



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO PILGRIMS FROM KRAKÓW**

Thursday, 4 June 1998

1. "*Gaude, felix Cracovia...*". A year has past since the day when I addressed this hope to my native city. It was a really joyful day — *that of Queen Hedwig's canonization*. How can I forget that moment when whole centuries and entire generations seemed to have gathered in Blonia Krakówskie, to praise God for the gift of holiness of the one they venerated as "queen, zealous promoter of faith and charity, apostle of truth and goodness"? (cf. Collect of the memorial of St Hedwig). I often recall that solemn canonization mass, and give thanks to divine Providence for *having to celebrate that act, awaited for six centuries*. Today I am particularly full of this joy and gratitude, because in a certain sense they are engraved in the joy and gratitude of the entire community of the Church in Kraków, represented here by you who have come in such large numbers to the apostolic threshold.

I extend a cordial welcome to you all. I greet the beloved Metropolitan, Cardinal Franciszek, and thank him for his words. I greet the Bishops, the priests, the religious, the representatives of the authorities and of the individual cities and territories, H.E. the Ambassador to the Apostolic See and all the guests. I also warmly embrace your families, especially the sick and the elderly and those who were unable to come, who are united with us in thought and prayer. May God reward them for this visit.

2. Allow me to remember those days when, in a certain sense, St Hedwig guided me in my spiritual pilgrimage across the land of Kraków. May this remembrance revive in us all a spirit of thanksgiving for the countless gifts we have received from divine Providence.

I see vividly before my eyes those torches that lit up the silhouettes of the mountains and valleys of Podhale. It is hard to resist the rich symbolism of this fire. Is it not the *sign of the Spirit of God* who moved over the face of the waters when the Creator was making this beautiful earth? — of the same Spirit, who a thousand years ago descended upon it once more in the waters of Baptism, to enliven it with the breath of salvation? Moreover, the mountain people's torches are *a sign of vigilance, of readiness to defend their goods*. As I did that evening, I also give thanks to God so that the fire of faith, hope

and charity will stay alight in the land of Kraków, because the multitudes of its faithful are *alert and ready to defend the treasure of the Gospel acquired at Baptism*. I was moved when among the crowds at Zakopane I fixed my gaze on the cross on Mount Giewont which looks over Poland. At the time I could not but recall the *Crucified One of Wawel*, before which Hedwig knelt to hear the Lord say: “do what you see”. I pray to God without respite that the Exhortation “*Sursum corda*” may be fulfilled; that the faithful of the land of Kraków and of all Poland may follow Hedwig’s example and *lift up their hearts to the Cross, drawing from it a personal and social project of life*.

I am grateful to God because precisely in beloved Podhale, in the church of Our Lady of Fátima at Krzeptówki, *I could renew my “Totus tuus”*, entrusting my whole service to the universal Church to her who spared me at the moment of trial, the attempt on my life. I know I have not been the only one to make this act of entrustment. I was sustained by the prayer of those who had chosen Mary as their Mother and Patroness. I had the opportunity to see this when I visited the parishes of Zakopane, Holy Cross and Holy Family and especially when I was swept up in the age-old recitation of the Rosary prayer, at the feet of the Patroness of Podhale of Ludymierz. I thank you and all our compatriots for the prayerful support you give the Pope. I also ask you: never discontinue this prayer!

3. I directed my first steps in royal Kraków to the *Shrine of Divine Mercy*, St Hedwig could not have taken me anywhere else. In fact it was she who responded with her whole life to the Crucified One: “Jesus, I trust in you”, and made mercy to the most deprived the programme of her reign. The artist who set the figure of the merciful Christ in the 15th century triptych that adorns the altar of the Christ of Wawel did not forget this. How can we not thank God for his mercy? I am pleased that the devotion to divine Mercy is spreading on all the continents. I hear with joy that the Archdiocese of Kraków is endeavouring to enlarge the Shrine of Lagiewniki which is visited by faithful from all over the world. I hope that it will become a *living centre of the apostolate of divine Mercy*.

How magnificent and appropriate a setting for the canonization of Queen Hedwig were the celebrations to mark *the 600th anniversary of the Jagiellonian foundation of the University of Kraków and, in the same context, the Faculty of Theology*; thus making it appropriate to pay homage to the mother of Polish erudition, the “Alma Mater”. I give thanks to God because the time has come when all Polish athenaeums — represented by their respective rectors and professors — have been able to do so, with the Pope, in the university’s collegiate church of St Anne. We met *in the name of our common love of the truth*. I believe that this unitive love will bring blessed fruits to Polish learning. During those days I did not fail to remember the people who down the centuries created the scientific atmosphere of the Jagiellonian *Alma Mater*, of the city of Kraków and of Poland. *The professors and students who in a certain sense gave their life to this university*, especially during the occupation, cannot be forgotten. I pray today as I do every day for the eternal rest of those distinguished men and women of science.

I rejoice to have been able to visit once again the *Collegium Maius* — a place so dear to me. Nor can I forget Queen Hedwig Parish in Krowdrza.

At the end of the celebrations, the Queen led me to the hills of Wawel, to which I have been so strongly attached since my youth. For me personally, it was a special moment. Divine grace enabled me *to relive the first experiences of my priestly ministry*. Fifty years later I could present myself at the same altar in St Leonard’s Crypt where I celebrated the Eucharistic sacrifice for the first time. How grateful I am to God for this exceptional meeting with the whole Church

gathered round the cathedral of Wawel, in which my priesthood is rooted, to which my Episcopal mission is linked and which, in a certain sense, prepared me for the Petrine service. I was deeply moved by the countless memories of our national history and the Christian tradition which this church contains. *Among these visits, I could not miss an encounter with Queen St Hedwig's black Crucifix.*

4. "There is suffering in the Cross, there is salvation in the Cross, love is learned in the Cross. Those who once succeed in understanding you, O God, desire nothing and seek nothing". This crucifix has deep roots in the religious tradition of Kraków. One can say that Kraków's spirituality was formed by the Cross. Its mystery of the infinite love of God who gives himself without reservation for man's salvation, is a strong exhortation to "Do what you see!". It is impossible to give any other response than to follow Christ on the way of the Cross — on the way of the love of God and neighbour which knows no bounds. Therefore, today I would like to recall once again what I said on that memorable day in Blonia Krakówskie: "Divine Providence is putting a new task before us: to love and to serve. To love in deed and in truth. Queen St Hedwig teaches us that the fulfilment of freedom is love, thanks to which man is willing to entrust himself to God and his brothers and sisters, to belong to them She gave the whole nation the example of love of Christ and of man, of man who is hungry for faith and knowledge, as he is also for daily bread and clothing" (*Mass for the canonization of Queen Hedwig*, Blonia Esplanade, Kraków, 8 June; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 25 June 1997, p. 4). This is a great challenge. The Church of Kraków must continue to face it in the perspective of her own millennium, to be faithful to the path marked out by the Holy Lady of Wawel and by so many other "Krakówian" saints.

"Our saint, Queen Hedwig, teach us today, on the threshold of the third millennium, that wisdom and love which you made your path to holiness. Lead all of us, Hedwig, to the Crucified One of Wawel, so that, like you, we may know what it means to love in deed and in truth, what it means to be truly free. Place under your protection your nation and the Church which it serves, and *intercede for us with God, that our joy may never end*" (ibid.).

With deep gratitude, I am thinking today of all those who in some way *helped to make possible my meeting with the Church of Kraków last year*. Once again, I would like to place my gratitude to the entire Archdiocese of Kraków in the hands of Cardinal Franciszek and in yours. I also thank you for this meeting. Please take my greetings and my blessing home: convey them to your loved ones and to the whole community of the Church of Kraków. May God reward you!

Before imparting his blessing, the Holy Father said:

You do well to sing "A hundred years", because I was thinking precisely that His Eminence has listed many places — the shrines and parishes, but perhaps he did not remember the cemeteries, Kraków's most beautiful cemeteries: the Rakowicki, the Salwatorski and obviously, the most important and monumental cemetery next to Wawel Cathedral. These are places where our faith in life is expressed: "I believe in life everlasting". Now receive my blessing.

