



The Holy See

JUBILEE OF THE ARMED FORCES AND THE POLICE

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE MEMBERS OF THE POLISH MILITARY AND POLICE

Saturday, 18 November 2000

1. I cordially greet all the participants in the Jubilee of the Military and the Police who came for this meeting in the Vatican. I am very pleased that you are here. I extend my welcome to Bishop Sławoj Leszek Głódz, Military Ordinary for Poland, to Bishop Marian Dus, to Bishop Miron of the Orthodox Church, to Bishop Borski of the Augsburg Evangelical Church and to the army and police chaplains.

I greet the Minister of Defence, the Chief of Staff and the Army, Navy, Airforce and Anti-Aircraft Defence Commanders. I greet the Supreme Commandant of the Police, the Commandant of the Border Police, of the Nadwislanskie Units and the Head of the Office for Government Protection. I greet the generals, officers, staff marshals, non-commissioned officers, soldiers, police officers and civilian employees of the army. I thank the bands and choruses who with their music and lively singing enhanced this meeting. All this touches me deeply and helps me to return to the past, as it stirs many memories in me.

2. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13: 8). In this holy time of the Great Jubilee our thoughts and desires turn to Christ, the Redeemer of man. He, the Son of God, as the Second Vatican Council says, "by his Incarnation, has in a certain way united himself with each man. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will, and with a human heart he loved. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like to us in all things except sin" (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 22).

You came to Rome as pilgrims to strengthen your faith in Christ and to renew yourselves interiorly. In the Christian understanding, a pilgrimage is a symbol of the believer's journey in the footsteps of Christ. How many footsteps of this kind can be found in Rome, how many signs of the presence of God, how many churches, shrines and sacred places! One of these signs is the Holy Door. It symbolizes Christ. Jesus said of himself: "I am the door" (Jn 10: 7). It means that there is only one door through which the encounter with God is reached and that there is only one way that leads to

salvation.

3. In this context the theme of the Jubilee of the Military and the Police is very eloquent: "With Christ in defence of justice and peace". May these words accompany your pilgrimage and your prayer during your stay in the Eternal City and in your service in your homeland and beyond its borders. Today, at the end of the second millennium, the world still needs justice and peace. It is important that these words be given a concrete sense and, at times, be given back their correct meaning. I also wish to recall the Polish soldiers who are carrying out their mission in Bosnia, Kosovo, Lebanon and the Golan Heights.

I know that in all the garrisons, over these four years, you have made an effort of spiritual renewal and have prepared for the celebrations of the Great Jubilee. The time of preparation was accompanied by the pilgrimage of the image of Our Lady "Protectress of the Polish Soldier". You welcomed her image in the barracks and in the military academies and institutes, in the hospitals and on the training grounds. You have entrusted your service to her, in order to enter the third millennium strong in faith.

Dear friends, continue the "morning of resurrection" that I experienced at the training ground near Koszalin 10 years ago during my visit to Poland! Joyfully bring the message of peace and love to individuals and nations. A very eloquent proof of that attitude is the gift from Caritas to the Military Ordinariate: an ambulance for the hospital in Kosovo. You offered this as an offertory gift on the occasion of the Great Jubilee. I thank you for this beautiful gift from the soldiers' hearts.

4. May you be accompanied on this pilgrimage by the example of a courageous soldier, a just and pious man: the centurion named Cornelius. It was he who received Baptism after meeting Peter, and together with him his soldiers and his whole household (cf. Acts 10: 1-48).

I hope that, after this pilgrimage, you will return spiritually strengthened to your places of service and to your families, and be ready to bear witness to the Gospel and the Cross. Stay faithful to Christ by defending "justice and peace"!

Through you I greet the entire Polish army and police, and sincerely bless you all.

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