



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II TO THE SLOVAK PILGRIMS

Tuesday, 15 February 2000

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,
Esteemed Representatives of other Christian Confessions,
Mr President of the Slovak Republic,
Dear Slovak Pilgrims,*

1. I welcome you with great joy and thank you for the visit you have wished to pay me on the occasion of your national pilgrimage. I extend my fraternal greeting to Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, Bishop of Nitra, and to Bishop Rudolf Baláz, President of the Slovak Episcopal Conference, whom I thank for his expressive and cordial words on everyone's behalf. I also greet the other prelates, priests, religious, seminarians and faithful present. I greet you, distinguished representatives and delegates of the Evangelical Church and the other Christian Confessions in Slovakia. I also extend a special and grateful greeting to the President of the Slovak Republic, who has wished to honour me with this visit and to give me a significant address.

Through you, dear pilgrims, I would especially like to convey my warm and grateful greetings to all the people of Slovakia. I still cherish in my heart vivid memories of the Apostolic Visit which Providence gave me the opportunity to make to your beloved land in 1995, and I cannot forget the welcome I received during those intense days of meetings and spiritual experiences. I especially remember the Shrine of Sastín where, under the gaze of the Sorrowful Virgin, Slovak Catholics chose her as their patroness and protectress, and renewed their consecration to her, affirming that your nation considers the Christian faith as one of the hallmarks of its identity.

Thank you for your visit, which is taking place during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, when the whole Church meditates on the mystery of love revealed in the Incarnation of the Word and feels surrounded by the tenderness of the heavenly Father, who reaches out to his sons and daughters

with peace and salvation for them all.

2. Dear brothers and sisters, may the good resolutions of renewed Christian commitment which you expressed five years ago during my pilgrimage to Slovakia be strengthened at the Apostle Peter's tomb by the fruits of redemption, which the Church grants us with special generosity in this year of grace and mercy. Fortified by these gifts, you would like here to renew your faith in Christ, the "Son of the living God", and to confirm your decision to follow his way of life, which is demanding but brings peace and salvation.

The Gospel is a precious inheritance which your people have welcomed for many centuries. Long years of harsh communist oppression did not destroy it, even if the difficulties were truly great.

Now is the time of spiritual rebirth, the moment for a springtime of hope after the winter of militant atheism. There are certainly trials and difficulties right now, but the constant return to the well-springs of the Gospel is the sure source of human and religious revival. Be faithful to Christ! Be faithful to his Gospel of salvation, which can renew man and society! Faith, if fully lived, demands a consistent witness in the various contexts where human, personal and community life unfolds.

At this particularly significant moment in the faith history of your people, I would like to extend to you and to everyone in the beloved Slovak nation who shares the honour and joy of being believers the invitation to be courageous witnesses to Christ in your families, in your workplaces and in society. Indeed, it would be impossible to preserve a people's Christian identity if there were not a consistent and courageous witness in the most important areas of their lives, a witness that can avert the ever threatening dangers of compromise, hedonism and secularism.

3. At the centre of the process of spiritual and civil renewal, which the Jubilee offers the people of our time, is the encounter with Christ. He is the Holy Door that leads us into the new life of the Father's kingdom through the light of his word and the effective help of his grace.

The Word of God, which the Church proclaims and offers for our meditation, guides us in our daily lives, giving us criteria for a true assessment of social events and personal actions and opening ever new horizons of holiness and authentic culture for our endeavour. The Jubilee urges us to be attentive and ready listeners to the divine Word, growing in fidelity to Christ and to his unchanging message of salvation. All believers are called and strongly invited by the Jubilee to meet the one Lord and Redeemer of man, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen. He calls us to heal divisions and to walk with determination towards unity of faith through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Let us raise our prayer to God with renewed fervour, that in this year of mercy he will grant all Christians the grace to comply generously with the action of the Holy Spirit, to appear before humanity deeply united in charity, which is the prelude to perfect unity of faith.

4. Christ comes to help man not only by the word, but also through the grace of the sacraments, beginning with Baptism, in which we are reborn "of water and the Spirit" (*Jn* 3: 5). He nourishes this new life especially with the gift of his Body and his Blood in the Eucharist, the divine banquet in which, according to the Apostle's admonition, we can take part only if we form "one body" (*1 Cor* 10: 17). It is in the Eucharist that Christ nourishes and strengthens believers, so that they can live in accordance with the Gospel. In approaching the Eucharistic table, the disciple of the Lord learns to make certain conscious and responsible decisions, to live worthily before God, our good and merciful Father, who reads the depths of his conscience and judges with truth the conduct of each individual. By partaking of the "Bread that is broken", the faithful learn to regard others as neighbours and brethren to be respected and accepted, and to devote themselves to patiently and diligently building the community, a value to be pursued despite limitations and disappointments.

Is this not the model of Christian community presented to us in the Acts of the Apostles, which says that the believers "devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (*Acts* 2: 42)? Only Christians united with one another so as to be "one" can offer a fully credible witness to the world (cf. *Jn* 17: 21). Unity remains today the principal way of evangelization.

5. Dear brothers and sisters of Slovakia, whom I have the pleasure to meet today, I firmly hope you will return home strengthened in your desire to follow the Gospel and to bear courageous witness to it. I pray the Lord that our meeting will also help you, with renewed commitment and under the wise guidance of your Pastors, to be living and courageous communities, ever ready to proclaim the saving and liberating truth to the people of our time.

I entrust all the Slovak people, who are particularly dear to me, to the heavenly protection of the Sorrowful Virgin, the good and caring Mother who watches lovingly over your land. May Mary most holy help you to receive the grace of the Great Jubilee fruitfully and to welcome the Saviour each day with a humble and faithful heart.

With these sentiments I invoke an abundance of divine blessings upon each of you and upon the whole Slovak nation.

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