



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY
OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC (APRIL 25-27, 1997)
**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
AT THE MEETING WITH THE SICK AND MEMBERS
OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES**

Saturday, 26 April 1997

Dear Friends who are sick,

Dear Men and Women Religious,

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*1. "He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev 3:12). It is a joy for me to meet you in this ancient Basilica of Saint Margaret, the heart of the Archabbey of Brevnov. This place, rich in memories, is in a sense the wellspring of the religious and national history of your country. This Benedictine monastery, as you well know, is closely linked to the name and history of Saint Adalbert, who built here a hermitage and a cell in order to gain, in solitude and prayer, the inner strength he needed. The monastery which he desired, built with the help of the Premyslid Prince Boleslaw II, became the cradle of Benedictine monasticism in Bohemia and Moravia, and the centre of the spread of Christianity in this part of Europe.2. Ten centuries after his martyrdom, Saint Adalbert still appears to us as the *conqueror* whom God raised up *as the solid pillar* to support your Christian history. As a monk, Bishop, missionary and Apostle of Central and Eastern Europe, he continues to impress us even today, holding up to all an example of fidelity to Christ and the Church, capable of pressing on towards the supreme witness of martyrdom. In the biography of Saint Adalbert composed by Bruno of Querfurt, we read that when the Saint decided to leave the world, he had a precise goal: "*Una cogitatio, unum studium erat: nihil concupiscere, nihil quaerere praeter Christum*. His sole thought, his sole purpose was to desire nothing, to seek nothing but Christ. Mel jedinou myslenku a jedinú snahu, netouzit po nicem a o nic neusilovat mimo Krista" (Legend *Nascitur purpureus flos*, XI). To us today he leaves this same programme. He holds it up especially to you, brothers and sisters, who represent two fundamental aspects of Christian life: a unique configuration to the Crucified Christ through suffering, and a special consecration to God and to the spread of his Kingdom. I greet you all with affection, together with Cardinal Vlk, the Bishops and other authorities present, and in a particular way the Archabbot, whom I thank for his words of welcome, and the Benedictine monks who are our hosts.3. I now turn to you, *dear brothers and sisters who are sick*. Through pain you are being configured to that "Servant of the Lord" who, in the words of Isaiah, "was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (Is 53:5; cf. Mt 8:17, Col 1:24). You are a

hidden force contributing powerfully to the life of the Church: by your sufferings you have a share in the redemption of the world. You too, like Saint Adalbert, have been placed by God as a *pillar* in the temple of the Church so as to become one of its most powerful supports. Dear friends who are sick, the Church is grateful to you for the patience, the Christian resignation and indeed for the *generosity and dedication* with which you carry, at times even heroically, the cross which Jesus has placed upon your shoulders. You are close to his heart! He is with you, and you bear him a precious witness in this world so lacking in values, a world which often mistakes pleasure for love and considers sacrifice as something meaningless. In this millenary year of the martyrdom of Saint Adalbert, which is also the first year of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, and is consecrated to Christ, *the one Saviour of the world, yesterday, today and for ever*, I entrust to you my intentions for the universal Church and for the Church in your country. Offer up your sufferings for the needs of the new evangelization, for the Church in mission lands, where the Lord today too is raising up his martyrs, like Adalbert, and for those who are distant or who have lost the faith. I also ask you to pray for the work being done by the Church in this country, for your Bishops and priests, for an increase of vocations to the priesthood and the religious life, and for the cause of ecumenism. May Saint Adalbert, son of the Czech nation and fearless witness to Christ, fill you with a lively desire for full unity among Christians. Into your hands and your hearts I place all these hopes, dear brothers and sisters who are suffering. May our Lady of Sorrows, who was acquainted with suffering and who understands you, be close to you as a loving Mother. And while I think of you who are sorely tried in body and spirit, I would like to address a pressing appeal to the nation's leaders to be constantly sensitive to the situations of suffering present in today's society. The civil authorities and all citizens need to be concerned about the needs of the sick and should promote effective and constant solidarity within society. Let respect for every human being and respect for life from its beginning to its natural end be the great treasure of the civilization of this land!⁴ I would now like to speak to you, *dear Men and Women Religious of the whole nation!* Saint Adalbert shows each of you how it is possible to combine the contemplative and the apostolic life, and he makes clear how providential consecrated life is for the Church and the world. You are a living and indispensable source of strength for the Christian community. I remember my meeting with you seven years ago in Saint Vitus Cathedral. At that time you were emerging from a long and difficult period of repression which had forced believers, and Religious in particular, to remain silent. But even in the dark years you were able to bear *a great witness of fidelity to the Church*. The oldest among you experienced great humiliations and sufferings during the two terrible dictatorships, Nazi and Communist. Many consecrated persons were interned in concentration camps, imprisoned, sent to the mines and to forced labour. But even in those situations they were able to give an example of great dignity in the exercise of the Christian virtues, as was true of the Jesuit Father A. Kajpr, the Dominican Father S. Braito, the Borromean Sister Vojtěcha Hasmandová, and many others with them. This treasury of acts of love, sacrifice and self-offering, fully known only to God, certainly prepared the flowering of vocations in these new times of refound religious freedom.⁵ Dear brothers and sisters! The Millennium of Saint Adalbert represents a direct and profound challenge for you. Adalbert, a man of learning and prayer, missionary and Bishop, always kept in his heart his original vocation as a Benedictine monk. He was a solid bulwark in the defence of the Gospel. The Lord wants to place you too as *pillars in his spiritual temple, the Church*, for the new evangelization. In the new climate of freedom which you are now experiencing and amid profound transformations in culture and mentality, you are realizing, perhaps more than in the past, how the consecrated life meets resistance and obstacles, and how it can appear difficult and lacking in purpose. Do not lose heart! Communicate lofty and demanding ideals to the young men and women who knock on the doors of your houses. Pass on to them the experience of the Paschal Mystery in daily religious life. Live intensely *the splendour of love*, from which springs the beauty of total consecration to God. As witnesses and prophets of the transcendence of human life, let yourself be challenged "by the revealed word and the signs of the times" (Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, 81). Live radically

your following of Christ and tend with all your strength towards the perfection of charity. "To tend toward holiness: this is in summary the programme of every consecrated life, particularly in the perspective of its renewal on the threshold of the Third Millennium" (*ibid.*, 93). Do not forget that you, consecrated men and women, have "a great history still to be accomplished" (*ibid.*, 110)!⁶ You must write this history of renewed fidelity to Christ and to our brothers and sisters *in a world with urgent and real problems* which call for a generous contribution on your part. Offer that contribution in full harmony with the Gospel and with the inspiration proper to your specific charism. Your total gift of self to God should radiate convictions and values capable of challenging your contemporaries and helping them to see things in a way which fully respects God's plan for mankind. In your activity remain always in communion with the directives of the Church authorities. Without the Church, consecrated life would be meaningless. But what would the Church be without you, monks and nuns, contemplative souls, and without Men and Women Religious and members of Secular Institutes and of Societies of Apostolic Life, devoted to the proclamation of the Gospel, care of the sick, elderly and outcast, and the education of young people in the schools? *The Church needs you!* In you she shows her fruitfulness as a mother and her purity as a virgin. Spread about you *the sense of the Absolute who is God*, joy, optimism and hope. These are things which flow from a life surrounded by the love and beauty of God, and from "seeking nothing but Christ", as was the life of Saint Adalbert.⁷ Dear consecrated persons, dear friends who are sick, as I pray that each of you will come to grasp in your daily life the unfathomable love of God and the abundance of his graces, I entrust all of you to the maternal protection of Mary who, at the foot of the Cross, sealed her total abandonment to God's will with a complete and trustful acceptance. May the Blessed Virgin guide your steps as you seek Christ. May He be the sole, profound desire of your heart! To all of you I impart my Blessing.