



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC LETTER

RUTILANS AGMEN

OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF

JOHN PAUL II

ON THE NINTH CENTENARY

OF THE DEATH OF SAINT STANISLAUS

BISHOP AND MARTYR 1. THE GLOWING BAND of those who suffered torments and died readily for the faith and for the Christian virtues has throughout the centuries from the beginning of the Church, had the effect of giving it remarkable vitality and strength. Rightly Saint Augustine says: The earth has been filled with martyrs as if with the seed of blood, and from that seed there has resulted a harvest for the Church. They asserted Christ more when they were dead than when they were alive. Today they assert him, today they preach him: their tongues are silent, it is their deeds that speak" (*Serm.* 286, 4; *PL* 38, 1298). These words would seem to be able to be applied to the Church in Poland in a particular way, since it also has been born from the blood of the martyrs among whom Saint Stanislaus holds the chief place. His life and glorious death, as it were, speak out forcibly. It cannot be that the voice of the Bishop of Rome and successor of Blessed Peter should be silent in the very year in which the Church founded there celebrates the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of the same Saint Stanislaus, Bishop of Krakow. This jubilee is of supreme importance and is very closely connected with the history of the Church in Poland and of the Polish nation. For more than a thousand years this nation has enjoyed a very special relationship with the Church, which she has valued highly. We repeat that that voice cannot remain silent, the more so because, by the inscrutable designs of God, he, who a short while before had been the successor of Saint Stanislaus in the episcopal see of Krakow, has been elected to the see of Peter as Supreme Pastor of the Church. This is indeed a wonderful opportunity which has been given to us to write this letter on the occasion of the ninth centenary of the death of Saint Stanislaus. We ourselves requested that this be done by our predecessor Paul VI, of great repute, and then by his immediate successor John Paul I, whose pontificate lasted only thirty-three days. Therefore today not only have we done what as Archbishop of Krakow we asked both our predecessors in the see of Peter to do, but we have also fulfilled a desire and wish which is dear to our heart. Whoever could have thought that, after the solemn celebrations had already been announced for this jubilee of Saint Stanislaus, we should leave the episcopal see of Krakow which that Saint occupied, and by the votes of the Cardinals gathered together in Conclave, should be transferred to the see of Rome? Who could have imagined that we should be present at the solemn days of that same jubilee not as the "pater familias", who organises the celebrations, but as a guest, who comes to the land of our ancestors as the Supreme Roman Pontiff of Polish nationality and the first Pope in the history of the Church to visit this land?2. According to the liturgical calendar for the Church in Poland the feast of Saint Stanislaus has for centuries been kept on 8 May. But in Krakow the external solemnities were transferred to the Sunday nearest 8 May. On this day the

religious procession goes from the cathedral, built on "Wawel" hill, to the church of Saint Michael in "Rupella"—tradition has it that Bishop Stanislaus, from the village of Szczepanow, was martyred there, by Boleslaus the Bold, while celebrating the Eucharist. It has been decided that this year the principal celebrations in honour of Saint Stanislaus, which have also the form of a jubilee, will be transferred from the Sunday following 8 May to the week beginning with Whit Sunday and ending with Trinity Sunday. Indeed the importance of the day of Pentecost, when the Church recalls her beginnings in the Cenacle at Jerusalem, is very great. From there the Apostles, who before that continued in prayer with Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:14), went forth filled with that strength which had been infused into their souls as the special gift of the Holy Spirit. From there they went out and scattered throughout the world to fulfil the command of Christ: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Mt 28: 19-20). The Apostles, therefore, went out from the Cenacle at Pentecost. Likewise from there, their successors go forth down through the ages. In his day, Saint Stanislaus, of the village of Szczepanow, also went forth from there, bearing within himself, the gift of fortitude to give witness to the truth of the Gospel even to the shedding of his blood. That generation of nine centuries ago was indeed the generation of our ancestors, who like Saint Stanislaus, their Bishop in the see of Krakow, are the bone of our bone and blood of our blood. The time of his pastoral ministry was short. It lasted from the year 1072 to the year 1078, namely seven years, but its fruit still remains. Certainly Christ's words to the Apostles: "I have chosen you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (Jn 15:16), have been verified in him.³ The solemn celebrations announced in honour of Saint Stanislaus, which after a lapse of nine centuries we relate in some way to the "Cenacle at Pentecost", are of the greatest significance. For as many as went forth from the Cenacle, in accordance with the words of Christ, went into the whole world "teaching all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (cf. Mt 28:19). In the year 936, the Polish nation was cleansed with baptismal water in the name of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, not so very long ago a thousand years had elapsed since the beginning of the history of the Church in Poland and of the fortunes of the nation itself. Surely one must extol the power present in baptism, namely in the sacrament by which we are buried with Christ into his death (cf. Col 2:12) so as to become sharers in his resurrection, sharers in that life which the Son of God, made man, wished to be the life of our souls. The beginning of this life is contained in baptism, which, conferred in the name of the Holy Trinity, gives to the children of men "the power to be children of God" (Jn 1:12) in the Holy Spirit. But this jubilee year of Saint Stanislaus, which also includes the thousand years since that baptism which was celebrated in Poland in the year 1966, is a year set apart for honouring the Holy Trinity. Truly the saints themselves, who by their life and death have been made "an everlasting gift" to God (cf. Eucharistic Prayer III), must be considered abundant fruits of this sacrament by which each one is consecrated to God in a special way (cf. Vat. II, Dogmatic Const. *Lumen Gentium*, 44). When therefore, in this year of our Lord 1979, we celebrate the feast of the commemoration of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus, we will also call to mind the baptism given in the name of the Holy Trinity, from which he emerged as the first and indeed the mature fruit of holiness. The whole nation was longing very much for this. With gratitude it recognised in this saint of the same race the fruit of that new life of which he became a partaker after Poland had been bathed in the saving baptism of the Christians. These things move us to show special reverence for the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus, as was shown for the thousand years of baptism received by our ancestors in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. So as to give greater importance to this act of veneration, we have decreed, in accordance with the desire of the Polish bishops, to raise the rank of the memorial of Saint Stanislaus in the liturgical calendar to that of an obligatory memorial for the universal Church.⁴ The devotion shown to Saint Stanislaus for nine centuries has deep roots in Poland. His canonization in Assisi at the tomb of Saint Francis on 8 September 1253, by which our predecessor Pius IV

accorded to this outstanding person the honours due to the saints, accounted in no small way for the increase of this devotion. Indeed this devotion has deep roots! What concerns the history of the Church in Poland, what is evident in the very life of the nation, is linked with his fortunes. Not only does the annual celebration bear witness to the devotion to Saint Stanislaus, but also many dioceses, churches and parishes in Poland and outside of it are dedicated to him. Wherever the sons of Poland have gone, they have brought with them devotion to this great patron. For many centuries Saint Stanislaus was the principal patron of Poland; as a concession by John XXIII, our predecessor, he now protects that nation with his heavenly patronage together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland, and with Saint Wojciech [Adalbert]. It so happens that in this year when the ninth centenary of the martyrdom of Saint Stanislaus is being celebrated, similar celebrations will take place not only at Krakow but also at Gniezno and at Jasna Gora. For almost the space of a thousand years Saint Wojciech, whose body—tortured in martyrdom by king Boleslaus the Great, known as Chrobry—was buried at Gniezno, was put next to Saint Stanislaus, Bishop of Krakow. Therefore, both Saints Stanislaus and Wojciech, together with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Poland and Mother of the Church, protect the fatherland. The places connected with the life and death of Saint Stanislaus are the object of religious veneration. There is a very special devotion to the Saint in the cathedral in Krakow, which is built on the "Wavel" hill and where his tomb stands, as well as in the church in the village of "Rupella" and in his native village of Szczepanow, which is now in the diocese of Tarnow. His relics are the object of veneration, especially his head which to this day shows clear traces of the deadly blows inflicted nine centuries ago. Every year the inhabitants of the royal city and devout pilgrims from the whole of Poland flock to honour these relics of the head with a solemn procession through the streets of Krakow. In past centuries the kings of Poland even took part in this procession. They were the successors of Boleslaus the Bold, who, as has been said, put Saint Stanislaus to death in the year 1079 and, as is recorded, was reconciled to God and died away from his fatherland. Does not this fact have some special significance? Is it not a proof that down the centuries Saint Stanislaus has been an instrument of reconciliation by which the citizens of the nation itself, whether they are in authority or under authority, are reconciled to God? Does not this imply a special spiritual relationship in which—through the help of this martyr—all have become sharers and are being continually made such? This, surely, is the meaning of the death which by means of the mystery of baptism is involved in the Resurrection of Christ, in his truth and in his love: "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13).⁵ Saint Stanislaus, Patron of Poland! With what feeling the Roman Pontiff utters these words. For so many years of his life and episcopal ministry he was connected with this patron and the whole tradition surrounding this saint. Also all the research studies in this century and in the recent past into the turn of events and circumstances which 900 years ago caused this crime to be committed have been a source of pleasure to us. These studies show that this very fact—which is part of our history—and the distinguished person himself are still, as it were, at the root of the affairs, experiences and truths which always flourish and always have an importance for the life of man, of the nation, and of the Church. And so, supported by this special "vitality" of Saint Stanislaus, Patron of Poland—on the occasion of the ninth centenary of the witness he gave by his life and death—we must make known, as the vast heritage which the history of salvation in Poland has connected with the year 1079, that which through the Mother of Christ and of the Church, he accomplished and continually consolidated for God who is one and three. Namely, it is this heritage of faith, hope, and charity which gives to the life of man and of society its full and proper motivation. It is a heritage of firmness and courage, in professing the truth which shows the dignity of the human mind. It is a heritage of concern for the salvation and the spiritual and temporal good of our neighbour, namely of the citizens of the same nation and of all whom we should constantly serve. It is also a heritage of freedom in a spirit of service and of the giving of oneself out of love. Finally, it is the wonderful tradition of relationship and unity. The facts show that Saint Stanislaus, his cult, and especially his canonization, contributed to the

accomplishment of this in the history of the Polish people. Year by year the Church in Poland cherishes this heritage. Every year she goes back to this noble tradition of Saint Stanislaus, which in some way is a particular patrimony of the spirit of Poland. In this year of our Lord 1979, the Church in Poland, in her peculiar situation, desires to remind herself of this heritage. She wants to ponder it more deeply and to draw from it some considerations relevant to daily living. She needs help in fighting against apathy, crime, and sin, which are especially detrimental to the good of the Poles and of Poland. She seeks through a renewed protection to strengthen the faith and hope in the future, so that she may carry out her mission and serve the salvation of one and all. We, John Paul II, of Polish nationality, are heartily in agreement with these longings, these ardent desires of the heart which come to us from the fatherland, and while the great importance of this jubilee is impressed upon our mind, we lovingly impart the Apostolic Blessing to you, Esteemed Brothers, to the rest of the Polish Hierarchy and to the priests, religious, and faithful. *Given at Saint Peter's, Rome, on the eighth day of May in the year 1979, the first of our Pontificate.* **JOANNES PAULUS PP. II** © Copyright 1985 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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