



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)*ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II*

AT THE MEETING WITH THE DELEGATIONS

TO THE EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS Wrocław, 1st June 1997 Distinguished Guests,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*1. We meet this afternoon to thank Divine Providence together for the gift of the Eucharistic Congress. We thank God for this time of prayer and adoration, and also of theological reflection on the great mystery of our faith which is the Eucharist. For eight days you have been experiencing the special grace of being together. What united everyone was faith in the Real Presence of Christ under the appearances of bread and wine, and also the awareness that he is always among us, "that we may have life, and have it abundantly" (cf. Jn 10:10). During these days the City of Wrocław has been transformed into a great Cenacle in which all believers have been gathered at a common table around Christ, to listen to his words, to give him praise in song and prayer and to be nourished by his sacred Body. Taking part in the celebrations linked with the Congress were not only this City but the whole Archdiocese of Wrocław and the Church in Poland. This morning's Holy Mass, concelebrated by the Pope and many Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops, and by a large number of priests, was a true *Statio Orbis*, an immense assembly of pilgrims from all over the world, and especially from Europe. It became the visible image of the Church "made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (*Lumen Gentium*, 4). As we thank God for this gift, we express in the words of the *Didachè* the gratitude of the whole Church: "Almighty God,

You have created all things for the glory of your name

and have given to the children of men

food and drink that they might praise you;

but you have given us the grace

of spiritual food and drink

of eternal life

through the work of Jesus your Servant ...

To you be glory for ever and ever" (*Teaching of the Twelve Apostles / Didachè*, X.3).2. I feel a special joy at being able to meet with you today. I greet all the delegates who have come to Wrocław as representatives of their Ecclesial Communities, Dioceses, countries and nations from around the world. Among you there are Bishops, priests, consecrated persons and laity. I wish to express my particular appreciation to those among you who have contributed to the organization of this Congress. I offer words of special thanks to Cardinal Edouard Gagnon, President of the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses, as well as to the members of the Committee. With gratitude I also greet Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz, Metropolitan of Wrocław and President of the National Committee, and all those who

worked with him. I likewise thank the individual sections, commissions, and all men and women of good will. You have spared neither time nor effort. Your work and generous organizational effort enabled the Congress to be a great event in the Church's life and a profound spiritual experience for many. From the bottom of my heart I also thank for their presence all the sisters and brothers of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities who, together with us, have prayed for Christian unity. I likewise thank the followers of other religions and spiritual traditions. It is not possible to list them all here, so forgive me if I have omitted anyone.³ Dear Brothers and Sisters, I have said that the 46th International Eucharistic Congress has been a great ecclesial event. I would say that it has been a great experience of the universal Church united in the Eucharist. The Church lives from the Eucharist and is constantly born from it. The Church expresses herself in a special way through the Eucharist, which is as it were the summit to which everything in the Church is directed. "For the Most Blessed Eucharist," as the Council says, "contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is, Christ himself, our Passover" (*Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5). For this reason the Church, if she really wishes fully to understand herself and her mission, must ceaselessly discover this Eucharistic Presence of Christ, meditate on it, and live from it. Let us foster and deepen in our hearts profound gratitude to God for the graces which he bestows upon his Church. Dear Brothers and Sisters, we have all been able to experience how in the mystery of the Eucharist people of different races, languages, nations and cultures come together. Yes. The Eucharist transcends every boundary. In it there becomes visible the unity of the Church as the Mystical Body of Christ. How clearly are fulfilled here the words of Saint Augustine who called the Eucharist "the sacrament of devotion, the sign of unity, the bond of charity" (*In Ioannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 26, 6, 13: *PL* 35, 1613). The Eucharist is the living heart of the Church. "The Eucharist builds the Church, building it as the authentic community of the People of God, as the assembly of the faithful, bearing the same mark of unity that was shared by the Apostles and the first disciples of the Lord. The Eucharist builds ever anew this community and unity, ever building and regenerating it on the basis of the Sacrifice of Christ, since it commemorates his death on the Cross, the price by which he redeemed us" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 20). Precisely in this perspective must we understand every Eucharistic Congress and its role in the life of the whole Church.⁴ Allow me to stress yet another very important aspect, and that is the place in which the Congress is taking place. It is in Poland, one of the countries of Central Eastern Europe which, together with other countries of this region, has recently regained freedom and sovereignty after years of oppression by the totalitarian Communist system. Also significant is the slogan of the Congress: "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). Here, in this part of Europe, the word "freedom" takes on a special meaning. We know the taste of slavery, war and injustice. So do those countries which lived, like us, the tragic experiences of the lack of personal and social freedom. Today we rejoice at freedom regained, but "it is impossible merely to possess and enjoy freedom. It must be continually regained through the truth. Freedom entails the mature responsibility of human consciences, which is the result of this truth. It can be used correctly or badly, in the service of the true good or of a false, fictitious good" (*Jasna Góra Cycle*, 7 November 1990, No. 2). Christ present in the Eucharist teaches us what true freedom is and how to use it. Today there is a need for a great return to the Eucharist. Only the Eucharist can reveal to man the fullness of God's infinite love and thus answer his desire for love. Only the Eucharist can set on course his yearnings for freedom, and thus show him the new dimension of human existence. For when we discover that we have been called to make a free gift of ourselves to God and neighbour, our freedom is permeated by the splendour of truth which makes our love radiant. Let us thank God for these days full of grace. Let us pray that this Eucharistic Congress will intensify in people's hearts love for the Eucharistic Christ. I wrote in my Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*: "Every member of the Church, especially Bishops and priests, must be vigilant in seeing that this Sacrament of love shall be at the centre of the life of the People of God, so that through all the manifestations of worship due to it Christ shall be given back 'love for love' and truly become 'the life of our souls'" (No. 20). May God grant that

these days of prayer will bring a true conversion of hearts, contribute to the growth of holiness and renew commitment to the work of unity and peace. I wish to thank you once again for your presence and I ask Christ to bestow abundant graces upon all the distinguished guests here present. To all I impart my Apostolic Blessing, as a sign of my good will and esteem. Be witnesses to Christ's love in your countries, on every continent, to the ends of the earth. Amen!

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