



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL

Wadowice

Wednesday, 16 June 1999 1. Once again, during my service to the universal Church in the See of Saint Peter, I come to my native town of Wadowice. With great emotion I gaze upon this city of my childhood years, which witnessed my first steps, my first words and those “first bows” which, as Norwid puts it, are “like the eternal profession of Christ: ‘Be praised!’” (cf. *Moja piosenka [My Song]*). The city of my childhood, my family home, the church of my Baptism . . . I wish to cross these hospitable thresholds, bow before my native soil and its inhabitants, and utter the words of greeting given to family members upon their return from a long journey: “Praised be Jesus Christ!” With these words I greet all the people of Wadowice, from the elderly, to whom I am linked by the bonds of childhood and adolescence, to the children, who are seeing for the first time the Pope who has come to visit them. I greet the beloved Cardinal Franciszek and thank him because, as Pastor of the Archdiocese, he has shown constant concern for my native town. I greet the Auxiliary Bishops and the retired Bishops. I thank the visiting Bishops who are accompanying me along this pilgrimage. I extend heartfelt greetings to the priests, especially those from both Prefectures of Wadowice, and among them the parish priest of this parish. I entrust to God the late Father Tadeusz Zacher and all the deceased priests who exercised their pastoral ministry in this city. I warmly embrace all the families of Religious who serve in the Wadowice area. In a particular way I wish to greet the Discalced Carmelite Fathers of Górká in Wadowice. We are meeting on an exceptional occasion: 27 August this year marks the centenary of the consecration of the Church of Saint Joseph, at the Convent founded by Saint Raphael Kalinowski. As I did as a young man, I now return in spirit to that place of particular devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, which had such a great influence on the spirituality of the Wadowice area. I myself received many graces there, and today I wish to thank the Lord for them. I am pleased that I was able to beatify, together with one hundred and eight martyrs, Blessed Father Alfons Maria Mazurek, a pupil and later a worthy teacher in the minor seminary attached to the Convent. I had the opportunity to meet personally this witness of Christ who in 1944, as prior of the convent of Czerna, confirmed his fidelity to God by a martyr’s death. I kneel in veneration before his relics, which rest in the Church of Saint Joseph, and I give thanks to God for the gift of the life, martyrdom and holiness of this great Religious. 2. Jerusalem, “for love of the house of the Lord, I will ask for your good” (*Ps 122:9*). Today I make my own these words of the Psalmist and I apply them to this town. Wadowice, town of my childhood, for love of the house – my family home and the house of the Lord – I will ask for your good! How can I not make this promise, as Providence has enabled me today to be present here, on a bridge as it were, which connects these two houses – my family home and the house of God? It is an extraordinary, and yet most natural, coming together of two places which – like no others – leave a deep mark on the heart. With filial affection, I embrace the threshold of the home of my birth, giving thanks to divine Providence for the gift of life passed on to me by my beloved parents, for the warmth of the family home, for the love of my dear ones, who gave me a sense of security and strength, even when they had to face death and the difficulties of daily life in troubled

times. With profound veneration I also embrace the threshold of the house of God, the parish church of Wadowice, and in it the Baptistry, in which I was joined to Christ and received into the community of his Church. In this church I made my first Confession and received my First Holy Communion. Here I was an altar boy. Here I gave thanks to God for the gift of the priesthood and, as Archbishop of Kraków, I celebrated the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of my Ordination to the Priesthood. God alone, the giver of every grace, knows what goodness and what manifold graces I received from this church and from this parish community. To him, the Triune God, I give glory today at the doors of this church. Finally, with childlike trust, I turn to the Chapel of the Holy Cross, to gaze again upon the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Wadowice. I do it with even greater joy, because today I crown this image, as a sign of our love for the Mother of the Saviour and for her divine Son. This sign is all the more expressive because I am told that these crowns were made with your gifts, often very precious, and associated with many special memories, people's lives, their difficulties, or the noble sentiments of families, spouses and engaged couples. To this material gift you have added the great gift of the spirit – the prayer of entrustment to the Mother of Christ who has visited your homes. I am sure that your ardent love for Mary will never be without a response. This mutual bond of love is itself, in a sense, a source of grace and a pledge of the unfailing help which through Mary's intercession we receive from her divine Son.³ "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman" (*Gal* 4:4). These words of Saint Paul, which we have heard today, bring us in a certain sense to the very heart of this mystery. The fullness of time came with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. The Son of God came into the world to accomplish the Father's saving plan, to bring about the redemption of man and restore him to the sonship which he had lost. In this mystery Mary has a special place. God called her to become the woman by whom the original sin of the first woman would be undone. God needed this mediation of Mary. He needed her free consent, her obedience and her devotion, in order to reveal fully his eternal love for humanity. The Apostle of the Nations would later write: "Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying: 'Abba, Father!'" (*Gal* 4:6). We also know that this event took place in the presence of Mary. Just as she was present at the beginning of Christ's work of redemption, so too, on the day of Pentecost, she was present at the beginning of the Church. She, who on the day of the Annunciation was filled with the Holy Spirit, was the special witness of the Spirit's presence on the day of Pentecost. She who owed her own motherhood to the mysterious working of the Spirit was able, more than anyone else, to understand the significance of the descent of the Consoler. Mary, as no other, recognized the moment in which the life of the Church began – the life of that community of men and women who are made members of Christ and can call upon God as Father. No one in the world has been given an experience of the Trinitarian love of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to the same extent as Mary, the Mother of the Word Incarnate. And so, as we prepare to celebrate the Great Jubilee of the Redemption, we turn in a special way to her as a unique guide on the paths of salvation. If the Jubilee is meant to make us aware of all that was accomplished by the Incarnation of the Son of God, we cannot fail to imitate the experience of the faith, hope and love of the Mother of Christ. We cannot fail to turn to her. From Mary, in fact, we learn the openness to the Spirit which enables us to enjoy more fully the fruits of Christ's Death and Resurrection. The conviction that the Mother of God has a unique role in the life of the Church and of every Christian was always dear to our forefathers. Over the last hundred years the people of Wadowice expressed this in a special way when they gathered to venerate the image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help and made her the Patron of their personal, family and social life. In 1935 Father Leonard Prochownik, a local priest, wrote: "*Our Lady of Perpetual Help is venerated here. She has her chapel, where her miraculous image is placed, and there many people have personally experienced and continue to experience how much she shows her goodness and hastens to assist them in their temporal and spiritual needs*". And that was true; I can personally testify to this. And I believe that it is still true today. May it also be true in the future!⁴ During my first visit to Wadowice, I asked you to surround me with constant prayer before the image of this Mother. I see

that my request has been inscribed in stone. I believe this is a sign that my request has also remained deeply engraved in your hearts. Today, I thank you warmly today for this prayer. I always feel it at work and I ask you to continue to pray for me. I have so much need of your prayer. The Church has so much need of it. The entire world has need of it. There is one other thing for which I want to thank you. I know that in Wadowice the Church of Kraków, together with its Archbishop, has built a particular *votive shrine* of our thanksgiving to the Mother of God. Not far from here a Home for Single Mothers has been built. Those women who, despite the difficulties and sacrifices, wish to keep the fruit of their motherhood can find shelter and help there. I am grateful for this great gift of your love for the human person and your concern for life. I am all the more grateful because the Home is named after my mother Emilia. I believe that she who brought me into the world and filled my childhood with love will also watch over this undertaking. I ask you to continue to support this house with your goodness.⁵ *Sub tuum praesidium . . .* We fly to your protection, O Mary.

To your protection we entrust the history of this town,
of the Church of Kraków and the whole country.

To your maternal love

we entrust the lives of each individual,
of our families and of society as a whole.

*Despise not our petitions in our need,
but deliver us always from every danger.*

Mary, obtain for us the grace of faith, hope and love,
so that following your example and guidance,

we may carry into the new Millennium

our witness to the Father's love,

to the redeeming Death and Resurrection of the Son

and to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

Be with us at all times!

O glorious and blessed Virgin,

Our Lady,

Our Advocate,

Our Mediatrix

Our Consolatrix.

Our Mother! Amen.