



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SCREENING OF "TESTIMONY"
A FILM ON THE FIGURE OF POPE JOHN PAUL II**

Paul VI Audience Hall
Thursday, 16 October 2008

*Your Eminences,
Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The film we have just seen takes us back in spirit to that late evening of 16 October 1978, 30 years ago, which has remained impressed in the hearts of all. On this day, and at almost the same time, the new Pope addressed the multitude of the faithful thronging St Peter's Square, and said: "If I make a mistake, you will correct me" (First words of Pope John Paul II following his election, 16 October 1978; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, [ORE], 26 October 1978, p. 6). It was the first encounter with the City and with the world of the newly-elected Bishop who came, as he himself said, from a distant country. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, Archbishop of Krakow, chose the name John Paul ii, thus putting himself in continuity with his Predecessor, Pope Albino Luciani, who had guided the Church for only 33 days.

We could say that John Paul II's Pontificate is contained in two of his expressions. The first: "Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ!" (*Homily inaugurating the Pontificate*, 22 October 1978) was vibrant; it made an impression, an impact on public opinion and was to be frequently on his lips in the following years. The Pope spoke his other words, "Let me go to the Father's House", feebly, as he lay on his deathbed, at the end of a long and fruitful earthly pilgrimage. Those who heard his first words were many; his last words were heard only by those close to him, including his faithful secretary, Fr Stanisław, today Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow. In his book "A life with Karol", made into a film entitled: "Testimoniaza", he recounts his long familiarity with this great Pontiff, first in Krakow and then in Rome, retracing moments of joy and sorrow, of hope and

apostolic daring. Revealing unheard of episodes, the film portrays the human simplicity, decisive courage and, finally, the suffering of Pope Wojtyła, which he faced to the very end with the stamina of a mountain man and the patience of a humble servant of the Gospel.

This moving cinematographic narrative comes in addition to the large number of publications on this Pontiff, who marked the history of the Church and the world in the last part of the 20th century and the beginning of the third millennium. Thanks to this film, constituted of both documentary material and narrative reconstructions of historical events, the spectator unacquainted with John Paul II is given a means to take in his spirit and evangelical passion. The film offers us who knew him an opportunity to relive with deep emotion certain moments of his life with original interpretations that assume the book's content and enrich it with new elements. The film also gives us an opportunity to become more familiar with Poland, Pope Wojtyła's homeland, and its cultural and religious traditions; it enables us to retrace well known ecclesial and civil events as well as episodes unknown to most. It is all recounted as we have seen with the affection of one who shared closely in these events, in the shadow of the protagonist.

Then how could I not express special gratitude to those who contributed to the production of this new film? My sincere thanks go first of all to dear Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz, to whom I am grateful for this book and for this film. It truly makes us relive those days and see once again our beloved Pope John Paul II who from Heaven is certainly with us at this moment. I thank Pawel Pitera, the director, and the other collaborators it would take too long to list them all who have done a truly masterful job in editing the book and adapting it for the cinema. I also greet with affection all those who are gathered here this evening, starting with the Cardinals, Bishops, priests and men and women religious, then the great number of lay people present here who admired and loved my great Predecessor. At this moment, let us take up in particular his invitation not to be afraid. Following his example, let us too courageously bear our witness to Christ. With this hope, I renew my thanks to all those who produced this film and collaborated in organizing the event this evening. I impart my Blessing to you all.

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