



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT TO POLAND

46th INTERNATIONAL EUCHARISTIC CONGRESS

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II Wroclaw, 1 June 1997

1. *Statio Orbis*. The 46th International Eucharistic Congress now reaches its high point: the *Statio Orbis*! Spiritually gathered around this Altar today is the Church in every continent of the globe. She wishes, before the whole world, to make once more the solemn profession of faith in the Eucharist and to sing the hymn of thanksgiving for this ineffable gift of divine love. Truly, "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Church's life (cf. Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10). The Church lives by the Eucharist, she draws from it the spiritual energy to carry out her mission. It is the Eucharist that gives her the strength to grow and to be united. The Eucharist is the heart of the Church! This Congress is part and parcel of the context of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. In the programme of spiritual preparation for the Jubilee, this year is dedicated to special contemplation of the Person of Jesus Christ: "Jesus Christ, the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever" (cf. Heb 13:8). So could this year have lacked this Eucharistic profession of faith by the whole Church? In the series of Eucharistic Congresses which crosses every continent it is now the turn of Wroclaw — Poland and East Central Europe. The changes that have taken place here have begun a new era in the history of the modern world. The Church in this way wishes to give thanks to Christ for the gift of freedom regained by all those nations that have suffered so much in the years of totalitarian oppression. The Congress is taking place in Wroclaw, a city rich in history, tradition and Christian life. The Archdiocese of Wroclaw is getting ready to celebrate its millennium. Wroclaw is a city situated practically at the meeting point of three lands which through their history are very closely united to one another. It is, as it were, a city of encounter, a city that unites. Here there meet in a certain way the spiritual traditions of East and West. All of this gives a particular eloquence to this Eucharistic Congress, and especially to this *Statio Orbis*. My eyes and heart embrace the whole of our great Eucharistic community, the character of which is authentically international, worldwide. Through her representatives the universal Church is present today at Wroclaw. I extend a special greeting to all the Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops who are here, beginning with my Legate to the Congress, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, my Secretary of State. I greet the Polish Episcopal Conference under the Presidency of the Cardinal Primate. I greet Cardinal Henryk Gulbinowicz, Archbishop of the Church in Wroclaw, which has taken on with such generosity of spirit the task of hosting the great event that is this Congress. The joy of this celebration is made even greater by the participation of our other Christian brethren. I thank them for having come to take part in our praise and

supplication. I thank the Orthodox Churches which have arranged to send their representatives, and among them I thank in a special way dear Metropolitan Damaskinos, who is representing my beloved brother, the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I. This presence is a witness to our faith and affirms our hope to see the dawn of that day when we shall be able, in full fidelity to the will of our one Lord, to communicate together from the same chalice. I greet with a warm welcome the priests and the families of men and women religious. I greet you, dear pilgrims, some of whom have come from very far away. I greet you, dear fellow countrymen from the whole of Poland. I also greet all those who at this moment are spiritually united with us by radio and television throughout the world. Truly this is a genuine *Statio Orbis*! In the presence of this Eucharistic assembly of worldwide dimensions which at this moment is gathered round the Altar it is difficult not to be deeply moved.

2. "Mystery of faith"! In order to examine in depth the mystery of the Eucharist, we must continually return to the Upper Room where in the evening of Holy Thursday the Last Supper took place. In today's liturgy Saint Paul speaks precisely of the institution of the Eucharist. This text seems to be the most ancient one concerning the Eucharist, preceding the account itself given by the Evangelists. In his Letter to the Corinthians Paul writes: "The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me'. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:23-26). These words contain the very essence of the Eucharistic mystery. In them we find what we bear witness to and share in every day as we celebrate and receive the Eucharist. In the Upper Room Jesus effects the consecration. By virtue of his words, the bread — while keeping the external appearance of bread — becomes his Body, and the wine — while maintaining the external appearance of wine — becomes his Blood. This is the great mystery of faith! Celebrating this mystery, we not only renew what Christ did in the Upper Room, but we also enter into the mystery of his death. "We proclaim your death!" — redeeming death. "Christ is risen!" We are sharers in the Sacred Triduum and the night of Easter. We are sharers in the saving mystery of Christ and we await his coming in glory. Through the institution of the Eucharist we have entered the end times, the time of awaiting Christ's second and definitive coming, when the world will be judged and at the same time the work of redemption will be brought to completion. The Eucharist does not merely speak of all this. In the Eucharist all this is celebrated — in it all this is fulfilled. Truly the Eucharist is the great Sacrament of the Church. The Church celebrates the Eucharist, and at the same time the Eucharist makes the Church.

3. "I am the living bread" (Jn 6:51). The message of John's Gospel completes the liturgical picture of this great Eucharistic mystery that we are celebrating today at the culmination of the International Eucharistic Congress at Wroclaw. The words of John's Gospel are the great proclamation of the Eucharist, after the miraculous multiplication of bread near Capernaum. Anticipating as it were the time even before the Eucharist was instituted, Christ revealed what it was. He spoke thus: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh" (Jn 6:51). And when these words brought protests from many who were listening Jesus added: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him" (Jn 6:53-56). These are words which concern the very essence of the Eucharist. Behold, Christ came into the world to bestow upon man divine life. He not only proclaimed the Good News but he also instituted the Eucharist which is to make present until the end of time his redeeming mystery. And as the means of expressing this he chose the elements of nature — the bread and wine, the food and drink that man must consume to maintain his life. The Eucharist is precisely this food and drink. This food contains in itself all the power of the Redemption wrought by Christ. In order to live man needs food and drink. In

order to gain eternal life man needs the Eucharist. This is the food and drink that transform man's life and open before him the way to eternal life. By consuming the Body and Blood of Christ, man bears within himself, already on this earth, the seed of eternal life, for the Eucharist is the sacrament of life in God. Christ says: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me" (Jn 6:57). **4. "The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season" (Ps 145:15).** In the first reading of today's liturgy Moses speaks to us of God who feeds his people on their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land: "Remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart. . . . [he] fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end" (Dt 8:2,16). The image of a pilgrim people in the wilderness, which emerges from these words, speaks also to us who are approaching the end of the Second Millennium after Christ's birth. In this image all the peoples and nations of the whole earth find a place, and especially those who suffer from hunger. During this *Statio Orbis* we need to recall the whole "geography of hunger", which includes many areas of the world. At this moment millions of our brothers and sisters are suffering from hunger, and many are dying of it — especially children! In an age of unprecedented development, of advanced systems and technology, the tragedy of hunger is a great challenge and a great indictment! The earth is capable of feeding everyone. Why then today, at the end of the Twentieth Century, are thousands of people dying of hunger? There is needed here a serious and worldwide examination of conscience — an examination of conscience regarding social justice, elementary solidarity among human beings. We do well to recall here the fundamental truth that the earth belongs to God, and all the riches which it contains have been placed by God in man's hands, to use them in the right way, so that they can serve the good of all. This is the purpose of created goods. The very law of nature bears testimony to this. During this Eucharistic Congress there cannot fail to be a joint invocation for bread in the name of all who are suffering from hunger. We address it first of all to God, who is Father of all: "Give us this day our daily bread"! But we make it also to the politicians and economists, upon whom rests responsibility for a just distribution of goods, on both the worldwide and the national levels: we must finally put an end to the scourge of hunger! May solidarity prevail over the unrestrained desire for profit and ways of applying trade laws which do not take into account inalienable human rights. Upon each one of us there rests a small part of responsibility for this injustice. Each of us in some way has firsthand experience of the hunger and poverty of others. Let us learn to share our bread with those who have none, or who have less than we do! Let us learn how to open our hearts to the needs of our brothers and sisters who are suffering because of poverty and neglect! Sometimes they are ashamed to admit it and hide their need. We should discreetly offer them a friendly hand. This is also the lesson taught to us by the Eucharist — the bread of life. It was eloquently put by Brother Saint Albert, the poor man of Krakow, who dedicated his life to the service of the most needy. He would often say: "We must be good like bread, which is on the table for everyone and from which each can cut a slice and eat, if he is hungry". **5. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1).** The theme of this 46th International Eucharistic Congress at Wroclaw is freedom. Freedom has a flavour all its own, especially here in this part of Europe, which for many long years was sorely tried by being deprived of freedom under Nazi and Communist totalitarianism. The very word "freedom" now makes the heart beat faster. And this is certainly the case because during the past decades a high price had to be paid for freedom. Deep are the wounds that remain in the human spirit from that period. Much time must yet pass before they will be completely healed. The Congress exhorts us to look at human freedom from a Eucharistic perspective. In the Congress hymn we sing: "You have left us the gift of the Eucharist to re-order inner freedom". This is a most essential affirmation. We speak here of the "order of freedom". Yes, true freedom demands order. But what kind of order are we talking about here? We are talking first of all about the moral order, order in the sphere of values, the order of truth and goodness. When there is a void in the area of values — when chaos and

confusion reign in the moral sphere — freedom dies, man is reduced from freedom to slavery, becoming a slave to instincts, passions and pseudo-values. It is true that building the order of freedom demands hard work. True freedom always costs dear! We each have to keep making this effort. And here there arises the following question: can man build the order of freedom by himself, without Christ, or even against Christ? This is an exceedingly important question, but how relevant it is in a social context permeated by ideas of democracy inspired by liberal ideology! In fact, attempts are being made to convince man and whole societies that God is an obstacle on the path to full freedom, that the Church is the enemy of freedom, that she does not understand freedom, that she is afraid of it. This is an unprecedented falsification of the truth! The Church never ceases to be in the world the proclaimer of the gospel of freedom! This is her mission. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (Gal 5:1). For this reason a Christian is not afraid of freedom, nor does he flee from it! He takes it up in a creative and responsible way as the task of his life. Freedom, in fact, is not just a gift of God; it is also given to us as a task! It is our vocation: "For you were called to freedom, brethren" (Gal 5:13), the Apostle reminds us. "You have left us the gift of the Eucharist to re-order inner freedom". Modelled on the Eucharist, what does this order of freedom consist in? In the Eucharist Christ is present as the one who gives himself to man, as the one who serves man: "having loved his own . . . he loved them to the end" (Jn 13:1). True freedom is measured by readiness to serve and by the gift of self. Only when it is understood in this way is freedom truly creative, only then does it build up our humanity and create interhuman bonds. It builds and does not divide! How much the world, Europe and Poland need this freedom that unites! The Eucharistic Christ will ever remain an unattainable model of the "pro-existence" attitude, that is to say the attitude of the person who lives for others. He lived completely for his Heavenly Father, and in the Father he lived for every individual person. The Second Vatican Council explains that man finds himself, and therefore also the full meaning of his freedom, precisely "through a sincere gift of self" (cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 24). Today, during this *Statio Orbis*, the Church invites us to enter this Eucharistic school of freedom, so that gazing at the Eucharist with the eyes of faith we will become builders of a new, evangelical order of freedom — deep within ourselves and within the societies in which we live and work. **6. "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps 8:4)** As we contemplate the Eucharist we are filled with wondering faith not only concerning the mystery of God and his boundless love but also concerning the mystery of man. In the presence of the Eucharist the words of the Psalmist come spontaneously to our lips: "What is man that you care so much for him?! . . ." What great value man has in the eyes of God, if God himself feeds him with his Body! What vast spaces the human heart conceals within itself, if they can be filled only by God! "You have made us for yourself, O God," we confess with Saint Augustine, "and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (cf. *Confessions*, I.1.1). *Statio Orbis* of the 46th International Eucharistic Congress . . . The whole Church today gives special honour and glory to you, O Christ, Redeemer of man, hidden in the Eucharist. She publicly confesses her faith in you, who have become for us the Bread of Life. And she gives you thanks because you are God-with-us, because you are Emmanuel! Yours are the praise and the glory . . . Amen!