



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY TO POLAND AND HUNGARY

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

Apostolic Nunciature of Budapest

Sunday, 18 August 1991

1. *Grant us your peace*, O Lord! How often this prayer was addressed to God, when you met in this place of worship in those days when the dark clouds of persecution were beginning to gather over the Hebrew community of *Hungary* and when hateful measures of discrimination were making life ever more difficult. In your hearts you repeated the prayers which from ancient times had so often been on the lips of your forefathers: "O God, why do you cast us off for ever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?" (Ps. 74 (73):1). But persecution became ever more severe. At that time you were gripped by fear for your very lives. Thousand after thousand of the Hebrew community were imprisoned in concentration camps and progressively exterminated. In those terrible days the words of the Prophet Jeremiah became once more a reality: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not" (Jer. 31:15).

My thoughts go with deep respect to the great believers who, even in those days of anguish and affliction, in those days of devastation - "Yom Shoah", in the words of Zephaniah (cf. Zeph. 1:15) - did not fail to believe in the Lord's promises and to repeat: "He has torn, that he may heal us; he has stricken, and he will bind us up" (Hos. 6:1). We are here now to adore the God of Israel, who this time too has stretched out his protecting hand over a blessed remnant of his people. How often this mysterious ransom has been repeated in your history!

2. Sustained by its faith in the Lord, even in its millenary dispersion, the Jewish people has preserved its identity, its rites, its tradition, and indeed *has made an essential contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of the world*, particularly in Europe. In this country too you have behind

you a long history of generous dedication and commitment. And today, after the period of darkness when it seemed as though the Jews would be completely exterminated, you are here once more and making a significant contribution to Magyar national life. I rejoice at your active presence, which reveals the new vitality of your people. But at the same time I recall each and every one of the Jews—women and children, old men and young—who, though they lost their lives, kept their faith in the Lord's promises. In fact I firmly believe that in their persons too is fulfilled the word of God written in the Book of Daniel: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake... And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament . . ." (Dn. 12:2-3).

The sure expectation of the resurrection of the dead is a treasure which many children of Israel discovered at the very moment when their unconditional trust in God had to face the evidence of a situation which, humanly speaking, was desperate. This expectation, shot through with Messianic hope, constituted a break on the darkened human horizon, and revealed a decisive dimension of their existence. With profound respect I salute the testimony of those brave and righteous people; I am certain that their convictions were not in vain, and I trust that all who share that expectation will always have the strength to obey God's commands.

I would like also to remember what the illustrious representatives of the Catholic Church, here in Hungary as well as in other countries, have done to defend the Jews; within the possibilities allowed by the circumstances, they committed themselves with courage; as for instance did the Papal Nuncio Monsignor Angelo Rotta and Monsignor Apor, Bishop of Győr.

4. Our gaze now turns from the past to *a future of reconciliation in justice*. Once again I deplore and condemn, together with you, the wickedness which made you suffer and which brought about the death of so many others. Of course we must try to "purge the evil from our midst" (cf. Deut. 17:7), but what concerns us now is not desire for revenge on the wicked, since it is fitting to leave the supreme judgment to God, but a commitment to ensure that never again can selfishness and hatred sow suffering and death. We must ensure that justice reigns at least in that part of the world over which we can exercise a certain influence, beginning in the first place with our own hearts, our families and those who are close to us.

This fight against hatred and selfishness is *a necessary requirement of fidelity to God's law*. The precept "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:28), concerns in the first place the mutual relationship between the children of Israel, but it does not allow indifference to others. "The Lord your God... loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner therefore; for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19). The hard quest for justice, love and peace must begin with ourselves. It would be a mistake to think that the dark force of selfishness and hatred remains totally outside our lives and does not in some way tarnish our very existence. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21), says the Lord. And this inclination finds an echo in our ways of behaving. Therefore, with God's powerful help, true

liberation from evil is a continuous crossing of the Red Sea, and involves a patient struggle, through which we have to progress by means of a daily conversion of heart, or *Teshuvà*, in repentance, fasting, and works of mercy.

Let us join therefore in a sincere quest for goodness and peace, within us and about us, day after day, so that thanks also to our commitment the wickedness which we detest may be more radically conquered, and that the kingdom of justice, love and peace which corresponds to the Creator's intention may be spread ever more widely within us and about us. "Love for the one same God must be translated into concrete action in favour of man... in the quest for social justice and peace, at the local, national and international levels" (*Guidelines and Suggestions for Applying the Declaration "Nostra Aetate"*, 4: "Enchiridion Vaticanum", vol. 5, p. 513).

5. Knowing our weakness, and trusting in the strength of God who works in us and delivers us from evil, let us have recourse to the Lord who sets us free. He who rescues his people from forms of external slavery will also free us from slavery within. May the Lord's face shine upon our hearts, so that we shall not fix our gaze on the bitter memory of wrongs received, nor wait for others to become good first, but shall ourselves go forward in conversion to what is good and, forgetting the past, cooperate with the Creator in building a brighter future.

This was precisely the great teaching of the Second Vatican Council, which exhorted the whole Church to study the vast treasure made up by the common spiritual patrimony (cf. *Nostra aetate*, 4) which unites us with Abraham's stock, so as to draw from that patrimony a renewed impulse of faith and action. And from this conviction springs a common commitment for Christians and Jews to get to know one another better, to engage in dialogue, to cooperate intensely in the sphere of human rights, religious education, and the fight against antisemitism, in accordance with the programme laid down in Prague in 1991 by the Jewish-Catholic Mixed Committee, in a spirit of fraternal esteem.

In the face of the risk of a resurgence and spread of antisemitic feelings, attitudes and initiatives, of which certain disquieting signs are to be seen today, and of which we have experienced the most frightful results in the past, we must teach consciences to consider antisemitism, and all forms of racism, as sins against God and humanity. In order to ensure this education of consciences and effective cooperation in general, it is to be hoped that there can also be set up joint local committees.

And so, my friends, may this meeting of ours turn into a fervent prayer, after the manner of the Prophet's moving supplication: "Remember your power and your name. For you are our Lord, our God, and you, O Lord, will we praise" (Bar. 3:5-6).

May this prayer unite all the inhabitants of Hungary, in the peace of the Lord.

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