

Homilia Jana Pawła II na placu Zwycięstwa w Warszawie - Tekst angielski

May Jesus Christ be praised!

My Beloved Fellow-countrymen,

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Participants in the Eucharistic Sacrifice celebrated today at Victory Square¹ in Warsaw.

1. Together with you I wish to sing a hymn of thanksgiving to Divine Providence, which has enabled me to stand here as a pilgrim.

We know how very ardently the recently deceased Paul VI, the first pilgrim pope after so many centuries, desired to set foot on Polish soil, especially at Jasna Góra (Bright Mountain). To the end of his life he kept this desire in his heart, and with it he went to the grave. And so we feel that this desire—a desire so potent and so deeply rooted that it goes beyond the span of one pontificate—is coming to fruition today, and in a way difficult for human eyes to have foreseen. And thus we thank Divine Providence for having given Paul VI² so strong a desire. For we are grateful for the whole pilgrim-pope³ style he began with the Second Vatican Council⁴. At a time when the whole Church had become newly aware of being the People of God, a People sharing in the mission of Christ, a People that proceeds through history with that mission, a “pilgrim” People, the Pope could no longer remain a “prisoner of the Vatican”. He had to become again the pilgrim Peter, like the first Peter, who from Jerusalem journeyed to Antioch, and from there to Rome in order to give witness to Christ and seal his witness with his blood.

¹ Situated in the centre of Warsaw, Victory Square (Plac Zwycięstwa) has changed its name several times. These changes are symbolic and reflective of Polish history. It was initially called Saxon Square (Plac Saski). During the interwar period, it was named after Marshal Józef Piłsudski. After the Germans occupied Warsaw in 1939, it was renamed Adolf Hitler Platz. When the communists came to power in 1945, it became Victory Square, and remained so until 1990, at which point its historic name (Marshal Józef Piłsudski Square) was restored. In 2009, a cross commemorating the mass John Paul II celebrated in 1979 was set up at the site of the altar where he officiated.

² Pope Paul VI (Giovanni Battista Montini 1897-1978, pope since 1963) wanted to come to Poland for the Millennium of Christianity in Polish lands, celebrated in 1966.

³ The popes had not travelled outside Italy from the end of the nineteenth century until the pontificate of Paul VI.

⁴ The Second Vatican Council – the ecumenical council of the Catholic Church which deliberated from 1962 until 1965. Its decisions resulted in profound changes in the functioning of the Catholic Church and of the Papacy.

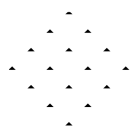


Today it is granted to me to fulfil this desire of the deceased Pope Paul VI with you, beloved sons and daughters of my motherland. For when, after the death of Paul VI¹ and the but several-weeks-long pontificate of my immediate predecessor John Paul I², I was, through the inscrutable designs of Divine Providence, called by the votes of the Cardinals from the chair of Saint Stanisław in Kraków³ to that of Saint Peter in Rome, I immediately understood that it was for me to fulfil that desire, the desire that Paul VI had been unable to carry out during the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland. And so, as your fellow-countryman, a son of this soil, and at the same time a pilgrim-pope, I greet you all! I greet his Eminence, the Primate of Poland. I greet all the archbishops, bishops, and pastors of the Church in our motherland who are with us here today. Among our guests, please allow me to extend special greetings to the cardinal-archbishop of Santo Domingo. It was there I happened to direct the first steps of my papal pilgrimage, just this January. It was there I first kissed the ground where once stood Christopher Columbus, after whom came so many others who proclaimed the Gospel. Among them were also our own countrymen and Polish soldiers. Today, together with all of you here, I greet in Warsaw this witness of my first papal trip. Is my pilgrimage to my motherland in the year in which the Church in Poland is celebrating the ninth centenary of the death of Saint Stanisław not a special sign of the pilgrimage that we Poles are making down through the history of the Church – and not only along the paths of our motherland, but also along those of Europe and the world? Leaving my own person aside at this point, I must nonetheless with all of you ask myself why, precisely in 1978, after so many centuries of a well-established tradition in this field, why was a son of the Polish People, from the land of Poland, called to the chair of Saint Peter? Christ demanded of Peter and of the other Apostles that they should be his “witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

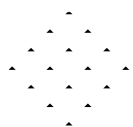
¹ Paul VI died on August 6, 1978.

² John Paul I (Albino Luciani 1912-1978). His pontificate lasted only 33 days, from August 26 until September 28, 1978.

³ Wawel Cathedral in Kraków is the resting place of the sarcophagus with the remains of one of the most important Polish saints, St Stanisław of Szczepanów, bishop of Kraków in 1072-79.



Have we not the right, with reference to these words of Christ, to conclude that Poland in our day has become a land with a particularly significant testimony? Have we not the right to think that from here—from Warsaw, and also from Gniezno, from Jasna Góra, from Kraków and from the whole of this historic route that I have so often in my life traversed, and that in these days I again have the chance to visit—do we not have the right to proclaim Christ from here with both singular humility and singular conviction? Have we not the right to think that one must come here, to this land, and stand on this path, in order to grasp the testimony of His Cross and His Resurrection? But, my beloved fellow-countrymen, if we accept all that I have just dared to pronounce, what enormous duties and obligations arise! Are we indeed capable of shouldering them? 2. Today, at the first stage of my papal pilgrimage in Poland, it is granted to me to celebrate the Eucharistic Sacrifice at Victory Square in Warsaw. The liturgy of the evening of Saturday the Vigil of Pentecost takes us to the Upper Room in Jerusalem, where the Apostles, gathered around Mary the Mother of Christ, were on the following day to receive the Holy Spirit. They were to receive the Spirit obtained for them by Christ through the Cross, in order that through the power of this Spirit they might fulfil his command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). Before Christ the Lord left the world, he transmitted to the Apostles with these words his last recommendation, his “missionary mandate”. And he added: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). It is fitting that my pilgrimage to Poland, connected with the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanisław, should fall in the period of Pentecost and on the solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. Fulfilling the desire of Paul VI after his death, I am able to relive the Millennium of the Baptism on Polish soil and to inscribe this year’s jubilee of Saint Stanisław into the Millennium since the beginning of the whole history of our nation and the Church.



The Solemnity of Pentecost and that of the Most Holy Trinity bring us especially close to this beginning. We may say that in the apostles who receive the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost are spiritually present all their successors, all the Bishops, including those whose task it has been for a thousand years to proclaim the Gospel on Polish soil. Among them was Stanisław of Szczepanów, who paid with his blood for his mission on the episcopal chair of Kraków nine centuries ago. On the day of Pentecost there were gathered, in the Apostles and around them, not only the representatives of the peoples and tongues listed in the Acts of the Apostles. Even then there were gathered about them the various peoples and nations that, through the light of the Gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit, were to enter the Church in various periods and in various centuries. The day of Pentecost is the birthday of the faith and of the Church in our land of Poland, as well. It is also the beginning of the proclamation of the mighty works of God in our Polish language. And it is also the beginning of Christianity in the life of our nation, in its history, its culture, its trials. 3a. To Poland the Church brought Christ, the key to understanding that great and fundamental reality that is man. For man cannot be fully understood without Christ. Or rather, man is incapable of understanding himself fully without Christ. He cannot understand who he is, nor what his true dignity is, nor what his vocation is, nor what his final destiny is. He cannot understand any of this without Christ. That is why Christ cannot be excluded from the history of man in any part of the globe, at any longitude or latitude of geography. The exclusion of Christ from the history of man is an act against man. Without Christ it is impossible to understand the history of Poland, especially the history of the people who have passed or are passing through this land. The story of people! The history of the nation is above all the story of people. And the story of each person unfolds in Jesus Christ. In Him it becomes the story of salvation.



The history of the nation deserves to be adequately appraised in the light of its contribution to the development of man and humanity, to intellect, heart and conscience. This is the deepest stratum of culture. It is culture's firmest bedrock, its core, its strength. It is impossible without Christ to understand and appraise the contribution of the Polish nation to the development of man and his humanity in the past and its contribution today also: "This old oak tree has risen up thus and no wind has knocked it down because its root is Christ" (Piotr Skarga¹, *Kazania Sejmowe IV*, Biblioteka Narodowa, I, 70, p. 92). It is necessary to follow the traces of what, or rather who, Christ was for the sons and daughters of this land down the generations. Not only for those who openly believed in Him and professed Him with the faith of the Church, but also for those who seemed to keep a distance, to be outside the Church. For those who doubted or were opposed. 3b. If it is fitting to understand the history of the nation through each human being in the nation, at the same time no individual can be understood apart from the community that is their nation. Of course, this is not the only community, but it is a special community, perhaps that most intimately linked with the family, the most important for the spiritual history of man.

It is therefore impossible to understand the history of the Polish nation—this great thousand-year-old community that is so profoundly decisive for me and each one of us – without Christ. If we reject this key to understanding our nation, we put ourselves at risk of a fundamental misunderstanding. For we would no longer understand ourselves. It is impossible to understand this nation with its past so full of splendor, and also of terrible difficulties, without Christ. It is impossible to understand this city, Warsaw, the capital of Poland, which undertook in 1944 an unequal battle against the aggressor², a battle in which it was abandoned by the allied powers, a battle in which it was buried under its own ruins—if it is not remembered that under those same ruins there was also the statue of Christ the Saviour with his cross³ that is in front of the church on Krakowskie Przedmieście street. It is impossible to understand the history of Poland from Stanisław in Skalka⁴ to Maximilian Kolbe⁵ at Oświęcim unless we apply to them that one further fundamental criterion that is called Jesus Christ.

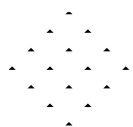
¹ Piotr Skarga (1536-1612) – Jesuit, theologian, preacher. Court preacher to King Zygmunt III Waza and first rector of the University of Wilno. One of the most prominent exponents of the Counter-Reformation in Poland; author of *Lives of the Saints* and of collections of sermons.

² 1 August 1944 witnessed the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. The Poles stood up to fight the Germans. The uprising was suppressed after 63 days. The population of Warsaw was expelled from the city and the Germans proceeded to blow up a vast number of buildings over the course of the following weeks.

³ There is a figure of Christ bearing the Cross in front of the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw. During the Warsaw Uprising, there was heavy fighting for control of the church, during which the Germans toppled the figure off its pedestal. A photograph of the sculpture of Christ lying on the pavement with a finger pointing toward the sky is one of the most famous pictures of wartime destruction in Warsaw.

⁴ According to legend, St. Stanisław was killed while celebrating mass at the Skalka church (the Church on the Rock) in Kraków.

⁵ Maksymilian Maria Kolbe (Rajmund Kolbe 1894-1941) – Franciscan. During the interwar period he worked intensively as a pastor in Poland and Japan, relying on the media to spread the Christian message (chiefly the written press, but also radio). Founder of the monastery at Niepokalanów outside Warsaw. In February 1941, he was arrested by the Germans and deported to Auschwitz. He volunteered to take the place of another prisoner who had been sentenced to death. Father Kolbe is a saint of the Catholic Church.



The Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, of which Saint Stanisław is the first mature fruit—the Millennium of Christ in our yesterday and today—is the chief reason for my pilgrimage, for my prayer of thanksgiving together with all of you, dear fellow-countrymen, to whom Christ does not cease to teach the great cause of man. Together with you, for whom Jesus Christ does not cease to be an ever open book on man, his dignity and his rights. And also a book of knowledge on the dignity and rights of the nation. Primate of Poland! I wish this celebrate this Most Holy Sacrifice together with my brother-bishops and chaplains in all the intentions which Your Eminence listed in the beginning.

Today, here at Victory Square, in the capital of Poland, I am asking with all of you, through the great Eucharistic prayer, that Christ will not cease to be for us an open book of life for the future, for our Polish future.

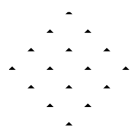
4. We stand here before the tomb of the Unknown Soldier¹. In the bygone and contemporary history of Poland, this tomb has a special basis, a special reason for its existence. In how many places in our native land has that soldier fallen! In how many places across Europe and the world has he cried out with his death that there can be no just Europe without an independent Poland on its map! On how many battlefields has that soldier given witness to the rights of man, indelibly inscribed in the inviolable rights of the people, by falling for “our freedom and yours”²! “Where are their tombs, O Poland? Where are they not! You know better than anyone—and God knows it in heaven” (A. Oppman³, *Pacierz za zmarłych*).

The history of the motherland written via the grave of a single Unknown Soldier!

¹ The Grave of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw was created in 1925.

² “For your freedom and ours” – one of the most popular slogans of the Polish independence movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It first appeared in January 1831 in Warsaw during a demonstration to commemorate the Russian Decembrists put to death by the tsar.

³ Artur Oppman (1867-1931), literary alias “Or-Ot” – poet and columnist, known chiefly for his works about Warsaw.



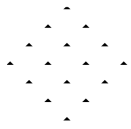
I knelt before this tomb with Primate Wyszyński to venerate every seed that falls into the earth and dies and thus bears fruit. Whether it be the seed of a soldier's blood shed on the battlefield, or the sacrifice of martyrdom in concentration camps or in prisons. Be it the seed of hard daily toil, with the sweat of one's brow, in the fields, the workshop, the mine, the foundries and the factories. Be it the seed of the love of parents who do not refuse to give life to a new human being and undertake the whole of the task of bringing him up. Be it the seed of creative work at the universities, the higher institutes, the libraries, and the workshops of national culture. Be it the seed of prayer, of service of the sick, the suffering, the abandoned—"all that makes up Poland". Whence these words? Father Primate, from the Millennium Act you submitted in offering with the Polish Episcopacy at the monastery in Jasna Góra: "all that makes up Poland".

All of this is in the hands of the Mother of God—at the foot of the cross on Calvary and in the Upper Room of Pentecost!

All of this—the whole history of the motherland shaped for a thousand years by each son and daughter – as well as in this and coming generations – even if they are anonymous and unknown like the Soldier before whose tomb we now stand.

All of this—including the history of the peoples that have lived with us and among us, such as those who died in the hundreds of thousands within the walls of the Warsaw ghetto¹. All of this I embrace in my thoughts and in my heart during this Eucharist, including it in this unique and most holy Sacrifice of Christ, here on Victory Square.

¹ The Germans set up the Jewish ghetto in the centre of Warsaw in 1940 during the occupation. In 1942 most of its inhabitants were deported to the death camp at Treblinka. In April and May 1943, a small group of Jews took up an uneven fight against the Germans, thereby launching the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Most of the insurgents, along with the commander of the uprising, Mordechai Anielewicz, perished. The ghetto was destroyed and the whole area was razed to the ground.



And I cry out – I, who am a Son of the land of Poland, and also I, Pope John Paul II – I cry out from the very depths of this Millennium, I cry out on the vigil of Pentecost, I cry out together with all of you: Let thy Spirit descend! Let thy Spirit descend!!! And make anew the face of Earth, Here on Earth. Amen.

© Copyright 1979 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

Edited © by Jerzy Giebułtowski, Philip Earl Steele