

August 18, 2002: A Call to Bear Witnesses of Divine Mercy

John Paul II's Homily During Beatification of 4 Apostles of Mercy

Krakow, Poland

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (Jn 15:2).

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

1. The words of Jesus which we just heard are closely related to the theme of today's liturgical assembly in Blonie in Krakow: "God, rich in mercy." This phrase in a way captures the entire truth about the love of God which has redeemed humanity. "God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" (Eph 2:4-5). The fullness of this love was revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross. For "greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn 15:13). Here is the measure of God's love! Here is the measure of God's mercy!

Once we recognize this truth, we become aware that Christ's call to love others even as He has loved us calls all of us to that same measure. We feel in some sense impelled to make our lives a daily offering by showing mercy to our brothers and sisters, drawing upon the gift of God's merciful love. We realize that God, in showing us mercy, calls upon us to become witnesses to mercy in today's world.

2. The call to be witnesses of mercy resounds with particular eloquence here, in my beloved Krakow, dominated by the Shrine of Divine Mercy of Lagicwniki and its new church which yesterday I had the joy of consecrating. Here this call sounds familiar, for it appeals to the age-old tradition of the City, which has always been known for its readiness to assist those in need. We cannot forget that this tradition includes the numerous Saints and Beati -- priests, consecrated persons, and laity -- who devoted their lives to works of mercy. Beginning with Bishop Stanislaus, Queen Hedwig, John of Kety and Piotr Skarga, and continuing to Brother Albert, Angela Salawa and Cardinal Sapieha, this heritage of mercy has been passed down by generations of Christians in this city over many centuries. Today this heritage has been placed in our hands and it must not be forgotten.

I thank Cardinal Franciszek Macharski whose words of greeting have reminded us of this tradition. I am grateful for the invitation to visit my dear Krakow and for the hospitality offered to me. I greet everyone present, beginning with the Cardinals and the Bishops, and all those who share in this Eucharist through radio and television.

I greet the whole of Poland. In spirit I retrace the luminous journey by which Saint Faustina Kowalska was being prepared to receive the message of mercy -- from

Warsaw, on to Plock, Vilnius, and finally Krakow -- and I recall all those who cooperated with the Apostle of Mercy on that journey. I embrace with affection my countrymen, particularly the suffering and the sick; those struggling with various difficulties, the unemployed, the homeless, the elderly and the lonely, and families with many children. I assure them of my spiritual closeness and I accompany them constantly in my prayer. My greeting also goes to my countrymen throughout the world. I also offer a heartfelt greeting to the pilgrims who have come here from various countries in Europe and from throughout the world.

3. From the beginning of her existence the Church, pointing to the mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection, has preached the mercy of God, a pledge of hope and a source of salvation for man. Nonetheless, it would appear that we today have been particularly called to proclaim this message before the world. We cannot neglect this mission, if God himself has called us to it through the testimony of Saint Faustina.

God has chosen our own times for this purpose. Perhaps because the twentieth century, despite indisputable achievements in many areas, was marked in a particular way by the "mystery of iniquity." With this heritage both of good and of evil, we have entered the new millennium. New prospects of development are opening up before mankind, together with hitherto unheard-of dangers. Frequently man lives as if God did not exist, and even puts himself in God's place. He claims for himself the Creator's right to interfere in the mystery of human life. He wishes to determine human life through genetic manipulation and to establish the limit of death. Rejecting divine law and moral principles, he openly attacks the family. In a variety of ways he attempts to silence the voice of God in human hearts; he wishes to make God the "great absence" in the culture and the conscience of peoples. The "mystery of iniquity" continues to mark the reality of the world.

In experiencing this mystery, man lives in fear of the future, of emptiness, of suffering, of annihilation. Perhaps for this very reason, it is as if Christ, using the testimony of a lowly Sister, entered our time in order to indicate clearly the source of relief and hope found in the eternal mercy of God.

The message of merciful love needs to resound forcefully anew. The world needs this love. The hour has come to bring Christ's message to everyone: to rulers and the oppressed, to those whose humanity and dignity seem lost in the *mysterium iniquitatis*. The hour has come when the message of Divine Mercy is able to fill hearts with hope and to become the spark of a new civilization: the civilization of love.

4. The Church desires tirelessly to proclaim this message, not only by convincing words, but by the ready practice of mercy. This is why she ceaselessly holds up stupendous examples of individuals who out of love for God and for man "went forth and bore fruit." Today she adds four new Beati to their number. They lived at different times and led

very different lives. But they are united by that particular feature of holiness which is devotion to the cause of mercy.

Blessed Sigismund Felix Felinski, Archbishop of Warsaw, during a difficult period marked by the lack of national freedom, urged everyone to persevere in generous service to the poor and to establish educational institutions and charitable works. He himself founded an orphanage and a school; he also brought the Sisters of Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy to Warsaw and supported the work they began. After the failure of the insurrection of 1863, in a spirit of mercy towards his brothers and sisters he openly defended the persecuted. This fidelity cost him deportation to the interior of Russia, which lasted twenty years. Even there he continued to be mindful of the poor and distressed, showing them great love, patience, and understanding. It has been written of him that "during his exile, oppressed on every side, in the poverty of prayer, he remained always alone at the foot of the Cross, commending himself to Divine Mercy."

His was an example of pastoral ministry which today in a special way I wish to entrust to my Brothers in the Episcopate. Dear Brothers, Archbishop Felinski supports your efforts to create and carry out a pastoral program of mercy. May this program be the expression of your commitment, primarily in the life of the Church and then, as fitting and necessary, in the social and political life of the nation, of Europe and of the world.

Inspired by this spirit of social charity, Archbishop Felinski gave himself fully in defending the freedom of the nation. This is necessary today also, when different forces -- often under the guidance of a false ideology of freedom -- try to take over this land. When the noisy propaganda of liberalism, of freedom without truth or responsibility, grows stronger in our country too, the Shepherds of the Church cannot fail to proclaim the one fail-proof philosophy of freedom, which is the truth of the Cross of Christ. This philosophy of freedom finds full motivation in the history of our nation.

5. The desire to bring mercy to the neediest led Blessed Jan Beyzym to far-away Madagascar, where, out of love for Christ, he devoted himself to caring for lepers. Day and night he served those who had been emarginated and separated from social life. By his works of mercy on behalf of the abandoned and despised, he bore extraordinary witness. This was a witness that rung out first in Krakow, then in Poland, and afterwards among Poles overseas. Funds were collected to construct the hospital named after Our Lady of Czestochowa, which still stands today. One of those who promoted this help was Saint Brother Albert.

I am pleased that this spirit of solidarity in mercy continues to be active in the Church in Poland; this is seen in the many programs lending assistance to the communities struck by natural catastrophes in different parts of the world, it is also seen in the recent initiative to purchase surplus grain and send it to those suffering hunger in Africa. I hope that this project will come to fruition.

The charitable work of Blessed Jan Beyzym was an integral component of his fundamental mission: bringing the Gospel to those who do not know it. This is the greatest gift of mercy: bringing people to Christ and giving them the opportunity to know and savor His love. Therefore I ask you: pray for the birth of missionary vocations in the Church in Poland. Support missionaries unceasingly with your prayers.

6. Blessed Jan Balicki's life was marked by his service of mercy. As a priest, his heart was always open to the needy. His ministry of mercy, besides offering help to the sick and the poor, found a particularly energetic expression in the confessional, where he was filled with patience and humility, always open to bringing the repentant sinner back to the throne of divine grace.

With this in mind, I turn to the priests and seminarians: I beseech you, Brothers, do not forget that, insofar as you are dispensers of Divine Mercy, you have a great responsibility; remember also that Christ himself comforts you with his promise handed on through Saint Faustina: "Tell my priests that hardened sinners will soften at their words, when they speak of my boundless Mercy and of the compassion that I feel for them in my Heart" (*Diary*, 1521).

7. The work of mercy traced out a path in the religious vocation of Blessed Santia Janina Szymkowiak, Sister "Seraphica." She had already received from her family an ardent love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and in this spirit she was filled with goodness towards others, especially the poor and the needy. She began to lend help to the poor first as a member of the Marian Guild and of the Saint Vincent Mercy Association; then, having embraced the religious life, she devoted herself to the service of others with greater fervor. She accepted the difficult times of the Nazi occupation as an occasion to give herself completely to the needy. She considered her religious vocation a gift of Divine Mercy.

As I greet the Congregation of the Daughters of Our Lady of Sorrows, the "Seraphic" Sisters, I turn to all religious and consecrated persons. Let Blessed Santia be your patron. Make your own her spiritual witness, summarized in a simple phrase: "To give yourself to God, you have to give yourself to the point of totally losing yourself."

8. Brothers and Sisters, as we contemplate these Beati, I wish to recall once more what I wrote in the Encyclical "Dives in Misericordia": "Man attains to the merciful love of God, His mercy, to the extent that he himself is interiorly transformed in the spirit of that love towards his neighbor" (No. 14). On this path, may we rediscover ever more profoundly the mystery of Divine Mercy and live it in our daily lives!

Faced with the modern forms of poverty that, as we all know, are not lacking in our country, what is needed today is -- as I called it in my Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio*

ineunte -- "a new 'creativity' in charity" (No. 50), in a spirit of solidarity towards our neighbor, so that the help we lend will be a witness of "sharing between brothers and sisters" (Ibid.). May this "creativity" never be lacking in the residents of Krakow and in all the people of our homeland. It represents the pastoral plan of the Church in Poland. May the message of God's mercy be reflected always in works of human mercy!

We must take a loving look around ourselves if we are to be aware of the neighbor by our side, who -- because of the loss of work, home, the possibility to maintain his family in a decent manner and to educate his children -- feels a sense of abandonment, of being lost, of distrust. This "creativity in charity" is needed to provide material and spiritual assistance to neglected children; to refrain from turning one's back on the boy or girl who have gotten lost in the world of addiction or crime; to give advice, consolation, spiritual support to those engaged in an internal struggle with evil. May this "creativity" never be lacking when a needy person pleads: "Give us this day our daily bread!" Thanks to brotherly love, this bread will not be lacking. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7).

9. During my 1979 pilgrimage to Poland, here in Blonie I said that "when we are strong with the Spirit of God, we are also strong with faith in man -- strong with faith, hope, and love, which are inseparable -- and we are ready to bear witness to the cause of man before those who really have this cause at heart" (Homily at Mass at Blonie Kraskowie, June 10, 1979, 4). Therefore, I asked you: "Never disdain charity, which is 'the greatest of these' and which shows itself in the Cross. Without it, human life has no roots and no meaning" (Ibid., 5).

Brothers and Sisters, today I repeat this invitation: open yourselves to God's greatest gift, to his love that, through the Cross of Christ, has revealed itself to the world as merciful love. Today, living in different times, at the dawn of the new century and millennium, continue to be "ready to bear witness to the cause of man." Today, with all my strength, I beseech the sons and daughters of the Church, and all people of good will: never, ever separate "the cause of man" from the love of God. Help modern men and women to experience God's merciful love! This love, in its splendor and warmth, will save humanity!