



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND

WELCOMING CEREMONY IN GNIEZNO

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Gniezno, 3 June 1979

Your Eminence, beloved Primate of Poland,

1. "May God reward" the words of greeting addressed to me here, on the way that leads to Gniezno. Here are the field and the wide meadows where we meet to begin our pilgrimage. This pilgrimage must bring us to Gniezno, and then from Gniezno—through Jasna Gora—to Krakow. This is like the route of the history of the nation and also the route of our Patrons: Adalbert and Stanislaus, united in solicitude for the Christian patrimony of this land, next to the Mother of God at Jasna Gora.

Here, in these wide meadows I greet with veneration the *nest of the Piasts*, the origin of the history of our motherland and the *cradle of the Church*, in which our ancestors were united, through the bond of faith, with the Father, with the Son, and with the Holy Spirit.

I greet this bond! I greet it with great veneration since it goes back to the very beginnings of history, and after a thousand years it continues to be intact. And therefore I greet here, together with the illustrious Primate of Poland, also the Metropolitan Archbishop of Poznan and the Bishops of Szczecin-Kamien, Koszalin-Kolobrzeg, Gdansk, Pelplin and Wloclawek, with the Auxiliary Bishops of these sees. I greet the clergy of all the dioceses belonging to the metropolitan community of Gniezno of the Primate. I greet the religious families of men and women. I greet all those who have assembled here in such great numbers. All together we are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people he claims for his own" (1 Pt 2:9). All together we form also "*the royal race of the Piasts*".

2. Dear brothers and sisters, my fellow-countrymen. I desire that my pilgrimage through Polish land, in communion with all of you, should become *a living catechesis*, the integration of that catechesis which entire generations of our forebears have inscribed into our history. May this be the catechesis of all the history of the Church and of Poland, and at the same time the catechesis of our times.

The fundamental task of the Church is catechesis. We know this well, not only on the basis of the work of the last Synod of Bishops, but also on the basis of our national experiences. In the field of this work of an ever more conscious faith that is always newly introduced into the life of each generation, we know how much depends on *the common effort* of parents, of the family, of the parish, of the priests and pastors of souls, of men and women catechists, of the community, of the instruments of social communication, and of customs. In fact the walls of the bell towers of the churches, the crosses at the crossroads, the holy pictures on the walls of the houses—all this in a certain way, catechizes. And on this great synthesis of the catechesis of life, in the present and in the past, depends the faith of future generations.

And therefore I desire today to be with you here, in the nest of the Piasts, in this cradle of the Church—here where *over a thousand years ago catechesis began on Polish soil*.

And I desire to greet from here all the ecclesial communities on Polish soil, in which catechesis takes place today. All the catechetical groups in the churches, chapels, halls and rooms...

I desire to greet from here the young Poland, all the Polish *children* and all *the youth* gathered in those groups where they assemble perseveringly and systematically... Yes, I say the young Poland; and my heart turns to all the Polish children, both to those who are present here at this moment and all those who live on Polish soil.

No one of us can ever forget the following words of Jesus; "*Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them*" (Lk 18:16). I want to be, before you dear Polish children, a living echo of these words of our Saviour, particularly in this year in which the Year of the Child is celebrated throughout the whole world.

With my thought and with my heart I embrace the infants that are still in the arms of their fathers and mothers. May those loving arms of parents never cease to exist! May the number be extremely small on Polish soil of those who are known as "social" orphans, coming from broken homes or from families that are unable to educate their own children.

May all the children of pre-school age have easy access to Christ. May they be prepared with joy *to receive him in the Eucharist*. May they grow "in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Lk 2:52), as he himself grew, in the house of Nazareth.

And as they grow up in years, as they pass from childhood to adolescence, let no one of us, dear brothers and sisters, ever be culpable in their regard, of causing that scandal of which Jesus speaks in such a severe manner. Let us meditate every once in a while on those words. May they help us to fulfil the great work of education and of catechesis with greater zeal and with a greater sense of responsibility.

3. The Cardinal Primate has greeted me in the name of *Poland always faithful*. The first and fundamental proof of this fidelity, the essential condition for the future is precisely this youth, these Polish children and, at their side, their parents, the pastors of souls, the sisters, the men and women catechists, united *in the daily work of catechesis throughout all the land of Poland*.

May God bless all of you, just as in the past he blessed our forebears, our sovereigns Mieszko and Boleslaw, here, along the route between Poznan and Gniezno. May he bless all of you!

Accept this sign of blessing from the hands of the pilgrim Pope who is visiting you.

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