



The Holy See

JOHN PAUL II

*Homily for the beatification of the Venerable Servant
of God Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek*

Maribor, 19 September 1999

1. "Let us now praise famous men.... Their posterity will continue for ever.... Peoples will declare their wisdom, and the congregation proclaims their praise (*Sir* 44: 1a, 14b-15).

Sirach's words resound today in our assembly. Hearing them, we immediately thought of the persons belonging to this Slovenian people who were distinguished for their virtues: we thought, for example, of Bishops Friderik Baraga, Janez Gnidovec and Anton Vovk, of Fr Vendelin Vosnjak and the young Lojze Grozde.

We remembered in particular the man the Church proclaims blessed today: Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek, the first son of this Slovenian nation to be raised to the glory of the altars. Three years after my first visit, I return today to present him to you as a model of that holiness which holds the only power that can conquer the world, as I pointed out to you then. I am therefore pleased to meet you and to preside at this solemn Holy Mass.

I greet Bishop Franc Kramberger, Pastor of this Church, and I thank him for his words. I also greet the Cardinals, the Slovenian Bishops and the other Bishops who are concelebrating this solemn Eucharist. My greeting also goes to the clergy, to the religious and to all of you, dear faithful of this illustrious Church and of the neighbouring Churches, who have gathered here to pay homage to the new blessed.

I offer a respectful greeting to the President of the Republic and to the civil authorities who have wished to honour us with their presence, thereby adding to the solemnity of this celebration.

2. Today's Gospel, which speaks of the vine and the branches, reminds us that it is only by abiding in Christ that we can bear fruit. In this way Jesus shows us the secret to the holiness of Bishop Anton Martin Slomsek, whom I have the joy of beatifying today.

He was a vine which yielded abundant fruits of Christian holiness, of remarkable cultural richness and of lofty patriotism. This is why he stands before us today as a splendid example of one who put the Gospel into practice.

In the new blessed it is the values of Christian holiness which shine the brightest. In the footsteps of Christ he made himself the Good Samaritan of the Slovenian people. Attentive to the formation needs of the clergy and faithful, with an apostolic zeal that is still an example to us today, he never tired of evangelizing by conducting popular missions, founding numerous confraternities, preaching spiritual exercises and disseminating popular hymns and religious writings. He was a Catholic Pastor in the truest sense of the word, and was entrusted by his ecclesiastical Superiors with important pastoral tasks even in other regions of the State at that time.

Faithful and docile to the Church, Slomsek showed he was profoundly open to ecumenism, and was one of the first in Central Europe to be committed to Christian unity. May his desire for unity stimulate the ecumenical commitment, so that the Christians of this Europe which was so dear to him may cross the threshold of the third millennium "if not completely united, at least closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium" (*Tertio millennio adveniente*, n. 34).

3. The new blessed also paid great attention to culture. Living in the middle of the last century, he was perfectly aware of the importance for the nation's future of the intellectual formation of its inhabitants, especially the young. For this reason, he combined pastoral action with commitment to the promotion of culture, which represents a nation's wealth and is the patrimony of all. Culture is the *soil* from which a people can draw the necessary elements for their growth and development.

Convinced of this, Slomsek worked to open various schools for young people and saw to the publication of books useful for human and spiritual formation. He warned that if young people were corrupted, the fault could often be traced to the lack of adequate formation. Families, schools and the Church, he taught, must join forces in a serious educational programme, each preserving its own area of autonomy, but all taking account of the values they share.

Only with a sound formation can men and women be prepared to build a world that is open to the perennial values of truth and love.

4. The new blessed was also motivated by deep sentiments of *patriotism*. He was concerned for the Slovenian language, called for appropriate social reforms, promoted a higher level of national culture and did all he could to have his people occupy an honourable place in the concert of other

European nations. And he did this without ever yielding to sentiments of short-sighted nationalism or selfish opposition to the aspirations of neighbouring peoples.

The new blessed is offered to you as a model of true patriotism. His projects left a decisive mark on your people's future and made an important contribution to the achievement of independence. In turning my gaze to the beloved region of the Balkans, unfortunately scarred in recent years by conflict and violence, extreme forms of nationalism, cruel ethnic cleansing and wars between peoples and cultures, I would like to call everyone's attention to the witness of this new blessed. He shows that it is possible to be sincere patriots and with equal sincerity to coexist and cooperate with people of other nationalities, other cultures and other religions. May his example and especially his intercession obtain solidarity and genuine peace for all the peoples of this vast area of Europe.

5. Dear brothers and sisters of beloved Slovenia! Follow in the footsteps of your upright and generous compatriot, who longed to know God's will and to fulfil it at any cost. His inner firmness and Gospel optimism were rooted in a strong faith in Christ's victory over sin and evil. Imitate him, especially you, dear young Slovenians, and like him, do not hesitate to put your young energies at the service of God's kingdom and of your brethren. For you priests, may he be a model of zealous labour and the spirit of sacrifice. For you, responsible lay people, especially those who work in public institutions, may he be an example of honesty, impartial service and the courageous quest for justice and the common good.

Be builders of peace within Europe too! The process of unification to which the continent is committed cannot only be based on economic concerns but must be inspired by those Christian values which are its most ancient and authentic roots. A Europe attentive to the human person and to full respect for his rights: this is the goal for which we must strive! May the old Europe transmit to the new generation the torch of the human and Christian civilization which illumined the steps of our ancestors during the millennium now drawing to a close.

6. In this connection, I invite everyone to pray for the next *Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, which will be meeting in a few days to reflect on Christ, alive in his Church, source of hope for Europe. It is an important occasion for acquiring a deeper understanding of the particular mission of European peoples in the context of world relations: a Europe, teacher of civilization, which can appreciate the resources that come from West and East.

Here I would like to repeat the prophetic words spoken by Bishop Slomsek during a popular mission: "They say: 'The world has grown old; the human race is adrift; Europe is coming to an end'. Well: yes, if we abandon humanity to its natural course, to its fatal direction. No, if the power from on high that is preserved in the religion of Jesus and in his Church is poured out anew on all ranks of the human race and restores them to life".

We can learn this important lesson from Bl. Slomsek. May he, a courageous servant of Christ, help us to be branches of the immortal vine, spreading the Gospel of hope and love everywhere.

Amen!