



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT THE WORLD PREMIÈRE OF THE NEW POLISH VERSION
OF THE FILM "QUO VADIS"**

Thursday 30 August 2001

1. I would like to express my warmest gratitude to those who have made it possible to preview this evening a work which is important for so many reasons. I congratulate first of all both the director, Mr Jerzy Kawalerowicz, and the producer, Mr Mirosław Słowiński, for having produced a far-reaching work, which shows the timelessness of the novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz, written more than a century ago and earned him the Nobel Prize in 1905.

This new screen adaptation was prepared on the occasion of the year 2000. During the Great Jubilee, Christ walked again, in a new way, in the streets of Rome and of the whole world. And we repeated to Him the words of the Apostle Peter, quoted by St Ambrose (*Serm. C. Auxentium*, n. 13): "*Domine, quo vadis?* Lord, where are you going?" Jesus responds to us as he did then: "*Venio iterum crucifigi*. I am going to be crucified once more". I am going to renew my gift of salvation for mankind, at the dawn of the third millennium. This profound perspective helps us understand what the producer intends to do, to reflect upon Peter's question as directed to contemporary man: "*Quo vadis, homo?* Young man or woman, where are you going?" Are you going to meet Christ, or are you following other paths that take you far from Him and from yourself?

The question strikes us more powerfully, when we remember that the place where we are at this moment is precisely the place where, 2,000 years ago, the facts narrated by the novel and film, *Quo vadis*, took place. In fact, we are in the area of Nero's Circus, where many Christians were martyred, including St Peter. A silent witness of those tragic and glorious events is the obelisk, the same obelisk which was then located in the middle of the Circus and which, in the 16th century, was erected in the middle of St Peter's Square, heart of the Catholic world. On top of the obelisk, is enthroned the Cross, to remind us that heaven and earth will pass away, with its empires and

human kingdoms, but Christ will never pass away: He is the same: yesterday, today and for ever.

2. Heartfelt thanks for this special evening go to everyone present, and above all, to those who produced the film: to the director, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, to the excellent actors and to those who in any way contributed to the production of this work of art.

The critics will offer their artistic evaluation of the film. I only want to thank you for the careful way in which you produced it - you respected Sienkiewicz's masterpiece, but, above all, you respected the Christian tradition from which it is drawn. We cannot understand the way the film presents the Church and Christian spirituality if we do not return to the religious events that involved the men and women who, in their enthusiasm for the "Good News" of Jesus Christ, became his witnesses (martyrs). We must return to the drama which they experienced in their souls, in which they confronted, face to face, human fear and superhuman courage, the desire to live and the will to be faithful until death, the sense of solitude before unfeeling hatred and the experience of the power that flows from the close, invisible presence of God and of the common faith of the early Church.

We need to return to that drama so that the question can arise: does something of that drama take place in me? The film *Quo vadis* makes it possible for us to return to this moving tradition of persecution and helps us to find ourselves in it. Once more, I thank you all.

3. Once again, I thank those who have offered and organized this evening's premiere, and I impart to you all and to those dear to you a heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.