



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (APRIL 25-27, 1997)

**ECUMENICAL PRAYER SERVICE
IN HONOUR OF SAINT ADALBERT**

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II 27 April 1997

*Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ!*1. "We ought to . . . be fellow workers in the truth" (3 Jn 8). Thus does the Third Letter of John admonish us. In this ecumenical prayer service, in which we sense more profoundly the longing for unity, I greet you with these words which touch us in the depths of our hearts. Yes, we ought to be fellow workers in the truth. Despite the commands which Christ gave at the Last Supper, we Christians have unfortunately become divided. The deep wounds opened during the religious history of Europe challenge our consciences. At this moment, and in a special way, we are challenged by the divisions which took place in the history of the Czech nation. Thanks be to God, this is also a moment of dialogue in prayer. It enables us to reflect together on the truth which, as I have written in my Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, "forms consciences and directs efforts to promote unity" (No. 33).2. The search for the truth make us aware of our sinfulness. We are divided from one another because of mutual misunderstandings, often due to mistrust, if not enmity. We have sinned. We have distanced ourselves from the Spirit of Christ. Precisely for this reason I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Oriente Lumen*: "The sin of our separation is very serious: I feel the need to increase our common openness to the Spirit who calls us to conversion ... Every day, I have a growing desire to go over the history of the Churches, in order to write at last a history of our unity" (Nos. 17-18). The imminence of the Third Millennium requires from all Christians a readiness to make, with the light of the Spirit, a strict examination of conscience, and to listen once more to Christ's farewell discourse in the Upper Room. We cannot but feel the urgent need to reach, all together, the humble recognition of the one Truth. We sense that today we are living the hour of truth. This year of immediate preparation for the Great Jubilee, which I have devoted to reflection on Jesus Christ, can be, in an ecumenical perspective, a providential occasion for an encounter which is more truthful, and therefore more charged with unifying power, with Him, our one Lord and Master.3. Is not the splendid cathedral in which we are gathered also a symbol of unity? A real treasure of art and faith, it was built more than 650 years ago by Emperor Charles IV and Bishop Arnost of Pardubice. They founded it to serve the ecclesial and civic community. Here are buried saints and kings. Here are preserved the treasures of the Nation - the trophies of the Czech Crown, and the treasures of the Church - the relics of many of her saints. Shortly I shall go to pray before the holy relics of Adalbert, and at the tomb of Saint Wenceslaus in the

chapel dedicated to him: they are saints of a yet undivided Christian community. I have prayed at the tomb of Cardinal Tomášek, who with his solid faith, helped to keep hope alive in every individual, even in the darkest moments of oppression, until the liberation of the homeland. What we are now living is therefore the hour of hope. This Cathedral, whose extraordinary architecture is joined to the plan of Prague Castle, is the home of ecclesial and patriotic tradition and the sign of the Nation's unity.⁴ From here, from this kind of "city set on a hill" (Mt 5:14), I am happy to acknowledge the efforts of reconciliation and dialogue which in this land the various Churches and Ecclesial Communities are making in order to heal past wounds. In my first visit, seven years ago, I quoted the "heartbreaking words" which I heard Cardinal Beran say at the Second Vatican Council on "the case of the Bohemian priest Jan Hus." And I expressed the hope that "the place which Jan Hus occupies among the reformers of the Church, beside other famous Reformation figures," could be defined "more precisely" (*Address to Cultural Leaders*, 21 April 1990, No. 5). In response to that invitation, the "Jan Hus" Ecumenical Commission is seriously working in the direction suggested. In this context special significance must be attributed to initiatives such as the Conference devoted to Jan Hus at Bayreuth, in 1993, to which Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity was invited as the Representative of the Holy See. I am also aware that the Cardinal Archbishop of Prague, Miloslav Vlk, takes part in the ecumenical meetings celebrated yearly on 6 July, the anniversary of the tragic death of Jan Hus. I also find worthy of mention the activity of the Ecumenical Commission for the study of Czech religious history in the 16th and 17th centuries. Inspired by a truly ecumenical spirit, it seeks to provide scientifically valid instruments for a better understanding, with minds free of prejudice, of matters not yet sufficiently clarified which in the past led to disorders and excesses in relations between members of Reformation Communities and Catholic brethren. Finally, I look with great comfort to the consoling results of the annual ecumenical celebrations of the Word. At these meetings representatives of all the Churches and Ecclesial Communities of the Republic come together, both at the beginning of the year, in accordance with the international initiative of the Evangelical Alliance, and during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. The atmosphere of profound recollection and fraternal love which is created on these occasions makes the yearning for one Eucharist more keenly felt.⁵ This moving ecumenical meeting is for all of us the hour of charity. It is my sincere wish that the words which the Apostle John writes to the unknown recipient of his Third Letter may apply to each one of us: "Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the Church" (5-6). This text can be for us an inspiring point of reference and a stimulus for our ecumenical undertaking. For it is in love that it is possible to ask God's forgiveness together and to find the courage to forgive one another for the injustices and wrongs of the past, no matter how great and terrible they have been. The barriers of mutual suspicion and mistrust must be broken down, in order to build a new civilization of love. This will be born of our sincere commitment to be fellow workers in spreading truth, hope, and love. The holy Bishop Adalbert made the unity of his flock the goal, the endeavour, the passion of his life, and he has the merit of having forged among the diverse peoples of Europe the desire for unity. Today, following his ideal, I repeat also from this Cathedral the words which I addressed to the country two years ago, from Olomouc, when in the name of the Church of Rome I asked forgiveness for the wrongs inflicted on non-Catholics and at the same time I wished to assure the Catholic Church's forgiveness of the sufferings which her children have undergone: "May this day mark a new beginning in the common effort to follow Christ, his Gospel, his law of love, his supreme desire for the unity of those who believe in him" (*Homily*, 21 May 1995, No. 5).⁷ Dear Brothers and Sisters! Much work remains to be done, there are opportunities not to be lost, heavenly gifts not to be overlooked, in order to respond to what the Lord expects from each and every one of the baptized. It is important that all the Churches concern themselves with the theological dimension of ecumenical dialogue and persevere in a frank and serious examination of the growing convergences. We must seek unity as the Lord wants it, and for this we must be ever more converted to the

demands of his Kingdom. We are called to be, following the example of Bishop Adalbert, fellow workers of truth, hope and love! I thank you, dear Brothers and Sisters, for having shared this providential experience of prayer. I also thank the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, together with the distinguished representatives of the country's political and social life who have wished to be present. Christ stands before us. He who "loved us to the end" is for all of us the infinite source of strength, creative ecumenical inspiration, patience and perseverance. He is the Truth! Dear Brothers and Sisters, thank you! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of history and guide of our hearts, thank you! May he bless you!

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