



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II IN THE BASILICA OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

Assisi, Italy

Sunday, 5 November 1978

Here I am in Assisi on this day that I have wished to dedicate specially to the Patron Saints of this country, Italy; a country to which God has called me in order that I may serve as St Peter's successor. Since I was not born in this land, I feel more than ever the need of a spiritual "birth" in it. And therefore, on this Sunday, I come as a pilgrim to Assisi, at the feet of St Francis, the Poverello, who wrote Christ's gospel in incisive characters in the hearts of the men of his time. We cannot be surprised that his fellow citizens have wished to see in him the Patron Saint of Italy. The Pope, who, owing to his mission, must have before his eyes the whole universal Church, the bride of Christ, in the various parts of the globe, particularly needs the help of the Patron Saint of Italy in his See in Rome; he needs the intercession of St Francis of Assisi. And so he arrives here today. He comes to visit this city, which is always a witness to the marvellous divine adventure that took place between the end of the twelfth and the beginning of the thirteenth century. It is a witness to that surprising holiness that passed here like a great breath of the Spirit. A breath in which St Francis of Assisi participated, as well as his spiritual sister St Clare and so many other saints born from their evangelical spirituality. The Franciscan message spread far beyond the frontiers of Italy, and very soon it also reached Polish soil, from where I come. And it still operates there with abundant fruits, as, moreover, in other countries of the world and in other continents. I will tell you that, as Archbishop of Krakow, I lived near a very ancient Franciscan church, and from time to time I went there to pray, to make the "Via Crucis" and to visit the chapel of Our Lady of Sorrows. Unforgettable moments for me! One cannot fail to mention here that it was just from this magnificent trunk of Franciscan spirituality that the blessed Maximilian Kolbe came, a special patron in our difficult times. I cannot pass over in silence the fact that just here, in Assisi, in this Basilica, in the year 1253, Pope Innocent IV proclaimed saint the Bishop of Krakow, the Martyr Stanislaus, now the Patron Saint of Poland, whose unworthy successor I was until a short time ago. Today, therefore, setting foot here for the first time as Pope, at the sources of this great breath of the Spirit, of this marvellous revival of the Church and of Christianity in the thirteenth century, linked with the figure of St Francis of Assisi, my heart opens to our Patron Saint and cries: You, who brought Christ so close to your age, help us to bring Christ close to our age, to our difficult and critical times. Help us! These times are waiting for Christ with great anxiety, although many men of our age are not aware of it. We are approaching the year A.D. 2000. Will they not be times that will prepare us for a rebirth of Christ, for a new Coming? Every day, we express in the eucharistic prayer our expectation, addressed to him alone, our Redeemer and Saviour, to him who is the fulfilment of the history of man and of the world. Help us, St Francis of Assisi, to bring Christ closer to the

Church and to the world of today. You, who bore in your heart the vicissitudes of your contemporaries, help us, with our heart close to the Redeemer's heart, to embrace the events of the men of our time. The difficult social, economic and political problems, the problems of culture and contemporary civilization, all the sufferings of the man of today, his doubts, his denials his disorders, his tensions, his complexes, his worries... Help us to express all this in the simple and fruitful language of the Gospel. Help us to solve everything in an evangelical key, in order that Christ himself may be "the Way — the Truth — the Life" for modern man. This is asked of you, holy son of the Church, son of the Italian land, by Pope John Paul II, son of the Polish land. And he hopes that you will not refuse him it, that you will help him. You have always been kind and you have always hastened to bring help to all those who appealed to you. I heartily thank His Eminence Cardinal Silvio Oddi, Pontifical Delegate for the Basilica of St Francis of Assisi, and Bishop Dino Tomassini of Assisi, and all the Archbishops and Bishops of the pastoral Region of Umbria, with the priests of the various dioceses. A greeting and special thanks to the Ministers General of the four Franciscan Families, to the Community of the Basilica of St Francis, to all Franciscans, and to all religious Families — men and women Religious — inspired by the Rule and the life-style of St Francis of Assisi. I tell you what I feel deep down in my heart: The Pope is grateful to you for your faithfulness to your Franciscan vocation. The Pope is grateful to you for your apostolic activity and evangelical mission. The Pope thanks you for your prayers for him and according to his intentions. The Pope assures you that he remembers you in his prayers. Serve the Lord joyfully. Be servants of his people gladly, because St Francis wished you to be joyful servants of mankind, capable of lighting everywhere the lamp of hope, trust, and optimism which has its source in the Lord himself. May your, our, common Patron Saint, St Francis of Assisi, be an example to you today and always! I then extend my cordial and respectful greeting to the civil Authorities present here: to the Lord Mayor of Assisi, to Members of the City Council and Board, to the civil Authorities of the Umbrian Region and the Province of Perugia, to the Members of Parliament of the Region. Thank you! Thank you for your presence, thank you for having wished to join in common prayer at the tomb of St Francis! To the sentiments of my deep gratitude I join my most fervent wishes of happiness, prosperity and progress for their persons and for the whole beloved population of Umbria. From Assisi, from this sacred place so dear to all Italians, a heartfelt greeting and a special blessing for the whole of Italy, for all Italians spiritually present at this meeting of ours for prayer, for the whole Italian people. I wish to address an affectionate thought, and a special memory to Italian emigrants, to Italians scattered in every continent of the globe. I know that in their homes, often far from Assisi and Italy, there is always a souvenir brought from Italy and connected with Assisi, an image of St Francis, and in their hearts a sincere and active devotion towards the Poor Man of Assisi. And then a greeting to all those who have the honour of being called "Francis", finding in our Patron Saint an example of life, a heavenly protector, a spiritual guide, an inner inspiration! For everyone, in Assisi, a special prayer of the Pope! And to everyone from Assisi, a special Apostolic Blessing! © Copyright 1978 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana