



The Holy See

**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (APRIL 25-27, 1997) ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
DURING DEPARTURE CEREMONY AT
PRAGUE-RUZYŇ INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
Sunday, 27 April 1997**

Mr President of the Republic,

Cardinal Vlk and Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Parliamentary, Government and Military Authorities,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters!*1. As I leave your country, I wish to offer thanks to God for the renewed witness of faith and affection which you have shown me on the occasion of the millenary celebrations of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert. I still have before my eyes and in my heart the crowds which have accompanied my pilgrimage: the young people who filled with their songs and prayers the Great Square of Hradec Králové, the sick, the men and women religious who filled the Basilica of the Archabbey of Brevnov. And how can I fail to mention the intense spiritual concentration which animated the Eucharistic Celebration this morning on the great esplanade of Letná, and the ecumenical prayer meeting which has just ended with the brethren of the other Christian Churches and denominations in the Cathedral of Saints Vitus, Wenceslaus and Adalbert? To all of you go my warm and heartfelt thanks!2. In particular, I wish to express sincere gratitude to you, Mr President of the Republic, for the friendly and courteous welcome with which you have surrounded my stay in the Czech Republic. I likewise feel the duty to express my special gratitude to Cardinal Miloslav Vlk, to Bishop Karel Otčenášek of Hradec Králové and to all my Brother Bishops, for having invited me to come for a third time to this country, and for the fraternal and affectionate communion which they have shown me also during this apostolic visit. With them I thank the priests and pastoral workers, and I pray that the great commitment which they have shown in preparing and celebrating the Millennium of Saint Adalbert will leave a deep impression on the religious history of the individual local Churches and of the entire nation.3. My affectionate thoughts go to you, the citizens of the Czech Republic. The unique qualities of your people — strength of character, tenacity, openness to others, love of peace — after helping you to resist an ideological pressure which was among the most ruthless in Eastern Europe, have enabled you in these recent years to attain impressive goals of civilization and progress. As I congratulate you on these victories, I exhort you to be particularly careful to promote a matching spiritual progress. Only the full development of a people's moral virtues can ensure the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of all its members. It is precisely this that is the message of Saint Adalbert, who in difficult times was able to establish upon the primacy of God and spiritual values the future of your land and of other European peoples. May his witness help you to give proper importance to economic triumphs, but without

succumbing to the deceptive fascination of consumer society. May he also encourage you to re-affirm the values which constitute the true greatness of a nation: intellectual and moral integrity, the defence of the family, openness to the needy, respect for human life from conception to death. The holy Bishop and Martyr reminds you of your nation's solid spiritual roots, and urges you to guard with care the patrimony of faith and civilization which, since the preaching of Saints Cyril and Methodius, from generation to generation has now reached you. It is present in the popular traditions, in the works of the philosophers, writers and artists of your land, and in many different expressions of your culture, and it is the guarantee of your identity and your future.⁴ To you, Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church on her pilgrimage in the Czech Republic, I wish to address a special greeting, inviting you to work with everyone, steadfastly and selflessly, for the greater good of your homeland. The example of Saint Adalbert, bravely facing the difficulties and challenges of his time and faithful to Christ, even to the supreme witness of his blood, encourages you to commit yourselves generously to a renewed work of evangelization: a deeper knowledge of the faith through serious biblical and theological formation, a convinced participation in the liturgy and in parish life, generous service of your brothers and sisters who are in need, frank and sincere dialogue with those who are near and those who are far, careful attention to the expectations of those around you.⁵ Finally, I wish to express my special appreciation to all those who with skill and dedication have worked in the preparation and running of this Pastoral Visit: the Episcopal Commissions of Prague and Hradec Králové; the State and Municipal Police, and all who have contributed to the not always easy task of ensuring order; the officials and helicopter pilots, the journalists and the radio and television workers who have provided up-to-the-minute news coverage of the various phases of my visit. To all I express my most heartfelt thanks.⁶ I entrust to Saint Adalbert, the great son and heavenly Patron of this land, the aspirations and the future of the entire Czech People, and I express the hope that the younger generation will be worthy of the historical heritage of which they are the bearers. I renew to each one of you my sincere wishes for your prosperity and peace, and, invoking upon you the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, I affectionately bless all of you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. S pánem Bohem. Mám vás velmi rád! Stále vás všechny nosím ve svém srdci!