting with original sin, to the personal sins committed by each person, to social sins, the sins which weigh heavily on the history of the entire human family.

We must be constantly aware of this great evil, we must constantly cultivate the subtle sensitivity and clear consciousness of the seeds of death contained in sin. This is what is commonly known as the sense of sin. Its source is to be found in man’s moral conscience; it is linked to the knowledge of God, to the experience of union with the Creator, Lord and Father. The more profound this awareness of union with God — strengthened by a person’s sacramental life and by sincere prayer — the clearer the sense of sin is. The reality of God lays open and sheds light on the mystery of man. We must do all that we can to make our consciences more sensitive, and to guard them from becoming deformed or imperceptive.

We see what great tasks God has put before us. We must truly form our humanity in the image and likeness of God, to become people who love the law of God and want to live according to it. The Psalmist cries out: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (*Ps 51:1-2*). Is this not for us a touching example of the man who presents himself repentant before God? He desires *metanoia* for his own heart, so that he may become a new creature, different, transformed by God’s power.

Saint Adalbert stands before us. We feel his presence here because in this land he gave his life for Christ. For a thousand years he has been telling us, by the witness of his martyrdom, that holiness is attained by sacrifice, that there is no room here for compromise, that we must be faithful to the end, that we must have the courage to protect the image of God in our souls even if it means paying the ultimate price. His martyr’s death is a reminder to all that by dying to evil and sin they will enable the new man to come to birth in themselves, the man of God who keeps the Lord’s commandments.

5. Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us contemplate the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is the source of life, since by means of it victory over death was achieved. It is also the source of holiness, since in it sin — the enemy of man’s spiritual development — is defeated. The Heart of the Lord Jesus is the starting-point of the holiness of each one of us. From the Heart of the Lord Jesus let us learn

the love of God and understanding of the mystery of sin — *mysterium iniquitatis*.

Let us make acts of reparation to the Divine Heart for the sins committed by us and by our fellow men. Let us make reparation for rejecting God's goodness and love.

Let us draw close each day to this fount from which flow springs of living water. Let us cry out with the Samaritan woman "Give us this water", for it wells up to eternal life.

Heart of Jesus, burning flame of love,
Heart of Jesus, fount of life and holiness,
Heart of Jesus, expiation for our sins
— have mercy on us. Amen.