

# Foreword

Since the very beginning of its existence, Jasna Góra has been high up in the Roman Catholic Church in national and universal terms. The representatives of churches from all over the world have come to the sanctuary; for John Paul II this place is of great significance. The Pope's messages delivered at Jasna Góra have a particularly universal dimension.

For the Poles who live either in the country or abroad, Jasna Góra is a religious symbol as well as national one. It is a centre of worship of the Holy Mary in the Icon of God's Mother. Pilgrims come to Częstochowa for they feel the need to do so, they believe themselves to be helped thanks to prayers to Our Lady. Numerous votive offerings placed around the image of Black Madonna are the evidence that the pilgrims requests have been answered.

Yet, the Monastery of the Pauline Fathers in Częstochowa played a special role in the history of Poland. Defending it during the wars against the Swedes (the 17th century), it became a symbol of fighting for independence and source of national consolidation. Pilgrimages were signs of faith and liberty during the time of Poland's Partition and when the country suffered from communism. The Polish religious consciousness was connected with the national one and that was hardly similar to situation in other countries and pilgrimage centres. The history of the image of Black Madonna has influenced Polish and world cultures.

Today, Jasna Góra is the main religious centre in Central and Eastern Europe, and perhaps, from France to the Russian Far East, the biggest Christian sanctuary. However we, as Poles, are not always aware of its scope of significance. That is why a special publication of *Peregrinus Cracoviensis* dedicated to Jasna Góra as a world pilgrimage centre, prepared collectively by the Pauline Fathers and Jagiellonian University in Cracow, is of increasing importance.

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