



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC PILGRIMAGE TO POLAND

VISIT TO THE PARISH CHURCH OF WADOWICE

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Wadowice

Thursday, 7 June 1979

Dear People of Wadowice,

It is with deep emotion that I arrive today in the town of my birth, *in the parish* in which I was baptized and accepted as part of the ecclesial community, and in the surroundings to which I was linked for eighteen years of my life, from when I was born to when I left school.

I want to thank you for greeting me, and also to greet and welcome all of you cordially. Many years have gone by since I lived in Wadowice and there have been changes. So I greet the *new* inhabitants of Wadowice, but I do so while thinking of the *former* inhabitants, that generation that lived its youth here in the period between the first world war and the second. In mind and heart I go back to the elementary school in Rynek (Market Square) and to the Wadowice secondary school dedicated to Marcin Wadwita that I went to. In mind and heart I go back to *those who grew up with me*, the boys and girls who were with me in school, and to our parents and teachers. Some of those who grew up with me are still here and I greet them with special cordiality. Others are scattered throughout Poland and the world, but they too will come to know of this meeting between us.

We know how important are the first years of life, of childhood and of youth for the development of human personality and character. These are the very years that bind me inseparably to Wadowice, to the town and the area around it, to the River Skawa and the Beskid Range. For that reason I have wanted very much to come here, in order to thank God with you for all the blessings that I have received. My prayer is for so many people who have died, beginning with *my parents*, my brother and my sister, whose memory is linked for me with this city.

On the human level, I want to express my feelings of deep gratitude to Monsignor Edward Zacher, who was my religion teacher in the Wadowice secondary school, who later gave the talk at my first Mass and at my first celebrations as Bishop, Archbishop and Cardinal here in the Church of Wadowice, and who finally has spoken again today on the occasion of this new stage in my life, which cannot be explained except by *the boundless mercy of God* and the exceptional protection of the Mother of God.

When in thought I look back over the long path of my life, I reflect on how the surroundings, the parish and my family *brought me to the baptismal font* of the church of Wadowice, where I was, given on 20 June 1920 the grace to become a son of God, together with faith in my Redeemer. I have already solemnly kissed this font in the year of the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland, when I was Archbishop of Krakow. Today I wish to kiss it again as Pope, successor of Saint Peter.

I wish to fix my gaze on *the face of the Mother of Perpetual Help* in her image at Wadowice.

I ask all of you to surround me with unceasing prayer before the image of this Mother.

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