



Introductory Remarks: John Paul II – Pope of Strong Faith and Human Dignity

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It is truly a great honour for me to have this opportunity to talk to you today about a man who significantly marked the last decades of the human history.

This is a great pleasure for me also because I have had the opportunity to meet with John Paul the Second many times and therefore I can share with you from my personal experience.

I have sensed him as a man, a Christian, who lived responsibly and with all his being, his demanding mission in the decisive times of European and world history.

We were fortunate that for so many years our horizons were illuminated by someone who with such deep faith accepted the revelation, who understood a man, society and history.

It is not surprising that his thoughts, words and deeds far exceeded the frame of the Church, which he guided and which speaks to all human kind.



One of the most crucial questions, which the human kind has been dealing with for a long time, is how to live with the diversity of races, sexes, nations, religions, beliefs, et cetera.

The history of human societies has so far shown two very divergent models.

The aggressive nationalisms, imperialisms and totalitarianisms tend to espouse the elimination of differences, to subordination of others. The results of their false concepts are racial, class-based and other monocultures. The other and the different are disabled, disqualified, artificially criminalized, politically marginalized or physically liquidated. Good name, possessions and humane future are taken away from them.

The second answer is significantly different from the first. It is derived from the respect of the human dignity. Therefore it leads to the respect of diversity and respect of the personal and collective identity. This model does not exert aggression towards nature or the truth. As a result it is also just.

In the first model diversity is an obstacle, in the second it is welcomed. The expression of the first model is a conflictual and aggressive way of solving mutual differences: wars, gulags, migrations of entire nations, pressures on national and other minorities, ideologically black-and-white text books, et cetera. This model creates a society of fear, distrust, self-censorship and limited creativity.

The second model is of organic nature; it is a model of harmony and cooperation.

John Paul the Second was on the side of this second outlook on the differences, on the side of human dignity: theologically, philosophically and in practical conduct.

As a Polish, John Paul the Second was deeply aware of the tragic faith of his own nation. At the same time he lived through a personal experience of two totalitarianisms, nazism and communism.

Both of these have humiliated a human being and entire nations to construction material in the hands of the almighty engineers of power.

Those of us who have lived through communism know what it means to humiliate a human being to the level of waste. We know what is the reality that stems from the project of the so-called free society without God, in which the border between good and bad as well as between life and death is decided by the self-proclaimed political elite or even just by its leader.

For the Catholic Church, and especially for the Central and Eastern Europe, the electing of Karol Józef Wojtyła was a special mercy. And the work for returning the **dignity** to a human being and to entire nations in the former communist societies was one of the key and successful projects of the new pope.

John Paul the Second and others of us east from the Iron curtain did not work on this out of revenge, but from the belief that in front of God we are all equal, free and responsible.

"Do not be afraid!" were the words John Paul the Second first exclaimed in Poland and they still echo today. This expression retains its meaning and significance. This is because the work for more human dignity and for more justice remains unfinished. Not just because of the remnants of totalitarianism in the East.

Allow me to on this occasion also convey my Slovenian perspective. You cannot imagine what recognition Slovenians experienced when pope for the first time addressed us in our Slovenian language. The pope did not greet us and many other nations in their own languages because of his polyglot sense for languages, but rather because of his sense for a human being and nations.

When he personally dictated the recognition of independence of the young Slovenian country in the state secretariat on the 13th of January 1993, he was not led by the daily

political tactics but by the same attentiveness to a human being, freedom, justice and history.

John Paul the Second wished for Europe that would breathe with both parts of its lungs, Europe that would live from its Christian identity. Without the return of the human dignity to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, without the democratization, this would be impossible. The pope has indubitably strongly helped to break communism. Even his election in 1978 served as a strong symbol. His support to the Solidarity had an outstanding meaning for spiritual and political breakthrough in Poland; his principled stance, encyclicals, visits and efforts of the Holy See have strengthened the hopes of Christians and democrats in then still communist countries.

Today we have an enlarged European Union, but we do not yet have the United Europe. Its formation will continue for a long time.

After the fall of communism we are facing the new challenges. We know that the totalitarian approach is not necessary hard and aggressive. Totalitarian concept of power can express itself also in much softer ways. For example when we stress our rights and freedoms to the extent that we forget about the responsibility towards others and to the entire creation.

Also with respect to this, the pope was clear. Therefore he is inviting us to continue to work for this world with the kingdom of God in our minds.