

JOHN PAUL II
Address at Blessing of Marian Shrine
Monday, 7 June 1999

1. "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord" (Lk 1:45). As a pilgrim I come today to the Shrine of Lichen and I greet Mary with the words of Elizabeth: "Blessed is she who believed". From the text of the evangelist Luke we learn that the house of Elizabeth was filled with joy. Thanks to the light shining from on high, Elizabeth understands the greatness of Mary who is "full of grace" and who is therefore "blessed among women" (cf. Lk 1:42), since she carries in her womb Jesus, the Saviour of the world. The scene of the Visitation is particularly near to our hearts here in this place so loved by Mary. Every shrine, in fact, is in some way the house of Elizabeth visited by the Mother of God's Son, who comes so that she may be close to her beloved people.

2. Brothers and Sisters, I give thanks to Divine Providence that this Shrine figures as part of my pilgrim journey in our homeland. I am thankful for being able to meet you on this beautiful and picturesque hill, amid fields and woods, to bless this new church in honour of the Mother of God. I look with admiration upon this large building, which in its architectural richness is an expression of faith and love for Mary and her Son. Let us give thanks to God for this church! Gratitude is due also to the guardians of this Shrine, the Marian Fathers who for years have taken care of it and have faithfully served the pilgrims. In fact, it is their initiative that led to the building of this church. I thank also those who built it and all who, with their offerings, have supported and continue to support this important undertaking. I cordially greet Bishop Bronislaw, Pastor of the Diocese of Wloclawek, in whose territory this Shrine lies. I greet the Auxiliary Bishop, the Bishop Emeritus, the clergy and the pilgrims who have come from various parts of Poland.

3. Let us turn our gaze to her "who believed". Mary believed that what the Lord had said to her would be fulfilled. She believed, on God's word, that she — a virgin — would conceive and bear a Son. Mary's act of faith reminds us of the faith of Abraham, who at the beginning of the Old Covenant believed in God. This is the greatness and the perfection of Mary's faith, in the presence of which Elizabeth uttered words of amazement. Calling Mary "blessed among women", Elizabeth shows that Mary was blessed thanks to her faith. Elizabeth's exclamation, filled with wonder, is for us an exhortation to learn to appreciate what Mary's presence brings to the life of every believer.

4. Gathered today for this morning prayer at the Shrine of Lichen, at the feet of Our Lady of Sorrows, let all of us — Bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, lay faithful — implore her to intercede for us with her Son, seeking to obtain for us:

A living faith that will grow from a mustard seed to the tree of divine life;

A faith that is nourished everyday by prayer, is strengthened by the holy sacraments and draws richness from the Gospel of Christ;

A strong faith that shrinks before no difficulty, suffering or lack of success, because it is sustained by the conviction that "nothing is impossible for God" (cf. Lk 1:37);

A mature faith without reservation, a faith that cooperates with the holy Church in the authentic building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

We thank you, Mary, because you ceaselessly and unfailingly lead us to Christ.

Mother of the Divine Son, watch over us, watch over our unshakable fidelity to God, to the Cross, to the Gospel and to the holy Church, as you have done since the first moments of our Christian history. Defend this nation which for a thousand years has walked the path of the Gospel. Grant that we live, grow and persevere in faith until the end.

Hail, O Daughter of God the Father,
Hail, O Mother of the Son of God,
Hail, O Bride of the Holy Spirit,
Temple of the Most Holy Trinity. Amen.