



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE NATIONAL PILGRIMAGE FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Saturday, 1 April 2000 Your Eminence,

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,

Distinguished Representatives of political life,

*Dear Pilgrims of the Czech Republic,*1. Your presence in such great numbers fills me with joy. You are making your national pilgrimage for the Great Jubilee. Welcome to Rome, dear brothers and sisters!! cordially greet Cardinal Miloslav Vlk along with Archbishop Jan Graubner, President of the Czech Episcopal Conference, whom I thank for his noble words expressing your sentiments of communion and affection for the Successor of Peter. My greeting extends to the dear prelates, priests, consecrated men and women and all of you who have come from the lands of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, as well as those who are joined with us through Radio Proglas, with a special thought for all the elderly, the sick and the suffering. Through you I would like once again to assure the entire Czech nation, which is so dear to me, of my spiritual closeness: the three Pastoral Visits which Providence allowed me to make to your country have left an indelible memory in my heart.2. The Lenten season we are observing, dear brothers and sisters, offers us a pressing invitation to conversion. Only hearts that know they need a deeper and more intimate union with God are ready to cross the threshold of the Holy Door; only those who truly repent can be faithful and credible witnesses in the world to a new life in Christ. This is the real meaning of the Holy Year!Gathered in this hall, today you are offering a *witness to that unity and love* which identify you as true Christians. I urge you to continue to live this solidarity, "united in the same mind and the same judgement" (1 Cor 1: 10), an unequivocal sign of Christ's active presence in the world.In a spirit of humility and obedience foster understanding and active cooperation with your Bishops, as St Ignatius of Antioch urged: "I implore you, take care that you do everything in divine harmony, under the guidance of your Bishop" (*Ad Magn.* 6, 1). Be witnesses and workers of unity, so that all Christ's disciples may achieve full communion as soon as possible. May the Lord, who is "our peace" and has broken down "the dividing wall of hostility" (*Eph* 2: 14), continue to guide your progress.3. Your society is at last enjoying a period of democracy and freedom. However, gradual secularization and widespread moral relativism challenge your Christian community. You are right in thinking that the present situation requires a *consistent catechetical effort* at all levels: from children to young adults, from families to the school, from the communications media to the world of work and culture. I urge you to spare no efforts in this important sector!!In the process of Gospel formation the family's role is fundamental. Dear parents, help your children to discern the values on which to build their lives. And you, dear young people, do not be misled by deceptive myths and mirages. Do not give in to the illusion of easy success; on the contrary, may your hearts always aspire to greater values, not excluding from the

horizon of your choices the prospect of giving yourselves totally to God through priestly or religious consecration. A united family is certainly a guarantee for building a responsible society. Each one, therefore, should do all he can in the religious, social and political realms to defend the family and to safeguard human life from conception to its natural end.⁴ Throughout history, the Church has always endeavoured to make her own contribution to the country's spiritual and civil progress. Vitally involved in society, she desires only to serve man, showing him the vast horizons of his dignity and the vocation he has received from God, the Creator and Redeemer. After passing through the crucible of persecution, she intends to offer her spiritual treasures to all the people. Naturally, the desired understanding with the State, for the stable, harmonious direction of reciprocal relations in mutual respect and honest cooperation, will help make the Church's activity more effective for all the citizens of the Czech Republic.⁵ Dear brothers and sisters, renewed and strengthened by this pilgrimage in your fidelity to Christ, return to your homeland filled with a convinced personal faith and an intense love for the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ. May the Mother of God, whom you especially venerate at Svatá Hora and Svatý Kopecek, guide your steps and sustain you each day in living according to Gospel values. May the example of all your patron saints inwardly strengthen you, so that you may be "the light of the world and the salt of the earth" (cf. *Mt* 5: 13-14) in your homeland. With these sentiments, I cordially impart a special Apostolic Blessing to you, to your families and to the beloved Czech people. Praised be Jesus Christ!

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