

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Sermon delivered on the Feast of the Ascension, 13 May 2010, marking the award of the International Charlemagne Prize of the City of Aachen to the Right Honourable Donald Tusk, Prime Minister of Poland

Acts 1.1-11

Eph 1.17-23

Lk 24.46-53

Dear sisters and brothers in the Lord,
dear Mister Prime Minister, Right Honourable Donald Tusk,
authorities in Europe,
esteemed guests,

We are celebrating the Feast of the Ascension. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke reports on how the apostles and disciples were staring into the sky. The good news is that Jesus has been taken up into heaven, and the promise is that he will come again, in the same way. As to ourselves, we are living beneath the heaven that has been opened. We are celebrating the fact that Jesus is with the Father – for us.

If you cast your gaze up into the dome of the octagon of our Cathedral, you can see the image of Christ returning home to God and coming again, depicting a reality to which the Emperor Charlemagne, in the exercise of his political, economic and cultural power, felt responsible.

And this is what I would like to offer to you today through the words of the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians: 'That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you ..'

I am convinced this is what you need, as you wield political, economic and cultural power for Europe and the world: wisdom that is more than just knowledge, wisdom that is knowledge saturated with practical life experi-

ence combined with the judicious use of this knowledge. Wisdom that enables us to live, and is the genuine art of life, wisdom that is rooted in God, who in His wisdom created everything in its place. Wisdom and revelation, which is to say knowledge that is founded on God, who reveals Himself to us and enables us to build society on the foundations of the values of faith. 'Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened', because, as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry put it, it is only with the heart that one can see rightly. And the education of hearts is the domain of women and men who shape politics, economics and culture from the heart, and who have at heart an interest in seeing everyone in Europe and the desire for a peaceful Europe, for a community of nations that focuses on the values from which it draws its identity and vitality, and that manages to live and breathe unity in diversity. Europe can become a melody in which the various notes and instruments resound in harmony, a melody that venerates God and creates a future through freedom in peace and justice.

Dear sisters and brothers,
esteemed guests,

Our Gospel according to Saint Luke closes with the opened heaven and the promise of God's Holy Spirit. Jesus left the disciples and was taken up into heaven. And 'lifting up His hands He blessed them'. As you lift your gaze upward into the dome of the octagon of this Cathedral, you will see the image of this blessing Christ. With His blessing He is saying goodbye to the world and to all of us. Under His blessing we are safe and secure, and with His blessing we may act within our families and societies to build peace in Europe and the world. Mary, 'Black Madonna' and Queen of Poland, protect the Polish people! Amen.

I would like to recall, on this occasion, the sufferings of the Polish people. The three partitions of Poland lasted from 1772 to 1914. These robbed the nation of its independence and sovereignty, forcing it to submit to the major powers and multi-ethnic states of the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg monarchy, the Russian tsarist rule of the Romanovs, and Prussian rule under the Hohenzollerns. Russia and Prussia were conspicuous in their drive to contain national autonomy. It was the Catholic Church that safeguarded the cohesion of the nation.

Following the brief interlude of the interwar period, Hitler lied and broke agreements to invade Poland just over 70 years ago. The Second World War brought monstrous suffering across Europe and the world. Wars do not break out. They are made by people in positions of political, economic and military responsibility. Those responsible in this case were Hitler and the national socialist regime. But it was not only war for which they were responsible. For the Polish civil population, and especially Poland's Jews, this marked the beginning of a time of horrific, unspeakable suffering. Poland and the nazi extermination camps became the main places of the Holocaust. Today, in the collective memory of the Poles the Holocaust is considered a catastrophe both for the Jews and for the Polish nation. During the five-year German occupation, almost every Polish family was affected by discrimination, forced labour and murder. Six million Poles were murdered, three million of them Polish Jews.

The war spread across the world. Fifty-five million people fell victim to this World War. Five million people were driven out of their homes.

I bow my head before all the victims of this war, before the Jews who were murdered, the Poles who were killed, before all those who suffered and still are suffering the consequences. We must take further steps along the path of reconciliation. We need a culture of remembrance, to honour the dead and admonish the living.

We recall the prophetic exchange of letters at the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965. The Polish bishops wrote: 'We forgive, and ask for forgiveness'. The German bishops replied: 'With fraternal reverence, we grasp the hands offered to us. May the God of peace grant, through the intercession of the "Regina Pacis", that our hands may never again be separated by the demon of hatred.'

That was a brave step by the Polish bishops, which earned them a great deal of criticism. But the process of reconciliation had been begun. Reconciliation means more than recognising and admitting our guilt, more than asking for and granting forgiveness. Reconciliation aims to build peace and friendship. Reconciliation requires continuous dialogue, devout prayer, a sincere will for peace, and the genuine love that allows itself to be guided by God's Ten Commandments. This makes it possible to break the vicious

circle of hatred, enmity and violence. I look upon my Polish friends and the great deeds of many Poles with much gratitude.

After the Second World War, Poland came under communist rule and the dictatorship of real-life state socialism. But the Poles remained steadfast; especially when Cardinal Wojtyla of Cracow was elected Pope, and went on to provide strong and effective support to the Solidarność labour movement. Westerplatte by the Gdańsk shipyard has become imprinted upon our memories, and it was you, Mister Prime Minister, who as a young man rallied students around the Solidarność movement, as well as older gentlemen, such as the former Archbishop of Gdańsk, Msgr Gocłowski, who supported that. And it was your courage and the courage of many Poles which changed the world of the blocs. Admittedly there is still much that remains to be done, especially with regard to changing people's mentalities.

Mister Prime Minister, today you, in a way, embody the European Union. The EU can become a tool for peace, if it builds on its religious and human roots. When the Extraordinary International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen was bestowed on Pope John Paul II at Rome in 2004, that outstanding Pope and son of Poland formulated his dream of Europe as follows: 'I am thinking of a Europe without egotistical nationalism, where nations are seen as living centres of cultural riches that must be protected and promoted to everyone's advantage.' Behind these words lies the perpetual world being able to live as decent a life as possible.

According to the Epistle to the Ephesians, God demonstrated His supreme power and strength in Christ 'when He raised Him from the dead and made Him sit at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion'. He, Christ, is the Lord of the Ages of the World.

Esteemed women and men of Europe,
dear Christians,

We are delighted that the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen is today being conferred on the Prime Minister of Poland, and my personal congratulations to you, Mr. Tusk, on receiving this award.

This leads us to cast our gaze toward our Polish neighbours, whom you, Mister Prime Minister, wish to tie firmly into Europe by acceding to the Lis-

bon Treaty. In doing so you are building on the friendship that linked St. Adalbert (Wojciech), the bishop and martyr, with the young Emperor Otto III, who found his final resting place here in this Cathedral, a friendship forged to create a culture of nations coming together.