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The contextual character of the Jasna Góra Appeal

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Abstract

The contextual character of the Jasna Góra Appeal

The Jasna Góra Appeal is a Marian form of devotion and entrustment experienced by the faithful gathered before the Mother in the Chapel of the Miraculous Image and those participating in the service through the media. This evening prayer, directed to Christ through the intercession of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, the Mother of the Church and Queen of Poland, has a national, ecclesial, biblical and social character. It helps the faithful to deepen their understanding of Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Church. The proclamation of the Gospel, an integral part of the Appeal, aims to awaken and strengthen faith and to foster vigilance and gratitude for God's works in history and in human life.

Keywords: Jasna Góra Appeal, Marian devotion, proclamation of the Gospel

Abstrakt

Kontekstualny charakter Apelu Jasnogórskiego

Apel Jasnogórski jest maryjną formą pobożności i zawierzenia, przeżywaną przez wiernych zgromadzonych przed Matką Bożą w Kaplicy Cudownego Obrazu oraz uczestniczących w nabożeństwie za pośrednictwem mediów. Ta wieczorna modlitwa, kierowana do Chrystusa przez wstawiennictwo Jasnogórskiej Matki Kościoła i Królowej Polski, ma charakter narodowy, eklezjalny, biblijny i społeczny. Pomaga wiernym pogłębiać rozumienie roli Maryi w misterium Chrystusa i Kościoła. Głoszenie Dobrej Nowiny, będące integralną częścią Apelu, ma na celu budzenie i umacnianie wiary uczestników oraz kształtowanie postawy czuwania i wdzięczności wobec Bożych dzieł w historii i życiu człowieka.

Słowa kluczowe: Apel Jasnogórski, pobożność maryjna, głoszenie Ewangelii

The issue outlined in the title invites an examination of the phenomenon of the Jasna Góra Appeal within the context of proclaiming the Gospel outside the framework of the liturgy. This devotion offers numerous opportunities for the proclamation of the Good News. The first of these is, above all, the very act of being present before the image of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, whose Icon represents the mystery of God's dwelling among His people through

the powerful intercession of the Mother of God.¹ The Black Madonna, by pointing to Jesus Christ, continually calls her children to entrust themselves to the Divine Redeemer and to do whatever Her Son tells them (cf. Jn 2:5).

Another reference to the proclaimed Gospel is found in the sung antiphon, “Mary, Queen of Poland, I am with You, I remember, I keep watch.” This invocation constitutes both the core of the prayer itself and conveys a profound biblical message. A third, equally significant element is the meditation intended to deepen faith, which—according to the teaching of the Apostle of the Nations—arises from hearing the word of God (cf. Rom 10:17).

The entire devotion should be viewed in the context of the sequence of historical and ecclesial events from which the Jasna Góra Appeal originated, as well as the various national and religious circumstances that accompanied its establishment. Therefore, taking into account a broader spectrum of the phenomenon is essential for a proper understanding of the idea of the Jasna Góra Appeal and the evangelical message conveyed through this prayer.

1. Within the sphere of fundamental concepts

A proper understanding of the subject under consideration requires reference to the basic notions indicated in the title of the article. These include: the Jasna Góra Appeal, preaching, and contextuality. At the outset, it is necessary to examine the essence of the devotion that gathers the faithful each day at 9:00 p.m. in the Chapel of the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, as well as those who unite spiritually with this Sanctuary through mass media.

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 65. See: T.D. Łukaszuk, *Religijno-doktrynalne przesłanie jubileuszu sześćsetlecia Jasnej Góry według Jana Pawła II*, in: *Jasna Góra w 20-lecie Pontyfikatu Jana Pawła II*, ed. Z.S. Jabłoński, Częstochowa 1999, pp. 82–91; A. Gąsior, *Formacja wiary przez Obraz Jasnogórski*, in: *Jasnogórska Szkoła Wiary. Ogólnopolskie Sympozjum Mariologiczno-Maryjne, Jasna Góra, 10 kwietnia 2013*, ed. Z.S. Jabłoński, Częstochowa 2013, p. 61–65.

1.1. The structure of the Jasna Góra Appeal

The Jasna Góra Appeal is a Marian devotion lasting approximately fifteen to twenty minutes. It begins with the hymn *Bogurodzica* ("Mother of God"), followed immediately by the refrain "Mary, Queen of Poland, I am with You, I remember, I keep watch."² Inspired by the practice of evening gatherings in the Chapel of the Miraculous Image and in spiritual union with Jasna Góra, Jesuit Aleksander Kisiel introduced into the evening prayers of the Mokotów academic Marian Sodality the idea of offering a "knightly report" to the Queen of Poland. Its character—reminiscent of scout and military tradition—reflected the difficult history of a Nation that placed its hope in the protection of the Lady of Jasna Góra. The first composer of the widely known and most frequently intoned melody was the Salesian priest Fr. Stanisław Ormiński.³

Immediately following this hymn comes a meditation or religious reflection, after which the custodian or another Pauline father presents the groups of pilgrims who have visited the Shrine of Our Lady that day and announces the prayer intentions concerning the current needs of the Nation, the Church, the Holy Father, and the pilgrims. A decade of the Holy Rosary and the prayer *Under Your protection* (*Sub Tuum praesidium*) are then recited. The devotion concludes with the blessing imparted by the bishop or priest presiding over the Appeal. Since 2006, it has become customary for the Metropolitan Archbishop of Częstochowa, Archbishop Wacław Depo, to offer a brief reflection preceding the final blessing.⁴ The service concludes with a Marian hymn—most often *Z dawna Polski Tyś Królową, Maryjo* (From of

2 The original version of the Marian stanza, which referred to the appeal bugle call, read: "Most Holy Mother, I am with You, I remember, I keep watch." Its authorship is attributed to the Jesuit priest Fr. Aleksander Kisiel. Other versions of the Jasna Góra Appeal are also widely known.

3 S. J. Płatek, *Paulińska pobożność maryjna. Próba syntezy historyczno-doktrynalnej*, in: *Od fenomenu do fundamentu. Sympozjum „Duchowość paulińska—spojrzenie w przyszłość”*, ed. J. Mazur, Kraków 1999, pp. 99–105; S. J. Płatek, *Jasnogórski Apel—jego początki i upowszechnienie*, „Jasna Góra. Miesięcznik Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Jasnogórskiej” (1984) no. 8, pp. 5–9.

4 See W. Depo, *Apelowe „głosów zbieranie”*, Warszawa 2015; W. Depo, *Apelowe „głosów zbieranie” 2022*, Warszawa 2023.

Old You Are the Queen of Poland, O Mary)—while the Miraculous Image of the Mother of God is covered, unless a night vigil is being held.⁵

1.2. Preaching as an integral component of the devotion

The most substantial part of the Jasna Góra Appeal is the meditation (approximately five to ten minutes), delivered by a bishop or priest according to a previously determined schedule. The proclamation of evangelical and catechetical content was not part of the original form of the devotion. It was first introduced on October 28, 1956, when Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński returned from internment to his primatial office. On that occasion, he personally enriched the devotion with special prayerful reflections and intentions. “From that time onward, the Primate of the Millennium also bestowed his blessing upon the whole of Poland and the Polish diaspora scattered across all continents.”⁶ The initial absence of meditations stemmed from the fact that the Jasna Góra Appeal—in its original form as a knightly report—was conceived as a declaration of accountability before Mary and God for the graces received, as well as a gesture of trust and readiness to fulfill the command of Christ Himself.⁷ The wider adoption of meditative reflections, sometimes referred to as spontaneous prayer, occurred in 1975.

The meditation conducted during the Jasna Góra Appeal constitutes a distinctive form of proclaiming the Good News, as it combines two specific dimensions: preaching outside the liturgy and the proclamation of the Gospel within a sacred space, namely, a sanctuary. The first aspect, preaching (*praedicatio*) outside the liturgy, belongs to the Church’s ministry of the Word. In a broad sense, it encompasses all ways of proclaiming God’s interventions in the history of salvation—whether orally, through writing, symbolic gestures, or modern means of social communication.⁸ It thus includes liturgical rites, devotions, music, art, and

5 Z. S. Jabłoński, *W godzinie Apelu z Janem Pawłem II*, Częstochowa 2003, p. 9.

6 S. J. Płatek, 50 lat Apelu Jasnogórskiego, in: *Przez Akt oddania do zawierzenia Maryi w trzecim tysiącleciu*, eds. Z. S. Jabłoński, J. Pach, Częstochowa 2004, p. 107.

7 S. J. Płatek, *Paulińska pobożność maryjna. Próba syntezy historyczno-doktrynalnej*, pp. 102–105.

8 During national, military, and religious holidays, as well as during pilgrimages of uniformed services, the Jasna Góra Appeal may be celebrated with special ceremonial solemnity, according to military protocol—for example, accompanied by an honor guard

sacred architecture. In a more restricted sense, preaching refers to the ministry of the Word expressed in the form of a homily, sermon, or conference, whose purpose is to awaken or strengthen the faith of the listeners.⁹

From this perspective, the Jasna Góra Appeal may be classified within both forms of preaching—though in the strict sense only sermons qualify as direct proclamation of the Word. Rooted in Scripture and Tradition and under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium, such preaching becomes both “a word about God” and “the Word of God.” Proclaimed within the ecclesial sphere—in the Church, by the Church, and for the Church—it highlights the mysteries of faith and the principles of Christian life, often addressing the contemporary challenges of humanity and the world. Moreover, sound catechesis must be carefully structured and methodologically grounded.¹⁰ Human engagement, too, plays a vital role: it disposes the listener to receive divine love and inspires concrete action.¹¹

The second dimension concerns the place of proclamation, namely the sanctuary—a privileged space of “faith and Marian devotion, which includes all these special places of pilgrimage where the People of God seek to meet the Mother of God in order to find, within the radius of the maternal presence of her ‘who believed,’ a strengthening of their own faith.”¹² It is no coincidence that the faithful rightly expect to receive in such places more abundant means of salvation through fervent preaching of the Word of God, vital liturgical life, and the cultivation of popular piety—among which the Jasna Góra Appeal certainly holds a special place.¹³ Sanctuaries

from the Representative Regiment of the Polish Armed Forces or even with cannon salutes on the Jasna Góra fields.

9 G. Siwek, *Przepowiadanie słowa Bożego*, in: *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, eds. R. Kamiński, W. Przygoda, M. Fijałkowski, Lublin 2006, p. 696.

10 A. Lewek, *Katecheza*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 8, Lublin 2000, col. 1265–1268; See also: Second Vatican Council, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 35; Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 44.

11 H. Sławiński, *Teologia w służbie przepowiadania*, in: *Wokół pytań o teologię kontekstualną. Refleksja nad Listem apostoelskim Ad theologiam promovendam*, eds. A. A. Napiórkowski, D. Wąsek, M. Gilski, Kraków 2025, pp. 185–188.

12 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 28.

13 Code of Canon Law, can. 1234 § 1.

are privileged centers of evangelization and, at the same time, spaces of love—where one both experiences and learns to share that love with others.¹⁴

Furthermore, it is both possible and necessary to outline certain principles for preaching within the context of a sanctuary. Fr. Zachariasz Jabłoński lists the following: awareness of the sacred character of the place demands that all forms of ministry—including preaching—be in harmony with its holiness; abstract, over-intellectualized, or pompous language should be avoided in favor of a language of faith, love, and values, enabling the pilgrim-listener to freely receive the message as a gift and to respond to it in freedom; Mary should be presented as the Model of Humanity, while avoiding any tendency toward deification; the Person of the Mother of God should be shown as the Way and Mediator leading to the one Savior, Jesus Christ; a catechetical homily¹⁵—rather than a theoretical lecture—will more effectively foster a personal encounter with Christ and guide pilgrims to meet Him in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation; preaching should be characterized by passion and authentic commitment on the part of the preacher, who, after thorough preparation, speaks with conviction about the mighty works of God without seeking to please the audience.¹⁶ As Pope Francis teaches: “Preparation for preaching requires love. We only devote periods of quiet time to the things or the people whom we love; and here we are speaking of the God whom we love, a God who wishes to speak to us. Because of this love, we can take as much time as we need, like every true disciple: ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’ (1 Sam 3:9).”¹⁷

14 Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*, 275–276.

15 The term ‘catechetical homily’ appears in Z. Jabłoński’s text. Today, this term is no longer used, and a distinction is made between a homily, which is an integral part of the liturgy, and catechesis, which is the proclamation of the Gospel outside the liturgy.

16 Z. S. Jabłoński, *Pielgrzymowanie na Jasną Górę w czasie i przestrzeni*, Częstochowa 2000, pp. 51–53.

17 Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 146.

1.3. The contextual dimension of a prayer

According to its encyclopedic definition, *contextualism* (from Latin *contextus*, meaning “interweaving”) is a position emphasizing the importance of context in determining the meaning of expressions and the cognitive value of beliefs, theories, and evaluative statements.¹⁸ In relation to the present discussion, it denotes an approach advocating a holistic (contextual) understanding of the Jasna Góra Appeal, while highlighting the essential role of the individual, social, historical, religious, political, cultural, and national circumstances surrounding its origin. This issue will be examined in the following section, allowing us to understand that the phenomenon of the Jasna Góra Appeal was accompanied by a series of events that contributed to its emergence. It will also make it possible to recognize the significant factors that influenced the transformation of the devotion into the form known today, thereby revealing the impact of the idea of the Jasna Góra Appeal on the mode of proclaiming the Good News within its framework.¹⁹

2. The historical outline of the Jasna Góra Appeal

Bishop Józef Sebastian Pelczar may be considered the precursor of the prayer known today as the Jasna Góra Appeal. On 21 May 1910—the eve of the re-coronation of the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Częstochowa—he ordered that the bells of all churches in the Diocese of Przemyśl be rung at 9:00 p.m. for fifteen minutes as a sign of spiritual and prayerful solidarity with Jasna Góra. Another event foreshadowing the Jasna Góra Appeal occurred on 4 November 1918, when at 9:15 p.m., Polish soldiers from the 22nd Infantry Regiment, led by Artur Wiśniewski, appeared before the image of the Queen of the Polish Crown to offer thanksgiving together with the Pauline Fathers for the restoration of national independence.²⁰

The actual genesis of the Appeal, however, is associated with an episode from the life of Władysław Polesiński, a pilot who struggled deeply with faith in God. One day in 1934, during a test flight, he suddenly heard a command within himself: “Descend, land!” Obeying this inner prompting, he

18 A. Bronk, *Kontekstualizm*, in: *Encyklopedia katolicka*, vol. 9, Lublin 2002, col. 745.

19 See: Francis, Apostolic letter *Ad theologiam promovendam*, 8.

20 Z. S. Jabłoński, *W godzinie Apelu z Janem Pawłem II*, p. 10.

landed and immediately exited the aircraft, which moments later exploded. It was precisely 9:00 p.m. Later he learned that at that very time, his wife had been entrusting him to the Mother of God in prayer. Upon hearing this, “the captain stood at attention, saluted, and reported to Our Lady of Jasna Góra as his commander.”²¹ Profoundly transformed by this experience, Polesiński founded among Polish officers a Catholic organization known as the Knights of the Cross and Sword, whose members each day stood at attention before the Mother of God of Częstochowa at 9:00 p.m., offering her a spiritual report of their lives and service.²²

A similar practice of evening prayer in spiritual union with Jasna Góra also existed during the German occupation. University students and members of Marian Sodalties gathered for clandestine meetings in Warsaw, under the spiritual guidance of the Pallottine priest Leon Cieślak. At Jasna Góra itself, Fr. Polikarp Sawicki convened secret prayer meetings for students. Moreover, in Dachau concentration camp in 1942, a community of young men was formed under the leadership of Blessed Fr. Stefan Wincenty Frelichowski, who each evening at 9:00 p.m. united spiritually with Our Lady of Jasna Góra in prayer.²³

Worth noting is also the initiative of Fr. Leon Cieślak, who, after the Act of Consecration of Poland to the Immaculate Heart of Mary at Jasna Góra in 1946, proposed that each day at 9:00 p.m. the faithful offer a “Knightly report of the Polish Nation to Christ through the hands of Mary” as a sign of spiritual unity with the National Shrine. His intent was to encourage the practical implementation of the commitments arising from the renewed covenant with Mary.²⁴ A similar practice of the “Knightly Report”, also referred to as Jasna Góra Meditation, was customary among the Mokotów Academic Marian Sodality, directed by the Jesuit Fr. Aleksander Kisiel. The devotional cards he distributed bore the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, with the inscription on the reverse side: “The Jasna Góra Appeal at 9:00 in the evening. Most Holy Mother, I am with You, I remember, I keep watch.”²⁵

21 S. J. Płatek, 50 lat Apelu Jasnogórskiego, p. 101.

22 Cfr. S. J. Płatek, 50 lat Apelu Jasnogórskiego, p. 101.

23 Z. S. Jabłoński, W godzinie Apelu z Janem Pawłem II, p. 11.

24 W. Depo, Apel Jasnogórski szkołą wiary Polaków, p. 175.

25 Kiedy powstał Apel Jasnogórski? Kto jest jego autorem? Listy do redakcji, „Przegląd Katoicki” (1985) no 32–33, p. 6.

The official beginning of the Jasna Góra Appeal as a formal devotion is traditionally dated to 8 December 1953, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On that day, Fr. Jerzy Tomziński, the Prior of Jasna Góra, gathered a small group of people before the Miraculous Image of the Mother of God to pray for the freedom of the interned Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński.²⁶ He also called upon all Poles “to join spiritually in prayer with Jasna Góra every day at 9:00 p.m., for the intention of the Church in Poland and for the release of the Primate of Poland from imprisonment.”²⁷ During that evening’s Vespers, Fr. Tomziński delivered a message to the Nation in which he declared: “All of us—over thirty million Poles scattered throughout the world—wherever we may be, whether at work, in the street, at the cinema, or at a dance; all united by one thought, one Polish heart—we shall stand together before our Lady and Queen, our Mother and Comforter, to ask and to beg for Poland, for our Nation...”²⁸

From that moment, the Jasna Góra Appeal began to be celebrated regularly before the image of the Black Madonna. In 1960, it was officially incorporated into the daily liturgical and devotional schedule of the Shrine. Over time, the appeal homilies began to reflect major religious and national occasions and events, among which the following deserve particular mention: the Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation (1956); the Great Novena in preparation for the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland (1957–1966); the Peregrination of the Copy of the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of Częstochowa (from 1957 onward); the Council Vigils during the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965); the Millennium of the Baptism of Poland (1966); the Appeal in the Family during the Holy Year (1975); the 600th Anniversary Jubilee of Jasna Góra (1982); the World Youth Day at Jasna Góra (1991); the Pilgrimages of St. John Paul II to His Homeland; the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000; the 50th Anniversary of the Jasna Góra Appeal (2003); the 1050th Anniversary of the Baptism of Poland (2016); and numerous other significant events that have marked both the religious and national life of Poland.²⁹

²⁶ See: S. Wyszyński, *Zapiski więzienne*, Warszawa 2006, p. 58.

²⁷ W. Depo, *Apel Jasnogórski szkołą wiary Polaków*, p. 175.

²⁸ J. Tomziński, *Kazanie wygłoszone w uroczystość Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej Maryi Panny w Roku Maryjnym w dniu 8 grudnia 1953 r.*, „Niedziela” (2004) no. 2, p. 15.

²⁹ S. J. Płatek, *50 lat Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, pp. 103–113.

3. Biblical implications of the Appeal Antiphon

The Church of Christ is a community that both listens to and proclaims the Word of God. As Benedict XVI teaches, “The Church is a community that hears and proclaims the word of God. The Church draws life not from herself but from the Gospel, and from the Gospel she discovers ever anew the direction for her journey. This is an approach that every Christian must understand and apply to himself or herself: only those who first place themselves in an attitude of listening to the word can go on to become its heralds.”³⁰ This admonition can and should be applied to the proclamation of the Good News within the framework of the Jasna Góra Appeal.

Indeed, this is what happens, for preachers who lead the Appeal meditations—aware of the centrality of Sacred Scripture in the life of believers—frequently refer to biblical passages, especially those drawn from the Liturgy of the Word of the given day. They base their reflections on concrete texts from both the Old and New Testaments, recognizing that “in the Word of God lies the power and strength that become, for the children of the Church, the support of faith, the nourishment of the soul, and the pure and lasting source of spiritual life.”³¹ Many years ago, Fr. Zachariasz Jabłoński emphasized that biblical references should enrich the celebration of the Jasna Góra Appeal, since it constitutes the evening prayer of the entire Polish Nation.³² A particularly outstanding example of such biblically grounded reflection was presented by St. John Paul II during his prayer at Jasna Góra.

The biblical dimension of the meditation is expressed both in the recourse to the treasury of Sacred Scripture—an inexhaustible source of divine wisdom—and in the wealth of evangelical content contained within the very words of the antiphon sung at the beginning of the devotion. According to Antoni Tronina, all elements of the Marian invocation are deeply rooted in the Bible, while its Latin version — “*Maria Regina Mundi, Maria Mater Ecclesiae, Tibi adsumus, Tui memores, vigilamus*” — highlights even more

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, 51.

³¹ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 21.

³² Z. S. Jabłoński, *Posługa słowa w przestrzeni sanktuarium maryjnego*, in: *Jasna Góra. Sanktuarium troski o życie Narodu. Ogólnopolskie Sympozjum Mariologiczno-Maryjne. Jasna Góra, 28 kwietnia 2009*, ed. Z. S. Jabłoński, Częstochowa 2009, p. 134.

profoundly Mary's spiritual motherhood toward all the children of the Church.³³

"I am with You"

God is the One who IS (cf. Ex 3:13–15). "I AM" is the very name of God, both in the Old and the New Testament."³⁴ The expression "I am" therefore points to the ultimate goal toward which those who pray are directed – namely, God Himself. This word awakens the awareness of the One before whom a person stands when uttering the phrase "I am with You." One stands before the God who reveals Himself, the Creator who becomes accessible to His creatures and open to deeper knowledge. God is not an impersonal force but a personal Being whose name expresses His essence, identity, and the very meaning of life.³⁵ As John Paul II taught during an Appeal meditation, the name and the essence of God are one: "God is Love" (1 Jn 4:8). This divine "I AM" finds its full expression in the "I AM" of the Covenant, the "I AM" of the Paschal Mystery, and the "I AM" of the Eucharist.³⁶

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, "In revealing His name, God reveals His faithfulness which is from everlasting to everlasting; He who is always present with His people to save them."³⁷ Those who participate in the Jasna Góra Appeal are thus invited to open themselves to the saving presence of God, to enter into communion with Him, and to entrust themselves to the One who came not to condemn the world but to save it (cf. Jn 12:47). To stand before God is to respond to His love with one's own: "I am before You, who ARE."³⁸ The surest path to such communion with God is Mary, who from the Annunciation to Calvary remained intimately united with the redemptive work of her Son.³⁹ From her we learn best the attitude of abiding with God and responding faithfully to His saving presence.

33 A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, in: *Przez Akt oddania do zawierzenia Maryi w Trzecim tysiącleciu*, p. 179.

34 A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, pp. 179–181.

35 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 203.

36 Jan Paweł II, *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam*, in: *W godzinie Apelu z Janem Pawłem II*, p. 315.

37 *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 207.

38 Jan Paweł II, *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam*, p. 316.

39 A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, p. 181.

“I remember”

Memory is one of the key themes found throughout Sacred Scripture.⁴⁰ The psalmist’s exhortation not to forget the mighty works of God (Ps 78:7) remains a perpetual call to fidelity to divine revelation and to thanksgiving,⁴¹ for we are assured that the Creator never forgets His creatures: “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.” (Is 49:15) Divine remembrance has a salvific dimension and is linked to the covenant, which is itself a gift of life. Forgetting Yahweh always entails a breaking of the covenant, inevitably leading to personal tragedy and national disaster.⁴²

The Appeal’s “I remember” is therefore not a sentimental or nostalgic phrase addressed to God, but a stance of fidelity to His Covenant and a continual deepening of one’s faith directed toward obedience to God’s commandments. Constantly recalling God’s mighty deeds not only makes us resemble Mary—who “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart” (Lk 2:19, 51)—but also protects us from apostasy and unbelief. Not without reason did the Polish Pope call us to “do everything to come to know Christ ever more fully,”⁴³ encouraging continual engagement with Sacred Scripture. As the living Word of God, Scripture helps the human person to encounter the Savior, to know oneself, and ultimately to understand the meaning of one’s vocation in Christ—the Incarnate Word.

“I keep watch”

Watching—or keeping vigil—refers to a fundamental truth of divine revelation. Vigilance is first and foremost a divine activity, arising from God’s faithfulness to His Covenant with humankind:⁴⁴ “He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ... The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.” (Ps 121:4, 8) Yet man is

⁴⁰ See J. Corbon, *Pamięć*, in: *Słownik teologii biblijnej*, ed. X. Léon-Dufour, Poznań 1973, pp. 639–641.

⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 224.

⁴² A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, p. 182.

⁴³ Jan Paweł II, *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam*, p. 318.

⁴⁴ A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, p. 184.

not exempt from vigilance; he must “guard his ways” (Ps 39:2), and remain watchful lest he fall into sin (Lk 12:15) or be deceived by false teaching (Mt 7:15). Moreover, vigilance safeguards faith from weakening and prepares the believer for the coming of the Lord (Mt 24:42–25:13).⁴⁵

The participant in the Jasna Góra Appeal thus stands before the mystery of the merciful God, and under the protection of Mary and in the school of her faith, seeks to respond with fidelity to the love with which he has been eternally loved by the Father in Christ.⁴⁶ This watchfulness also means imitating the Mother of Christ in her attentiveness to God’s saving will and in her care and solicitude for every human being and for the entire Polish Nation.⁴⁷

The words of the antiphon—whose biblical implications have been outlined above—remind us that “the entire existence of the People of God, both collectively and individually, depends on being with Him, on remembering in prayer His mighty works, and on faithfully guarding His commandments.”⁴⁸ Mary, the Mother of the Church, stands as the perfect model of this attitude and a sure guide along the paths of salvation.

4. The dimensions of the Jasna Góra Appeal

The biblical dimension of the Appeal proclamation, though of great importance, does not exhaust the richness of themes that can be heard during the Jasna Góra devotion. A careful analysis of various sermons reveals and allows for the categorization of other, equally significant issues addressed in the course of these meditations—issues that continue to carry the living message of the Gospel.

First and foremost, one should highlight the Christological, Marian, and ecclesial dimensions of the meditations delivered during the Jasna Góra Appeal. The faithful, who gather in large numbers for this evening prayer, come to Mary believing that she is the „simplest, shortest, surest,

45 See Strzec, czuwać, in: *Słownik symboliki biblijnej*, eds. L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit, T. Longman, Warszawa 2003, pp. 948–949.

46 Jan Paweł II, *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam*, p. 289.

47 Jan Paweł II, *Jestem przy Tobie, pamiętam, czuwam*, p. 319.

48 A. Tronina, *Biblijne korzenie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, p. 185.

and most perfect way leading to Christ.”⁴⁹ It is therefore not without reason that the Appeal reflections are often dedicated to the Virgin of Nazareth, directing the gaze of believers toward her as the Mother of God. In this way, admiration is expressed for the beauty of her faith and her obedience to the will of God, while her maternal tenderness—offered to the Nation as its help and protection—is also recognized. Moreover, by addressing Mary by name, “we profess the primacy of personal relationships in faith and in the life of the Church,” as Fr. Janusz Królikowski observes, adding that “our devotion turns toward the person of Mary and shapes us personally.”⁵⁰ Through this intimacy, a kind of exchange of hearts takes place, strengthening the bond with the Mother of God and leading to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ and the Church, and to the contemplation of the face of the Son of God as Lord and Savior.⁵¹

This personal and individual dimension of the relationship with God through Mary does not close believers in on themselves but opens them even more toward others and toward the entire Church. Therefore, one may and should discern within the Gospel proclaimed during the Appeal an ecclesial message.⁵² No one participates in the Appeal alone. At the feet of Our Lady of Jasna Góra, the community of the Church gathers—just as in the Upper Room the disciples of Jesus were together with His Mother (cf. Acts 1:12–14). Following in the footsteps of Mary—she who is the “type (typus) of the Church in the order of faith, charity and perfect union with Christ”⁵³—we learn from her and with her to journey toward the Kingdom of Glory, the ultimate goal of human life. Furthermore, by turning to Mary as the Queen of Poland, we broaden our personal faith to include a communal and national dimension, recalling past experiences and entrusting the future destiny of the Homeland to her maternal care. In this way, the awareness of the social character of faith and its mutual sharing and transmission is strengthened. According to Fr. Królikowski, “The Jasna Góra Appeal, in its reference to Mary as the Queen of Poland, encapsulates these

49 L. M. Grignon de Montfort, *Traktat o prawdziwym nabożeństwie do Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, Warszawa 2008, p. 70.

50 J. Królikowski, *Odnowa Kościoła—inspiracje apelowe*, „Jasna Góra” 40 (2023) no. 6, pp. 10–11.

51 John Paul II, *Redemptoris Mater*, 47.

52 J. Królikowski, *Odnowa Kościoła—inspiracje apelowe*, p. 10.

53 Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 63.

significant acts of devotion and manifestations of ecclesial life, while deepening the ecclesial dimension of faith itself.”⁵⁴

The eschatological aspect and the theology of the nation remind us that everything constituting Polish identity—as a land subject to the reign of Christ—cannot exist apart from faith. For, as Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński taught, “A proper understanding of the nation requires not only history, philosophy, economics, or sociology, but also religion, because the nation itself arises from the creative act of God.”⁵⁵ Thus, the meditations of the Jasna Góra Appeal often include themes concerning the Homeland, which are rightly related to the Creator and to Christian values. Without these, the idea of a nation remains unintelligible and deprived of its true and fundamental good—namely, the Gospel and sacramental life.⁵⁶

The ecclesial character of the devotion was also expressed during the years 1962–1965, in the prayers offered for the Church during the so-called “Conciliar Vigils.” The faithful gathered in large numbers to commend the intentions of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, and the themes of the sermons focused on the renewal of faith within the Church. Moreover, the universal dimension of the Appeal became particularly visible during the 6th World Youth Day at Jasna Góra in 1991, when young people from around the world, led by Pope John Paul II, gathered on the plains of Jasna Góra to reflect together on the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to proclaim the mighty works of God.⁵⁷ Their act of homage to the Queen of the World and Mother of the Church, and their entrustment of their lives to her maternal care, became a clear sign of love and belonging to the Church of Christ.⁵⁸

It is also essential to emphasize the moral, social, and existential dimensions of the reflections delivered during the Appeal.⁵⁹ As has been observed, “From its very beginning, the Jasna Góra Appeal was a prayer attentive to the concrete problems of human life and became a vehicle for the spiritual

54 J. Królikowski, *Odnova Kościoła – inspiracje apelowe*, p. 11.

55 A. Napiórkowski, *Teologie XX i XXI wieku*, Kraków 2016, p. 52.

56 J. Lewandowski, *Naród w dziejach zbawienia w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, Lublin 1980, p. 23.

57 S. J. Płatek, *50 lat Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, pp. 109–114.

58 W. Depo, *Apel Jasnogórski modlitwą zawierzenia*, p. 188.

59 See J. Mazur, *Apel Jasnogórski w społecznej wyobraźni Jana Pawła II*, in: *Przez Akt oddania do zawierzenia Maryi w trzecim tysiącleciu*, pp. 203–213.

renewal contained, among other things, in the Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation.”⁶⁰

The program of a new socio-moral order, deeply rooted in the values of the Gospel, not only set the path by which the Church in Poland was to endure the painful experiences of totalitarianism, but also found expression in numerous contexts—including in the prayers of the Jasna Góra Appeal. The still-relevant plan of renewal, articulated in the Jasna Góra Vows of the Nation, includes such commitments as: fidelity to God, the Gospel, the Church, and its shepherds; perseverance in the state of grace; the observance of evangelical principles within family life; respect for human life; the indissolubility of marriage and the dignity of women; the protection of youth from moral corruption and unbelief; the maintenance of justice and charity in social life; and the struggle against national vices such as laziness, frivolity, wastefulness, drunkenness, and immorality—while at the same time fostering the growth of social virtues.⁶¹

Concern for the family, for the Homeland, for respect toward human life, for the common good, prayer for the suffering, for the universal Church—especially the persecuted—for the Holy Father, for vocations, for peace in the world and in human hearts, for reconciliation and forgiveness, and for various professional and social groups present during the Jasna Góra Appeal—all these constitute but a few of the many issues raised during the evening devotion.⁶² These examples bear witness to the breadth of concerns embraced and commended in the proclamation of the Appeal message, whose aim is one and always the same: that Christ may Reign—in human hearts, in the Church, and in the Nation. For the program of Christianity for the third millennium remains, and will forever remain, unchanged: Jesus Christ⁶³—Redeemer of humanity, the center of the universe and of history.⁶⁴

60 J. Kielech, *Moralne przestanie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, in: *Przez Akt oddania do zawierzenia Maryi w trzecim tysiącleciu*, p. 196.

61 S. Wyszyński, *Jasnogórskie Śluby Narodu Polskiego*, in: *Na drogach zawierzenia*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 18–22.

62 See I. Matuszewski, *Matko ludzkich pragnień. Apele Jasnogórskie*, Warszawa 2002; J. Pach, *W wieczornej godzinie łaski. Apele Jasnogórskie*, Warszawa 1999; Z. S. Jabłoński, *W godzinie Apelu. Trzecie Tysiąclecie*, Częstochowa 2008.

63 John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29–45.

64 John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, 1.

Conclusions

The Jasna Góra Appeal—described as “an hour of vigil with Our Lady of Jasna Góra, an hour of self-examination and of laying our achievements at her royal feet”⁶⁵—has become a permanent element of the daily rhythm both of Jasna Góra and of countless Poles who, each evening, unite spiritually with the nation’s sacred shrine. It expresses the millennial heritage of faith of the Polish people and, at the same time, serves as a program of spiritual renewal for the decades to come. The simple yet universal message of the Marian antiphon, rooted in the very Gospel itself, possesses a renewing power.⁶⁶ Sung in the presence of Mary, the Mother of God, it becomes a deeply personal response to the love of God. Through the proclamation of the Good News, this devotion offers an opportunity to awaken and enliven faith within the Nation and to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth. This occurs because the reflections delivered during the Jasna Góra Appeal convey a profound biblical, Christological, Mariological, ecclesial, social, and moral message. They also make reference to significant events in Polish history, which cannot be rightly understood apart from their religious dimension. Ultimately, “keeping vigil with Mary and beside Mary inspires concrete action. It cannot be otherwise, for such vigil forms attitudes and creates an inner program of love toward God and toward others.”⁶⁷

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65 S. Wyszynski (*Apel Jasnogórski* 14.08.1962) cited in: J. Kielech, *Moralne przesłanie Apelu Jasnogórskiego*, p. 197.

66 Jan Paweł II, *Apel Jasnogórski streszcza program nowej ewangelizacji*, in: *W godzinie Apelu z Janem Pawłem II*, p. 322.

67 J. Mazur, *Apel Jasnogórski w społecznej wyobraźni Jana Pawła II*, p. 213.

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