

WORLD & NATION

Enthusiastic throngs greet pope in Poland

By John Thavis
Catholic News Service

ELK, Poland — On the first leg of a 13-day pilgrimage to his homeland, Pope John Paul II evoked the martyr saints of ancient and recent times and said their spiritual guidance was essential in the country's new era of economic and social progress.

The pope said Poland's past spiritual models are especially relevant in a world that needs people motivated by Gospel values and not just material happiness.

It was the start of his longest visit to Poland, a marathon touching 21 cities, and the 79-year-old pontiff looked and sounded good as he presided over Masses, meetings and prayer services in eight northern cities June 5-8.

In the seaport of Gdansk, where in 1987 he delighted Solidarity supporters by publicly defending their human and political rights, the pope said this time he was here as "a fellow Pole who comes among you to fulfill the need of his own heart and who brings the blessing of God, who is love."

At a Mass for half a million people in the nearby city of Sopot, he credited the Solidarity movement for bringing down the Berlin Wall and opening the doors to freedom throughout Eastern Europe. Now, Poland faces new challenges, he said.

"At that time I heard you say in Gdansk: 'There is no freedom without solidarity.' Today we need to say: 'There is no solidarity without love.' Indeed, there is no happiness, there is no future for the individual and the nation without love," he said.

From the moment his plane landed, the pope saw evidence of a remarkable transformation in the Gdansk region, where the economy has boomed despite a crisis in the ship-building industry. Streets were lined with foreign businesses like McDonalds and Pizza Hut, cell phones sometimes rang during outdoor Masses, and the banners welcoming the pope were often hung from satellite dishes that adorned nearly every apartment building.

The pope said he was proud of the economic progress, but he reminded his listeners not to seek ultimate happiness in "pleasures, in material things and in what is earthly and transient."

The pope's visit was designed as a spiritual preparation for the year 2000, and he said one model for the future was St. Adalbert, a Czech bishop who evangelized the Gdansk region and was martyred there in 997. Celebrating Mass on a grassy hillside outside the agricultural town of Pelplin June 6, he linked St. Adalbert to the heroic suffering of 24 priests and pastoral workers who were slain by Nazis in 1939.

Outside the manufacturing center of Elblag, near the spot of St. Adalbert's martyrdom, the pope recited the Ten Commandments and asked his listeners to make them the touchstone of their daily lives. He said it was a strong temptation today to organize one's life as if God and his commandments do not exist, but told the crowd of several hundred thousand: "The material order is not enough."

In the small village of Lichen June 7, the pope blessed a half-finished, massive new Marian shrine that will be Poland's largest sanctuary when it is completed in the year 2000.

Celebrating Mass later in the day in Bydgoszcz, the pope again drew attention to the persecution endured by Polish pastors and lay people during the struggles of this century, part of what he called a rich 20th-century "martyrology."

"How many martyrs there were during the time of the Second World War and under communist totalitarianism! They suffered and gave their lives in the death camps of Hitler or those of the Soviets," he said. Similar heroic witness has been given by Christians in France, Japan, Mexico,

Spain and Vietnam, he said.

Later, he beatified the first of more than 100 martyrs he was to honor during his visit. The pope said Father Stefan Wincenty Frelichowski's path to Dachau, via other Nazi death camps at Stutthof, Grenzdorf and Sachsenhausen, had been his "list of stations on a path of suffering."

Traveling June 8 to a corner of Poland largely untouched by the country's recent economic revival, the pope warned that his homeland must not turn its back on the new poor of the post-communist era.

"Let us not harden our hearts when we hear the cry of the poor," the pope said during a Mass in the northeastern city of Elk. "Let us strive to act and to live in such a way that in our country no one will be without a roof over their heads or bread on the table; that no one will feel alone, left without anyone to care for them."

After the Mass, he went to a secluded former monastery near the Lithuanian border for a day and a half of relaxation, amid wooded hills where he used to hike and canoe as a young priest.



Reuters/CNS

A cheering crowd surrounds Pope John Paul II as he rides in his popemobile to Mass in Bydgoszcz, Poland, June 7. The pope was on a 13-day visit to his homeland.

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