



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO POLAND (MAY 31-JUNE 10, 1997)
MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO CONSECRATED PERSONS

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him" (Eph 1:3-4). With these words of Saint Paul I greet all the Orders, Religious Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life and Secular Institutes of Poland. "Blessed be God" for the gift of a vocation to religious life. For this gift we should praise and give him thanks unceasingly. Before the beginning of time he chose you in Jesus Christ and out of love he destined you for himself. Each of you has experienced in your life a particular encounter with Christ, when you heard within the depths of your heart the mysterious call: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mt 19:21). Unlike the young man in the Gospel, you have responded with generosity to this invitation, embracing the way of the evangelical counsels: of chastity, poverty and obedience. With an open heart you have welcomed the grace of a vocation, like a "precious pearl" (cf. Mt 13:45).

Together with you I give thanks today to the Blessed Trinity for the gift of the consecrated life in our homeland, for the Saints, the Beati and the candidates for the honours of the altar from your Institutes and for all of you who "fight for the Gospel" (cf. Phil 4:3) on Polish soil, as well as in other parts of the world, especially in mission countries, proclaiming, sometimes to the point of heroism, "the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour" (Tit 3:4).

With gratitude I think of those among you who bring help to the Church in the neighbouring countries, so that there, after years of oppression and persecution of the faith, there will not be

"sheep without a shepherd" (cf. Mt 9:36).

I offer special words of greeting and appreciation to the communities of contemplative life, completely dedicated to prayer and sacrifice and, precisely because of this, so productive for the Kingdom of God on earth. "Peace to all of you that are in Christ" (1 Pet 5:14).

2. The Second Vatican Council clearly highlighted the importance of the consecrated life, affirming that it is profoundly linked to the holiness and mission of the Church. It is at the Church's very heart, since it expresses the deepest meaning of Christian vocation: it is the radical gift that individuals make of themselves out of love for Christ — Teacher and Spouse — and for their brothers and sisters redeemed on the Cross by the Blood of the Saviour. This teaching of the Council, set out above all in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and in the Decrees *Perfectae Caritatis* and *Ad Gentes*, has been taken up and developed in subsequent years, especially by Paul VI, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelica Testificatio*, and in the documents issued by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and for Societies of Apostolic Life.

I myself, ever since the beginning of my Pontificate, being solicitous for the renewal of the Church in line with the Council, have turned my attention as Pastor to the life and apostolate of consecrated persons, who have an extremely important role in the evangelization of the modern world. There remain in my heart all the meetings with men and women religious and with the representatives of Lay Institutes held during my apostolic travels and in the Eternal City. Each year, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, I invite consecrated persons to Saint Peter's Basilica for a celebration of the Eucharist in common, during which those present renew their vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.

On various occasions I have addressed the communities of consecrated life, expressing the love that the Church has for their vocation and for their service to the People of God. For the Jubilee Year of the Redemption, I addressed to all the men and women religious of the world the Apostolic Exhortation *Redemptionis Donum*, and for the Marian Year the Letter dedicated to the presence of the Virgin Mother of God in the consecrated life. This life — your life — has also been the theme of many of my addresses to pilgrims during the General Audiences, and was given an exhaustive presentation during the work of the Ninth General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, in October 1994.

The work of the Synod and, subsequently, the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, which I published last year, gave new impetus to the consecrated life, and lent greater depth to its identity, spirituality and mission in the Church and in the contemporary world. This wealth of conciliar and postconciliar teaching about the consecrated life must be ever better known, meditated upon, made the object of personal and community reflection, so that your Congregations and Institutes may be renewed and grow according to the divine plan, in conformity with the spirit of your Founders and in full communion with the Pastors of the Church. It is my hope that the celebrations

of "Consecrated Life Day", established this year, will prompt the clergy and the faithful to deepen their awareness of the beauty of the path of the evangelical counsels, to express to God their gratitude for this gift and to develop vocational programmes.

3. In his farewell discourse to the Apostles before his Passion, Christ said: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (Jn 15:16). These are the words that Christ speaks unceasingly to those whom he has loved and chosen, and to whom he has entrusted the work of evangelization. By virtue of your baptismal and religious consecration, you are called to give yourselves completely to the mission of Christ "whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world" (Jn 10:36). Communities of consecrated life have always distinguished themselves within the Church by such an attitude of responsibility with regard to the proclamation of the Gospel. In difficult moments of history and in moments of crisis the Holy Spirit has raised up new Orders and Institutes so that through holiness, selfless service, and the charisms of their Founders they might contribute to the renewal of the Church. Your vocation springs from the innermost heart of the Gospel and serves the work of evangelization in a most productive manner.

"Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16). These words of the Apostle to the Gentiles inspired also the thoughts and work of Saint Adalbert. The love of Christ guided him towards countries and peoples which had not yet received the Good News of Salvation. He sealed with suffering and his martyr's death his profession of faith and his proclamation of the Gospel on the Baltic, doing just what his Master and Lord had done. In the attitude and apostolic activity of Saint Adalbert is manifested the universality of the Church's mission, the universality of love and service, the source of which is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Jubilee of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert, Bishop of Prague and Benedictine monk, exhorts us to reflect on Christ's command: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19). It exhorts the Church in Poland to take up again with renewed energy the work of the new evangelization in the years of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

On the threshold of the Third Millennium of Christianity, we must all join in the fundamental mission of "revealing Christ to the world, helping each person to find himself in Christ, and helping the contemporary generations of our brothers and sisters, the peoples, nations, States, mankind, developing countries and countries of opulence — in short, helping everyone to get to know 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph 3:8), since these riches are for every individual and are everybody's property" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 11).

We live in times of chaos, of spiritual disorientation and confusion, in which we discern various liberal and secularizing tendencies; God is often openly banished from social life, attempts are made to limit faith to the purely private sphere, and in people's moral conduct a harmful relativism creeps in. Religious indifference spreads. The new evangelization is an impelling need of the moment also in the Polish nation, baptized a thousand years ago. The Church expects you to

dedicate yourselves with all your strength to proclaiming to the modern generation of Poles the truth of Christ's Cross and Resurrection, and to stand up against the greatest temptation of our times: the denial of the God of Love.

With your eyes fixed on Saint Adalbert, work with zeal and perseverance for the deepening of faith and for the renewal of the religious life of the faithful, for the Christian education of children and young people, for the formation of the clergy, for missionary commitment "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8), in the various areas of pastoral ministry, in the social apostolate, in ecumenism, in teaching, in the world of culture and of the media. Focus particular attention on the areas where help is most needed: families in difficult situations, the poor, the abandoned, the suffering, those who have been rejected by all. Search out new ways for the Gospel to touch all sectors of human reality, keeping in mind that the new evangelization cannot neglect the proclamation of faith and justice, defence of the fundamental right to life from conception to natural death, the preaching of the mystery of the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ.

Love Holy Mother Church and live her problems in imitation of Christ who "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). May your service be characterized by the profound *sensus Ecclesiae* which distinguished your Founders. Form also among the laity a more mature and profound awareness of the Church, so as to increase their sense of belonging and of responsibility for her.

4. "And thus, even though the many different apostolic works that you perform are extremely important, nevertheless the truly fundamental work of the apostolate remains always what (and at the same time who) you are in the Church" (*Redemptionis Donum*, 15). The soul of the new evangelization is a deep interior life, because only the one who "remains" in Christ "bears much fruit" (cf. Jn 15:5).

Preparations for the International Eucharistic Congress at Wrocław and its solemn celebration have put once more before the Church, especially in our homeland, the ineffable mystery of the Eucharist and have recalled the "new commandment" announced by Christ at the Last Supper.

The Eucharist, "a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 47), most perfectly expresses the meaning and the truth of your vocation, of fraternal life in community and of the need for evangelization. The Eucharist is sacrifice and gift. As such, it requires a response worthy of the gift and the sacrifice. The words of the well-known Eucharistic hymn say of Christ: "He gives himself completely to us". A corresponding response to this extraordinary Gift is the complete and generous gift of self, which finds proper expression in the faithful fulfilment of the evangelical counsels, that is, in moving towards perfect love of God and neighbour, and, consequently, in the dedicated proclamation of the message of salvation. The Eucharist is an inexhaustible source of spiritual energy that comes directly from the Lord, who, although silent in this "mystery of faith", nevertheless repeats

continuously: "I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive *forevermore*, and I have the keys of Death and Hades" (Rev 1:17-18). His help, in proportion to your openness to the ministry of love, always sustains your efforts anew, efforts which sometimes grow weak, and shines its light on "the dark nights of the soul". Thanks to this help and by virtue of your cooperation, the Lord's exhortation: "Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Rev 2:10) will certainly find its fulfilment. He, "chaste, poor and obedient to the Father", and now glorious in the Eucharist, is for you the pledge of your reaching the goal of your difficult and fascinating journey to holiness.

You must never forget that you are called to bear personal and community witness to that holiness which is the essence of the call of the consecrated life and the source of apostolic dynamism in the Church. The laity expect you to be before all else witnesses to holiness and guides who show the way to attain this holiness in daily life. It is good, therefore, that you should offer generous hospitality and spiritual help to those looking for a living contact with God and who through contact with you wish to strengthen their commitment to holiness. There is a need for your witness to promote and support "every Christian's desire for perfection . . . The fact that all are called to become saints cannot fail to inspire more and more those who by their very choice of life have the mission of reminding others of that call" (*Vita Consecrata*, 39). The increasing impoverishment of human values, linked with models of behaviour which are spreading also in Poland and which are based on the triple concupiscence, gives the sincere practice of the evangelical counsels the particular characteristic of being a prophetic sign. For the evangelical counsels "propose . . . a spiritual therapy' for humanity, because they reject the idolatry of anything created and in a certain way they make visible the living God" (*ibid.*, 87). The Church in our day in Poland has an enormous need of this prophetic sign if she is to help people to make good use of freedom.

The witness of your lives, offered authentically and unreservedly to God and to neighbour, is indispensable for making Christ present in the world and for making the Gospel reach the people of our time, who more willingly listen to witnesses than to teachers and are more receptive to living examples than to words. Consecrated persons must be in the world as salt which has not lost its flavour, as light which does not cease to shine on everything round it, as a city set on a hill that draws people's attention from afar (*cf.* Mt 5:13-16).

Attaining the ideal of holiness in one's personal life and in community life entails, obviously, spiritual combat and self-discipline. The secularizing processes at work in society do not leave untouched those who are consecrated to God. They too are subject to the temptation of "doing" rather than "being". The participants in the Synod of Bishops, in 1994, emphasized these dangers. Vigilance and discernment of spirit is always necessary to protect the consecrated life from external and internal dangers, from anything that could lead to a weakening of the original enthusiasm or to superficiality and mediocrity in the service of God. "Do not be conformed to the world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom 12:2).

I rejoice that religious life in Poland is growing and producing magnificent fruits of holiness, as I can testify before the whole Church also during this pilgrimage, by raising Saints and Beati to the glory of the altar: John of Dukla, the Servant of God Sister M. Bernardina Jablolska and Sister Maria Karłowska.

5. I give you this message in the Shrine of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, where so often you gather for prayer, for days of retreat and for spiritual exercises. Mary, the first among all human creatures, at the moment of the Annunciation received the gift of God — the eternal plan for her participation in the mission of her Son. Jesus, in agony on the Cross, with the words: "Woman, behold, your son!" (Jn 19:26) entrusted to her, as Mother, John and all people and, in particular, those whom the Father "foreknew and predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). All those who down the centuries have followed the way of the imitation of Christ have been called with "the disciple whom he loved" to "take Mary into their own home" (cf. Jn 19:27), to love her and imitate her in a radical way, in order to experience in turn her special maternal tenderness.

Mary, the first consecrated person, is for you the model of openness to the gift of God and of acceptance of grace on the part of the creature, the model of complete self-giving to God loved above all else. She responded to the gift of God with the obedience of faith that accompanied her all her life. Every day she was in contact with the ineffable mystery of the Son of God, not only in Jesus' hidden life, when with Joseph she remained at his side, but also in the decisive moments of his public activity, and especially on Calvary, when beneath the Cross she was profoundly united with him in suffering and in praising God: "Blessed is she who believed" (Lk 1:45). Mary's faith overcame every trial without ever yielding. For every consecrated person the Virgin of Nazareth "teaches unconditional discipleship and diligent service" (*Vita Consecrata* 28). Seek in Mary's faith support for your own faith, in order to proclaim to the people of today "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6).

On the threshold of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I entrust to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary all the Orders, Congregations, Societies of Apostolic Life and Secular Institutes in Poland, both men and women.

On the journey of your lives and apostolic work may my Apostolic Blessing accompany you, so that "in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 4:11).

Jasna Góra, 4 June 1997