

(welcome in the garden)

Καλησπέρα. Good evening. Dobry wieczór.

On behalf of the Franciscan community at Holy Cross Church, and His Excellency Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nunzio in Cyprus and Israel, who, because of the travel restrictions, cannot be with us today, I cordially welcome all of you to this celebration.

I extend a special greeting to the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Her Excellency Irena Lichnerowicz-Augustyn, accompanied by her husband Marcin and the staff of the Polish Embassy. It is thanks to her initiative, kindness and commitment that we can unveil a monument to a great man of Poland, St. John Paul II here in Nicosia.

We have been waiting for this evening for a long time, and even this evening the coronavirus has to interfere in our ceremony, introducing its rules and obliging us to adapt to them.

We are glad, however, that we are gathered here today and for such a solemn occasion. The unveiling of the bust of St. John Paul II in the gardens of the Convent of the Holy Cross, the seat of the Apostolic Nunciature, is an historical event for Nicosia and for Cyprus.

This initiative of the Polish Embassy in Cyprus is part of this year's celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the birth of Karol Wojtyła.

The Parliament of the Republic of Poland established 2020 as the Year of Saint John Paul II. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has prepared a very interesting exhibition: **John Paul II - the Pope of Dialogue**. In the text promoting the exhibition, we read:

«For Pope John Paul II, dialogue was never an end in itself, but always a means to foster interaction between human persons. Among the sick, the poor, the young, the elderly, philosophers, politicians, artists, and diplomats, on all continents, in all situations, and standing in front of different ethnic groups, John Paul II was constantly discovering the human person behind the dialogue. [...] Well known gestures and events from his Pontificate showing this openness in dialogue were: a visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome [...], crossing the threshold of the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, initiating the World Days of Prayer for Peace in Assisi and meeting with young Muslims in Morocco.»

Dear Friends,

We need bridges, not walls. These words have a special meaning here in the Buffer Zone of Nicosia, the world's last divided capital. The green line that divides Cyprus in two parts is a challenging mission for all of us: diplomats, religious leaders, especially for the Religious Track of the Cyprus Peace Process, and all members of good will from both communities.

In conclusion, I would like to thank, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance and the Embassy of Poland in Nicosia for financial support. I would like to express my appreciation for a job well done to Wojtek Pondel, the sculptor of the bust, and to Stefan Marinov, who made the base with the inscription.

And now I invite Her Excellency Irena Lichnerowicz-Augustyn, the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, to unveil with me the bust of St. John Paul II.