



The Holy See

**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)
VISIT TO THE HEART SURGERY CLINIC
OF THE SPECIALIZED HOSPITAL IN KRAKOW**

ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II

Krakow — 9 June 1997

Dear Friends!

1. I am very pleased that during this pilgrimage to my native land I am able to visit the Specialized Hospital in Krakow and bless the newly built Cardiology Clinic. I am pleased to meet on this occasion the sick and those who take care of them. I am moved as I come among you and I thank the Administration and Staff for having invited me.

In 1913, the Krakow City Council had decided to build on this very spot, at Bialy Pradnik, the Municipal Institutes of Health. Construction was completed four years later. This year the Hospital is celebrating the Eightieth Anniversary of its existence and its generous service to the sick. How can we fail to remember on this occasion all those who, putting their own health at risk, gave themselves to the task of bringing help, like good Samaritans, to the suffering? We bow our heads, thinking especially of those who paid the supreme price and offered their lives. Some of us certainly remember Doctor Aleksander Wielgus, who died in 1939 after contracting tuberculosis, or Doctor Sielecka-Meier, who died of the same cause soon after the liberation. How can we fail to remember also the work of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, so filled with dedication to the Gospel? By their service to the sick, sacrificing their own health and sometimes even their lives, they wrote a beautiful page in the history of this Hospital. On two occasions Blessed Sister Faustina was treated here.

This specialized hospital has now been made even better by the addition of a new Cardiology Clinic. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to those who have helped to build it. Many people contributed, and it would be difficult to name all of them here. We thank God today for the gift of human work and human solidarity with the sick.

2. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40).

With these words of Christ I address you who work in this hospital and, through you, all health-care workers in Poland. My consideration and respect for your service is great. It demands a spirit of sacrifice and dedication to the sick, and therefore has a profoundly evangelical dimension. From the viewpoint of faith your service is seen as directed to Christ himself, mysteriously present in those tried by suffering. For this reason your profession deserves the greatest respect. It is a mission of extraordinary value, the best definition of which is found in the word "vocation".

I am well aware of the extremely difficult conditions in which you sometimes have to work. I am confident that in Poland all the problems of health-care services will be solved, in a wise and fair manner, for the good of the patients and those who take care of them.

Accept today the expression of my appreciation for this generous work undertaken with self-sacrifice. In a certain sense, you take on your own shoulders the weight of the suffering and pain of your sisters and brothers, by trying to give them relief and to restore the health for which they yearn. My appreciation goes in a special way to all who courageously remain on the side of the divine law which guides human life. I repeat once more what I wrote in my Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*: "Your profession calls for you to be guardians and servants of human life. In today's cultural and social context, in which science and the practice of medicine risk losing sight of their inherent ethical dimension, you can be strongly tempted at times to become manipulators of life, or even agents of death. In the face of this temptation your responsibility today is greatly increased. Its deepest inspiration and strongest support lie in the intrinsic and undeniable ethical dimension of the health-care profession, something already recognized by the ancient and still relevant Hippocratic Oath, which requires every doctor to commit himself to absolute respect for human life and its sacredness" (cf. No. 89).

I rejoice that the medical world in Poland, in the vast majority of cases, accepts this responsibility, not only by caring for and sustaining life but also by firmly avoiding actions that would lead to its destruction. With my whole heart I praise the doctors, nurses and all Polish health-care workers who place the divine law "Thou shalt not kill" above what human law allows. I praise you for this witness that you are giving, especially recently.

I ask you to continue with perseverance and enthusiasm your praiseworthy duty of serving life in all its dimensions, according to your particular specializations. My prayer will sustain you in this service.

3. To you, dear friends who are sick and who are taking part in this meeting, and to those who cannot be present with us here, I extend a cordial greeting. Every day I try to be close to your sufferings. I can say this because I am familiar with the experience of a hospital bed. Precisely because of this, with greater insistence in my daily prayer I beseech God for you, asking him to give you strength and health; I pray that in your suffering and sickness you will not lose hope; I pray that you will be able to place your pain at the foot of Christ's Cross. From a human point of view the situation of a sick person is difficult, painful and sometimes even humiliating. But it is precisely because of this that you are in a special way close to Christ, and in a certain sense share physically in his sacrifice. Try to remember this. The Passion and Resurrection of our Saviour will help you to grasp the mystery of your suffering.

It is thanks to you, thanks to your communion with the Crucified One, that the Church possesses inestimable wealth in her spiritual treasury. Thanks to you, others can draw from this treasury. Nothing enriches others like the free gift of suffering. Therefore always remember, especially when you feel abandoned, that the Church, the world, our homeland need you so much. Remember also that the Pope needs you.

In closing, I wish to say to all of you that I have greatly looked forward to this meeting. It could not have been left out of my pilgrim itinerary. I pray that the power of faith will support you in these difficult moments of your lives, moments filled with torment. I pray that the light of the Holy Spirit will help you to discover that suffering ennobled by love "is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the Redemption" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 24). Commending to God all the sick and those who take care of them, I cordially bless you all.

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