



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY

OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

TO THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC **HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II**

Banská Bystrica

Friday, 12 September 2003

1. *“My heart rejoices in the Lord” (Resp. psalm)*. It is with deep joy and profound gratitude to God that I join you in this square, dear Brothers and Sisters, to celebrate today the *memorial of the Holy Name of Mary*.

The place where we are assembled is *especially meaningful* in the history of your city. It calls to mind the respect and devotion of your Ancestors towards Almighty God and the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the same time it recalls the attempt to profane this precious inheritance, perpetrated by a bleak regime of not so many years ago. To all of this the column of the Blessed Virgin Mary is a silent witness.

I greet you all most affectionately: in the first place your Bishop, the Most Reverend Rudolf Baláž, whom I thank for his warm words of welcome. I greet the Auxiliary Bishop, the Most Reverend Tomáš Gális. I also greet the priests, the men and women religious, the seminarians and the laypeople who in different fields of endeavour are the living strength of this Diocesan Church. Finally I greet all who have come from neighbouring Dioceses and countries.

With respectful cordiality my greeting goes to the President of the Republic and to the civil and military authorities present. I thank all for the invaluable help they have given in preparing this journey of mine.

2. *“Behold the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38)*, says Mary in the Gospel passage which we have just heard. She speaks to the Angel Gabriel who communicates to her God’s call to become the mother of his Son. The Incarnation of the Word is the decisive moment in that “project” made known by God from the beginning of human history, after the first sin. His will is *to communicate to mankind his very life*, by calling men and women to become his children. This call awaits the

response of each person. *God does not impose salvation; he proposes it as an initiative of love,* to which one must reply by free choice, prompted by love.

The dialogue between the Angel and Mary, between heaven and earth, is in this sense *paradigmatic*: let us draw from it some indications for ourselves.

3. The Angel reveals God's expectations for *the future of mankind*. Mary replies by drawing attention responsibly to her *present situation*: she is engaged to Joseph, promised as his spouse (cf. *Lk 1:34*). Mary does not raise objections to *the future prepared by God*; she asks for light on *the present human circumstances* in which she is involved. God responds to her request by entering into dialogue with her. He wishes to deal with persons who are responsible and free.

In all this, what is *the lesson for us*? Mary shows us the path towards a *mature freedom*. In our days, many baptised Christians have not yet made the faith their own in an adult and conscious way. They call themselves Christians and yet they do not respond in a fully responsible way to the grace they have received; they still do not know *what* they want and *why* they want it.

This is the lesson to be learned today: an *education to freedom* is urgently needed. Especially *in the family*, parents must educate their children to a correct freedom, so as to prepare them to respond properly to God's call. The family is the nursery where the little plants, the new generations, are nurtured. In the family the future of the Nation is forged.

From this perspective, I pray that the *Diocesan Synod* which you are about to celebrate, will be a favourable occasion for *relaunching the pastoral ministry to families* and for finding ever new ways of proclaiming the Gospel to the new generations of this noble Land of Slovakia.

4. "*Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word*" (*Lk 1:38*). *Mary believes and therefore she says "yes"*. Her faith becomes life; it becomes a *commitment to God*, who fills her with himself through her divine motherhood. It becomes a *commitment to her neighbour*, who awaits her help in the person of her cousin Elisabeth (cf. *Lk 1:39-56*). Mary abandons herself freely and consciously to God's initiative, which will achieve in her his "marvellous things": *mirabilia Dei*.

With the Virgin Mary's example before us, we are invited to reflect: God has a project for each of us, he "calls" everyone. What is important is knowing how to recognise this call, how to accept it and how to be faithful to it.

5. My dear Brothers and Sisters, *let us make room for God!* In the variety and richness of diverse vocations, each one is called, like Mary, to accept God into one's own life and to travel along the paths of the world with him, proclaiming his Gospel and bearing witness to his love.

May this be the resolution that we all make together today and that we place confidently in Mary's maternal hands. May her intercession obtain for us the gift of a strong faith that makes clear the scope of our life and enlightens our mind, our spirit and our heart.

I entrust to the Virgin Mary your Diocese of Banská Bystrica, your Bishop, the priests, the men and women Religious and all of you. Amen!

Before imparting the Apostolic Blessing at the end of the Eucharistic Celebration, the Holy Father said in Slovak:

Thank you for your beautiful singing, for the liturgy and for the square that has been so nicely decorated. I warmly thank you for this common celebration of the Eucharist. I bless you all. Slovakia was and always will be faithful to Christ and the Church. Thank you for your witness. I greet the young people; you are the future of Banská Bystrica.

The Holy Father ended in Polish:

I would like to offer my cordial greeting to the Cardinal of Kraków and the pilgrims from Poland. Dear brothers and sisters, you have come to Banská Bystrica with your Slovak brothers and sisters to celebrate and glorify the Good Lord together with the Pope. May the faith, hope and love that have brought us together here, always unite our actions for the common good. May God bless us!

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