



# The Holy See

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APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

## CLOSING OF THE SECOND PLENARY SYNOD

**HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II** *Warsaw*

*Friday, 11 June 1999* 1. "Let me go into the field and glean among the ears of grain" (Ruth 2:2). The liturgy of today puts before us the image of reaping. The First Reading shows us Ruth the Moabitess going into the field of the rich man Booz to gather up the gleanings after the reapers. Although the mode of reaping in Israel was probably different from what is done in Poland, there was still some similarity, and we can therefore make a comparison with our own experience. With the image of a Polish harvest before our eyes, we think of the Second Plenary Synod, which concludes today in the Cathedral of Warsaw. It too is a kind of reaping. Through the years of the Synod's work, an attempt has been made to gather up all that has been produced in the soil of the Church in Poland during the last decades of the century. Through the Synod's work, you have sought to put all this together. Above all you have tried to observe, to identify, to evaluate and to draw conclusions. You bring all of that today and present it as an offering to God, as the reapers do after the harvest, bringing the sheaves of cut grain, trusting fully that what they have reaped will be useful — like bread that is made from grain, in the hope that future generations will be nourished by it.<sup>2</sup> From the first, the Polish Church has seen Synods as an effective means for the reform and renewal of Christian life, following a practice adopted from apostolic times of joint reflection on important and difficult problems. After the ancient period of development of synods in the Church, the Council of Trent gave the practice new impetus. With their decrees, the Synods which took place after the Council of Trent became an important means for deepening the faith and for indicating the way of the Gospel for all generations of the People of God in our homeland. Much credit here goes to the Archbishops of Gniezno, who convoked the various provincial synods: Archbishops Karnkowski, Maciejowski, Gembicki, Wezyk, and Lubienski. They were true proponents of the conciliar reform, which saw synods as an effective method of renewal. In our own century, synod activity increased after Poland regained independence. Thus in 1936 there was the Plenary Synod for all five Polish Metropolitan Sees, and many diocesan synods took place as well. These synods sought to give new life to the religious life of the faithful after the long years of lost independence, and to unify Church law. The praiseworthy practice of convoking synods continued after the Second World War. Especially after the Second Vatican Council, synods of a pastoral nature began to be held. Their deliberations were linked with the teaching and enactments of the Council, which involved the entire community of the Church. This brief history allows us to see how, through these synods, successive generations sought for themselves new ways of living the Christian life, making a precious contribution to the development and activity of the Church. Eight years ago, with all the Polish Bishops in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Prague, I was able to pray that the Second Plenary Synod would be blessed. I said then: "Your Synod begins its work after the Second Vatican Council (which was the Council of our century). At the same time, it takes place on the

threshold of the third millennium after Christ. These circumstances alone determine the character of the Plenary Synod and its tasks. It is bound to reflect all the new things which arose in the Second Vatican Council. It is also bound to highlight all the “signs of the times” which are present in our century as it draws to a close” (8 June 1991).<sup>3</sup> I know that the most important themes of the Council have been part of the Synod’s work, in which more than six thousand Study Groups have taken part. The approved documents express a common concern for the renewal of Christian life in the Polish Church in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council and also point the way for future work. In the Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, I wrote that the best preparation for the Jubilee of the Year 2000 is to apply as faithfully as possible, in the lives of individuals and in the whole Church, the teaching of Vatican II (cf. No. 20). At the same time I pointed out how necessary it was to undertake a spiritual discernment concerning the “reception given to the Council, this great gift of the Spirit to the Church as the end of the second millennium” (No. 36). I am glad that the Second Plenary Synod has taken on this task, seeking to reread the teaching of the Council and to assimilate its enactments more faithfully, in keeping with the motto chosen for the Synod: “*With the Message of the Council into the Third Millennium*”. As a divine and human reality immersed in time, the Church needs continuous renewal in order to become more and more like her Founder. Such a renewal is first of all the work of the Holy Spirit, who “dwells in the Church and with the power of the Gospel keeps her ever young and leads her to perfect union with Christ” (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 4). The Second Vatican Council has played an enormous role in this process of renewal of the Church, which requires the cooperation of all her members. During its sessions, the Church reflected deeply upon herself and upon her relations with the world of today. At the same time, she indicated the path to follow in order to fulfil the mandate and mission received from Christ. With great firmness, the Council stressed that all members of the Church are responsible for her well-being: Bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay people. The variety of charisms and tasks, conferred by the Holy Spirit upon clergy and laity, must help to build community life in the Church at the various levels — parish, diocesan, national and international.<sup>4</sup> The formation of a new society based upon respect for human rights, truth and freedom, requires from all the daughters and sons of the Church an awareness that can be the starting-point for wider responsibility in the Church. It is good that in a situation such as this the Plenary Synod recognized that its fundamental task was to work for the rebuilding and deepening of this awareness in the Church, among both laity and clergy. The long period of struggle against the Communist totalitarian system weakened the religious sense in many people, encouraging the tendency to reduce the Church to the level of merely a human institution and to relegate religion to the private realm. The attempt was made to weaken the Church in her identity as a community gathered around Christ giving public witness to the faith which she professes. Thanks to the work of the Synod, the Church is called to grow stronger as a community of believers, and this can be done chiefly through a well informed sharing in the Church’s life, in accordance with the charism proper to each person’s state of life and with the principle of subsidiarity. The Synod, therefore, will accomplish its task in so far as it succeeds in reviving in the hearts of all – clergy and laity – the sense of responsibility for the Church and the desire to work together for the realization of the Church’s saving mission. Yet the message left to us by the Second Vatican Council is much broader. It involves not only the truth of the Church as a visible community of faith, hope and charity, but also her relationship with the world around us. Evangelization today requires an apostolic dynamism which does not shut itself off from the problems of the world. I thank Almighty God for every inspiration, for every teaching which through the Synod has touched the minds and hearts of those who took part in it, enabling them to stand before the world as witnesses to the Gospel. The Polish Plenary Synod is part of the preparation of the entire People of God for the Year 2000, in the series of Synods being held in the Church at this time. This includes the Ordinary and Extraordinary Synods as well as the continental, regional, national and diocesan Synods. The Second Plenary Synod and its implementation attempt to meet the great challenge which the Church in Poland faces today. This challenge is the need for a new

evangelization, that is, accomplishing the saving work of God which requires new ways of spreading the Gospel of Christ.<sup>5</sup> I wish to thank all those who helped to prepare for this Synod and who worked the whole time of its duration. I thank the Cardinal Primate, the Synod President, the Bishops, the priests and the lay people who have worked on the Permanent Commission and on the Synod Secretariat. I thank especially all those involved in the Synod Groups and who by prayer, reflection and concrete apostolic initiatives have shaped this Synod. May God reward you for your work and your zeal, by which you have shown how much you love the Church and how much you have her future at heart.<sup>6</sup> *“The Kingdom of God is like a man who scattered seed on the ground” (Mk 4:26)*. Today’s Gospel speaks of the growth of the Kingdom of God. It is like a seed. It does not matter whether the man “should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. The earth produces of itself first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. But when the grain is ripe, at once he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mk 4:27-29). As we close the Second Plenary Synod, Christ shows us what its purpose was from the start and what must be its purpose in the future. It has helped to spread the Kingdom of God. The words of the Gospel reveal how this Kingdom grows in human history, in the history of nations and societies. It grows organically. From a tiny beginning, like a mustard seed, it eventually becomes a great tree. I sincerely trust that this will be the case for this Second Plenary Synod and for the many other initiatives of the Church in our land. Divine Providence has surely decreed that the closure of the Synod should fall on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, instituted by the Apostolic See in the eighteenth century following insistent requests from the Polish Bishops. Today the whole Church ponders and venerates in a special way the ineffable love of God, which found its human expression in the Saviour’s heart pierced by the centurion’s lance. Today we also recall the hundredth anniversary of the consecration of the entire human race to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a great event in the Church which contributed to the development of the devotion and produced saving fruits of holiness and apostolic zeal. “God is love” (Jn 4:8) and Christianity is the religion of love. While other systems of thought and action seek to construct the human world on the basis of wealth, power, force, science or pleasure, the Church proclaims love. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is precisely the image of this infinite and merciful love which the heavenly Father has poured out upon the world through his Son, Jesus Christ. The goal of the new evangelization is to lead people to encounter this love. Only love, revealed by the Heart of Christ, can transform the human heart and open it to the whole world, making the world more human and more divine. A hundred years ago, Pope Leo XIII wrote that in the Heart of Jesus “we need to place all our hope. In him we must seek and from him we must expect the salvation of all people” (*Annum Sacrum*, 6). I too exhort you to renew and nurture devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To this “Fount of life and holiness” draw individuals, families, parish communities, and all elements of the Church that they may obtain from him “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8). Only those who are “rooted and grounded in love” (*ibid.*, 3:17) can oppose the civilization of death and, upon the ruins of hatred, contempt and force, build a civilization which springs from the Heart of the Saviour. To conclude my meeting with you on this Solemnity so loved by all the Church I entrust the entire work of the Second Plenary Synod, its implementation and its outcome in Poland to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of his Mother, who in speaking her *fiat* was totally united to the redeeming sacrifice of her Son.