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Mass in the Jasna Góra shrine on the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland: leave behind all past wrongs and wounds, and build fellowship with all

Pope Francis began his second day in Poland with a visit to the convent of the Sisters of the Presentation, not far from the archbishop's residence. The convent, made up of a group of buildings dating from the eighteenth century, also includes a public middle school and high school, as well as the church of St. John, considered to be one of the most significant historical buildings in Krakow. Upon arrival the Holy Father was received by the Superior General of the Congregation and paused a moment to pray in silence in the chapel of the 30 women religious of the community and various students. He then signed the Community's Book of Honour with the following words: *"I thank you for your valuable service, I bless you and I encourage your educational mission: cultivate with love the seeds of goodness, beauty and truth that God sows in the new generations"*.

Before transferring to Czestochowa by car, he visited the hospital where Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, archbishop emeritus of Krakow, has been admitted, gravely ill. He then continued his visit to the Marian shrine of Jasna Góra.

The city of Czestochowa is twinned with other cities of Marian worship such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, Fatima and Loreto, and its shrine Jasna Góra (Luminous Mount) is the most famous Marian sanctuary in Poland and a destination for pilgrims. Since the fifteenth century the icon of the Mother of God, also known as the Black Virgin due to the dark colour of her skin, has been venerated there. In 2016 Poland celebrated the 360th anniversary of the commendation of the nation to Mary during the Swedish invasion (1656) and the 60th anniversary of the pledges of the nation in 1956. In this shrine on 4 June 1979, St. John Paul II entrusted his papacy to Mary and in 1997 he defined Jasna Góra as the national shrine, confessional and altar, a place of spiritual transformation, conversion and renewal in the life of the Polish people.

The Byzantine icon of the Black Virgin, of the "Hodegetria" type ("She who shows and guides the way") is dressed with a new cape given on the occasion of the pledge made on the 350th anniversary of the miraculous defence of Jasna Góra and as a sign of gratitude for the life of St. John Paul II and the 25th anniversary of the birth of the Solidarnosc union. The crowns of gold of the Virgin and Child were offered and blessed by St. John Paul II on 1 April 2005, shortly before his death. In the chapel beside the image there is a gold rose given by Blessed Paul VI, who had wished to participate in the millennium celebration of the baptism of Poland in 1966 but was refused permission by the Communist regime. It was placed there by St. John Paul II during his trip to

Poland in 1979, as he did in 1982 with a gold crown bearing the phrase “Totus Tuus”. In 2004 he also took the bloodstained fascia that the Pope was wearing at the time of the assassination attempt of 13 May 1981.

The shrine originates from 1382, when a monastery for Paulinosde Hungria was founded on the Jasna Góra hill. Around that time the famous icon of the Virgin appeared, and thereon Jasna Góra gradually became the most famous Marian shrine not only for Poland but also in surrounding nations. The influx of pilgrims made it necessary to construct new buildings between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries. The shrine is currently visited every year by four million pilgrims from more than eighty countries.

Upon arrival in Czestochowa, the Holy Father carried out an extended tour by popemobile to greet the faithful who awaited him in the courtyard of the shrine and its environs, and at 9.45 a.m. he was received in the monastery by the Superior General of the Order of St. Paul the First Hermit and by Fr. Arnold Chrapkowski. Three hundred fathers of this religious institute were gathered inside the Chapel of the Black Virgin. There, the Pope prayed in silence before the Marian icon and offered a golden rose as a tribute.

At 10.30 the Pope presided at Holy Mass on the occasion of the 1050th anniversary of the baptism of Poland, concelebrated with the bishops of Poland and thousands of priests, both Polish and of other nationalities. The Eucharistic celebration was attended by the president of the Republic, Andrzej Duda, and other state figures.

In his homily, the full text of which is given below, the Pope emphasises that God weaves in humanity the history of salvation, reiterating that the Lord prefers

“From the readings of this Liturgy a divine thread emerges, one that passes through human history and weaves the history of salvation. The apostle Paul tells us of God’s great plan: ‘When the fullness of time had come, God sent His son, born of a woman’. But history tells us that when this ‘fullness of time’ came, when God became man, humanity was not especially well-disposed, nor was there even a period of stability and peace: there was no ‘Golden Age’. The scenario of this world did not merit the coming of God; indeed, ‘His own received Him not. The fullness of time was thus a gift of grace: God filled our time out of the abundance of His mercy. Out of sheer love He inaugurated the fullness of time.

“It is particularly striking how the coming of God into history came about: He was ‘born of a woman’. There was no triumphal entrance or striking epiphany of the Almighty. He did not reveal Himself as a brilliantly rising sun, but entered the world in the simplest of ways, as a child from His mother, with that ‘style’ that Scripture tells us is like a rainfall upon the land, like the smallest of seeds which sprouts and grows. Thus, contrary to our expectations and perhaps even our desires, the kingdom of God, now as then, ‘does not come in a way that attracts attention’, but rather in littleness, in humility.

“Today’s Gospel takes up this divine thread delicately passing through history: from the fullness of time we come to the ‘third day’ of Jesus’ ministry and the proclamation of the ‘hour’ of salvation. Time shortens, God always shows Himself in littleness. And so we come to ‘the first of the signs that Jesus did’, in Cana of Galilee.

“There is no amazing deed done before the crowd, or even a word to settle a heated political question like that of the subjection of the people to the power of Rome. Instead, in a small village, a simple miracle takes place and brings joy to the wedding of a young and completely anonymous family. At the same time, the water that became wine at the wedding banquet is a great sign, for it reveals to us the spousal face of God, a God Who sits at table with us, Who dreams and holds communion with us. It tells us that the Lord does not keep His distance, but is near and real. He is in our midst and He takes care of us, without making decisions in our place and without troubling Himself with issues of power. He prefers to let himself be contained in little things, unlike we who always want to possess something greater. To be attracted by power, by grandeur, by appearances, is tragically human. It is a great temptation that tries to insinuate itself everywhere. But to give oneself to others, eliminating distances, dwelling in littleness and living the reality of one’s everyday life: this is exquisitely divine.

“God saves us, then by making Himself little, near and real. First God makes Himself little. The Lord, Who is ‘meek and humble of heart’, especially loves the little ones, to whom the kingdom of God is revealed; they are

great in His eyes and He looks to them. He especially loves them because they are opposed to the 'pride of life' that belongs to the world. The little ones speak His own language, that of the humble love that brings freedom. So He calls the simple and receptive to be His spokespersons; He entrusts to them the revelation of His name and the secrets of His heart. Our minds turn to so many sons and daughters of your own people, like the martyrs made the defenceless power of the Gospel shine forth, like those ordinary yet remarkable people who bore witness to the Lord's love amid great trials, and those meek and powerful heralds of mercy who were St. John Paul II and St. Faustina. Through these 'channels' of His love, the Lord has granted priceless gifts to the whole Church and to all mankind. It is significant that this anniversary of the baptism of your people exactly coincides with the Jubilee of mercy.

"Then too, God is near, His kingdom is at hand. The Lord does not want to be feared like a powerful and aloof sovereign. He does not want to remain on His throne in heaven or in history books, but loves to come down to our everyday affairs, to walk with us. As we think of the gift of a millennium so filled with faith, we do well before all else to thank God for having walked with your people, having taken you by the hand and accompanied you in so many situations. That is what we too, in the Church, are constantly called to do: to listen, to get involved and be neighbours, sharing in people's joys and struggles, so that the Gospel can spread every more consistently and fruitfully: radiating goodness through the transparency of our lives.

"Finally, God is real. Today's readings make it clear that everything about God's way of acting is real and concrete. Divine wisdom 'is like a master worker' and 'plays'. The Word becomes flesh, is born of a mother, is born under the law, has friends and goes to a party. The eternal is communicated by spending time with people and in concrete situations. Your own history, shaped by the Gospel, the Cross and fidelity to the Church, has seen the contagious power of a genuine faith, passed down from family to family, from fathers to sons and above all from mothers and grandmothers, whom we need so much to thank. In particular, you have been able to touch with your hand the real and provident tenderness of the Mother of all, whom I have come here as a pilgrim to venerate and whom we have acclaimed in the Psalm as the 'great pride of our nation'.

"It is to Mary, then that we, who have gathered here, now look. In her, we find complete conformity to the Lord. Throughout history, interwoven with the divine thread, is also a 'Marian thread'. If there is any human glory, any merit of our own in the fullness of time, it is she. Mary is that space, preserved free from sin, where God chose to mirror himself. She is the stairway God took to descend and draw near to us. She is the clearest sign of the fullness of time.

"In the life of Mary we admire that littleness that God loves, for he 'looked upon the humility of his servant', and 'lifted up the lowly'. He was so pleased with her that He let His flesh be woven from hers, so that the Virgin became the Mother of God, as an ancient hymn, sung for centuries, proclaims. To you who uninterruptedly come to her, converging upon this, the spiritual capital of the country, may she continue to point the way. May she help you to weave in your own lives the humble and simple thread of the Gospel.

"At Cana, as here in Jasna Góra, Mary offers us her nearness and helps us to discover what we need to live life to the full. Now as then, she does this with a mother's love, by her presence and counsel, teaching us to avoid hasty decisions and grumbling in our communities. As the Mother of a family, she wants to keep us together. Through unity, the journey of your people has surmounted any number of harsh experiences. May the Mother, who stood steadfast at the foot of the Cross and persevered in prayer with the disciples in awaiting the Holy Spirit, obtain for you the desire to leave behind all past wrongs and wounds, and to build fellowship with all, without ever yielding to the temptation to withdraw or to domineer.

"At Cana, Our Lady showed great realism. She is a Mother who takes people's problems to heart and acts. She recognises moments of difficulty and handles them discreetly, efficiently and decisively. She is neither imperious nor intrusive, but a Mother and a handmaid. Let us ask for the grace to imitate her sensitivity and her creativity in serving those in need, and to know how beautiful it is to spend our lives in the service of others, without favourites or distinctions. May Mary, Cause of our Joy, who brings peace amid the profusion of sin and the turmoil of history, obtain for us the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and enable us to be good and faithful servants

“Through her intercession, may the fullness of time come about also for us. The transition from before to after Christ means little if it remains a date in the annals of history. May each one of us be able to make an interior passage, a Passover of the heart, towards the divine ‘style’ incarnated by Mary. May we do everything in littleness, and accompany others at close hand, with a simple and open heart”.
