

FRUIT OF THE VINE

November 30, 2023

WALKING WITH SAINTS THROUGH CATHOLIC POLAND

Good Evening = Dobry wieczor! (Dobry Viator) I am Stephanie Honz, your Fruit of the Vine host and coordinator. **(slide 1)** Tonight, we are featuring a travelogue “Walking With Saints Through Catholic Poland”. Hopefully you have had the chance to enjoy some tastes of Poland. **(slide 2)** Please continue to help yourselves as the evening unfolds.

This pilgrimage was a long time in coming. Fr. Mitch was the inspiration for this journey. After he agreed to show us his Country, Kathryn and I began to work on an itinerary. I went to Poland in 2021 during the pandemic to further solidify our plans for an already delayed trip, and then the Ukraine war broke as our first deposits were due, so we rescheduled again, and then Kathryn moved to Indianapolis, but last month, all of our planning culminated in an unforgettable journey that 28 of us shared. **(slide 3)** (Introduce Kathryn and the rest of the pilgrims present).

When you share a pilgrimage together, there are amazing bonds that form. We are left wanting more encounters with Christ, Our Lady, and the Saints. Life is never the same again. Words and even pictures cannot fully capture our experiences, but all of us hope to share our best memories of this time with you now.

OPENING PRAYER ~ Deacon Roger

HISTORY

A brief history lesson will set the stage for what we are about to show you. **(slide 4)**

Beginning in the year 966, Poland adopted Western Christianity. Still today, everything about Poland stems from their faith. The vibrancy of this faith continues to give us some of our greatest saints. Poland has suffered through the

ages like few other Countries. In 1795, Poland was divided between the neighboring empires of Russia, Prussia, and Austria. It all but disappeared from the map of Europe for the next 123 years during which time it was ruled by foreign administrations that often subjected the population to harsh measures. They were attacked from the West by Nazi Germany, and from the East by Communist Russia. Yet in the very midst of these horrors of the 20th century, God raised up St. Faustina, St Pope John Paul II, and St. Maximilian Kolbe. From 1980-1989, **(slide 5)** the Solidarity movement became crucial in bringing about a peaceful transition. The Third Polish Republic was founded in 1989. It is this story of Solidarity that remains the most impressive element of the Polish road to freedom by a nation too proud to submit to oppression, a lesson from which we can all learn from today.

Poland's faith prepared and equipped them to endure much suffering, just as our faith helps us to endure the crosses in our lives. The persecution and suffering of the Poles would bring salvation to other persecuted nations, just as the death of Christ – crucified by His neighbors – brought redemption to mankind. Pope JP II referred to Poland as the Christ of Nations. And Poland, just like Christ was destined to return to glory.

THE PILGRIMAGE

(slide 6) We will go through the trip chronologically. This is roughly a 30-minute presentation. In order to finish in a timely manner, we ask that you jot down questions and hold them until the last part of our time together. After the slides, we have a few pilgrims who will give witness to the blessings they experienced. We will try to wrap up around 8:30 so those who need to go may do so, and those who would like to stay for questions may also do so.

October 3rd DAY 1

(slide 7) Our journey began as we flew from Rochester to JFK airport and landed 8 hours BEFORE the flight to Warsaw. **(slide 8)** Thankfully, we could take advantage of the Terminal 4 Catholic Chapel Our Lady of the Skies. We used the chapel to prepare our hearts for travel, sit and get to know each other, have Mass together,

and say the rosary. **(slide 9)** Peter Bahou, the founder of Peter's Way Tours for Catholic pilgrimages, has been providing pilgrimages and concert tours for St. Louis since 1997. He was there to see us off and enjoyed the afternoon with us. **(slide 10)** The blessings had begun.

October 4th DAY 2

(slide 11) We landed early morning in Warsaw. No luggage was lost, and our awesome **(slide 12)** guide Agneishka met us on arrival.

(slide 13) It was good to walk and stretch and drink more coffee! The weather was brisk! We did a walking tour of Old Town Warsaw where we got a glimpse of the **(slide 14)** Royal Castle, the former seat of Polish rulers dating back almost 7 centuries. The **(slide 15)** Archcathedral of St. John the Baptist founded in 1390, is the burial place of the last king of Poland. **(slide 16)** Sigimund's Column was erected in 1644, and commemorates King Sigismund III who in 1596 moved Poland's capital from Krakow to Warsaw. The column toppled during WWII along with most of Warsaw, but was rebuilt to its original glory. **(slide 17)** The Mermaid is a symbol of protection for Warsaw and is represented on the city's coat of arms.

Though we did not see much of New Town Warsaw, we must mention the **(slide 18)** Palace of Culture and Science built in 1952. A "gift" from the USSR paid for by Poland. It is a painful reminder for them of Soviet domination. The natives tell us that the best views are from the top of this building because you can't see the building itself.

We made our way to St. Stanislaw Kostka Church which is the **(slide 19)** National Shrine of Bl. Jerzy Popieluszko. He was a martyr for faith and was brutally beaten to death in 1984. He was known as Solidarity's Chaplain. Over 1 million attended his funeral. **(slide 20)** This outdoor shrine features a rosary made of massive stones and steel chain. An aerial view from above would show that the rosary is carefully placed in the shape of Poland.

We celebrated our **(slide 21)** first Mass in Poland at the little Franciscan Chapel under this shrine. It was perfect on this Feast of St. Francis.

(slide 22) After Mass we boarded our bus for a long nap on the drive to Czestochowa where we would visit the Black Madonna. The heart of Poland. We had dinner at our hotel and those of us who had the energy, ventured out after dinner to walk up **(slide 23)** Jasna Gora (bright mountain) for the 9:00 nightly veiling of the Miraculous Icon. **(slide 24)** The city was quiet and dark, and the parking lots were empty, but upon arriving at the massive doors to the church we were surprised to join 5000 people there for the prayers and hymns honoring Our Lady of Czestechowa. Fr. Mitch had warned us of the crowds. We heard our group from Rochester welcomed in Polish. Fr. Mitch was vested and participating in the evening prayer under the famous Black Madonna. This is live-streamed, so people from Rochester actually saw Fr. Mitch. SO many people united in prayer. **(slide 25)** What a marvelous display of faith!

October 5th DAY 3

(slide 26) A beautiful day to revisit the shrine and get a closer look at Our Lady of Czestochowa! **(slide 27)** Her scarred face is a reminder of the anguish the icon has survived. Thousands of miracles are attributed to this image. **(slide 28)** You will hear of one later this evening from one of our pilgrims. **(slide 29)** Tradition tells us that this image was painted by St. Luke on Mary and Joseph's kitchen table. **(slide 30)** It is a combination of Byzantine art of the East and Latin imagery of the West.

(slide 31) We celebrated Mass in the John Paul II Chapel which is part of the shrine. The altar has a first-class relic of St. JP11 embedded.

(slide 32) We then boarded our coach for a long drive South to Zakopane in the Tatra Mountains. After a nap we awoke to beautiful views and **(slide 33)** hand carved street chapel. It was soon dark, and we could hardly wait until sunrise when we could see the mountain views again.

October 6th DAY 4

(slide 34) Another beautiful sunny day to explore!

(slide 35-36) We celebrated morning Mass at Poland's Fatima Shrine. . **(slide 37)**
The main chapel of the Immaculate Heart was built in 1952

The newer part of the shrine was built in thanksgiving to Our Lady of Fatima after the assassination attempt on the pope's life May 13th 1981. The prophetic Third Secret of Fatima, and the significant date of the May 13th attempt, convinced Pope JPII that Our Lady of Fatima **(slide 38)** had guided the bullet and spared his life. **(slide 39, 40, 41)** .

(slide 42) After Mass we rode the funicular up the mountain to explore from above. **(slide 43)** We enjoyed craft and food open air markets. **(slide 44)** These markets were bombarded with the Highlander sheep's milk smoked cheese. Pretty to look at, but SALTY!!! **(slide 45-49)**

October 7th DAY 5

(slide 50) It was hard to say goodbye to Zakopane, but we traveled to Krakow and on our way had a tour of the **(slide 51)** Wieliczka Salt Mine. This began to be excavated in the 13th century and ceased in operation in 1996. **(slide 52)** In it's day, it produced 1/3 of the income of the Polish Treasury. It is now purely for tourism and recreation. **(slide 53)** The route that tourists are allowed is 2 miles in length with over 400 steps descending after the ride in a cable car down the shaft. **(slide 54)** This is only 2 percent of the entire complex! We were told to stay close to the guide, as if one gets lost it can take days to be found! Everything is erected in salt. **(slide 55)** There is a restaurant, a spa, conference rooms and many chapels, the famous which is in **(slide 56)** honor of St. Kinga finding her ring. We celebrated Mass in one of the **(slide 57 – Sacristy)** chapels. And yes, **(slide 58)** the walls are salty to the taste! We settled into our **(slide 59)** Krakow hotel and enjoyed nightly libations and inspirational conversations in the lobby lounge.

October 8th DAY 6

(slide 60-61) We celebrated Sunday Mass in an ornate chapel in Krakow.

(slide 62) We then enjoyed strolling the market square amid a **(slide 63)** marathon, and shopping for amber and other souvenirs in the famous **(slide 64)**

Cloth Market. The market square orbits around the iconic **(slide 65)** St. Mary's Basilica. Each hour, 24/7, the haunting 5 note bugle call closely bound to the history and traditions of Krakow is played 4 times in each direction. Add video of trumpet. **(slide 66)** The Hejnal (dawn) appears in history as early as 1241, when Mongol troops approached, and a sentry raised his bugle to warn the troops. The trumpeter was shot in the throat by an arrow and did not complete his warning call.

A peek inside the crowded St. Mary's reveals the largest Gothic altar piece ever built. **(slide 67)** The Altar of Dormition of the Mother of God was built by Veit Stoss and completed in 1489. **(slide 68)**

(slide 69) On our walking tour of Krakow, we got a glimpse at Wawel Castle and Cathedral which served as a coronation site of Polish monarchs. It is the official seat of the Archbishop of Krakow. Pope JP II offered his first Mass as a priest here.

(slide 70) October 9th DAY 7

(slide 71) We depart for the Marian Shrine of Kalwaria Zebrzydowska. This image gave great comfort to young Karol Wojtyla after losing his mother when he was 9. As we know, he was a Marian Pope to the max. *Totus Tuus*, Totally Yours, was his motto.

We continued on to Wadowice, birthplace of JP II. We toured the museum which is located in the actual apartment where Karol Wojtyla was born. **(slide 72)** We celebrated Mass at his childhood church, the Basilica of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A baroque church built in the 18th century. **(slide 73)** The beautiful altar contains reliquaries of St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Padre Pio, and St. Stanislaw Kazimierczyk. **(slide 74)** The monument to JP II on the exterior of the church was consecrated in 2006 by Cardinal Stanislaw Dzevisch. It shows him as the Moses of our times leading people out of slavery to the promised land. Just like Moses who brought water out of rock, the pope has a staff with water flowing from it to remind us about the unusual dynamics of his pontificate. **(slide 75)** A sun dial is in viewing distance from the apartment and reads, "time flies, eternity

waits". **(slide 76)** Of course, we sampled the famous **(slide 77)** Papal Cream Cake that was JP II's favorite sweet. **(slide 78)** Some of us preferred the Paczki.

(slide 79) Although we did not eat one, we brought home "Pope John Paul II cookies, which arrived unbroken". Bill Bailey could not bring himself to eat it. ☺

(slide 80) On to the Divine Mercy Shrine to venerate the tomb of St. Faustina and the famous painting of the Divine Mercy Image. Our visit to this shrine was rescheduled and quite abbreviated due to our scheduled visit with Cardinal Stanislaw, so I will add pictures from my extended visit in 2021. **(slide 81)** I had the privilege of meeting with one of the young sisters. She spoke with me for over an hour. Her name was Sr. Faustina, and I did not want our time together to end. I have never spoken to someone so filled with joy. **(slide 82)** She spoke about the Divine Mercy image and the life of St. Faustina, who was granted visions of the resurrected Christ and told to paint the image we know today. This image was painted twice. We viewed the second attempt at this shrine, and the original first image resides in Vilnius, Lithuania.

Jesus told St. Faustina that it does not matter which image is preferred. Those who sincerely say, "Jesus, I trust in you", will find comfort from all their anxieties and fears in these images. Sr. Faustina pointed out that Christ is stepping toward us in the image, pulling back his robes to reveal red rays for the blood of Jesus, and white rays for the water which purifies souls. His hand is raised in welcome and blessing, but not raised too high in dominance. His eyes are cast down. As if looking down from the cross. He saw all our future sins from the cross, and this was more painful to Him than the physical pain of the crucifixion. Divine Mercy began in the Garden of Eden, long before St. Faustina. Because of the stain of sin, God promised His Son as the second tree of Paradise, a chance for our redemption.

(slide 83) Spreading the message of Divine Mercy drove the papacy of Pope JP II. He canonized St. Faustina as we entered the new Millennium, and elevated the Feast of Divine Mercy to the Second Sunday of Easter. St Faustina was a young uneducated nun who only lived to the age of 33. **(slide 84)** I highly recommend that all read her diary!

October 10th DAY 8

(slide 85) We depart for Auschwitz, a tour you only wish to do once. **(slide 86)** The pictures tell the story, so we will take some time to reflect as we view the slides. You will see images of the reality that is responsible for over 4 million deaths. Notice the photo of one of the inmates. There is a hall that I had access to on my first trip of photos of ALL the inmates taken after they had been processed. It is when they realized they had not arrived in a good place. All had been taken. **(slides 86-103 with music)**

(slide 104) After Auschwitz, we briefly visited the Shrine of JP11 which is erected over the grounds of the stone quarry where JP11 worked during WWII while studying for the priesthood in secret.

The shrine was erected in 2016. **(slide 105)** The chapel contains the original slab from the tomb of the Holy Father in Rome with the reliquary of his blood. After he was declared Blessed, his body was moved, and moved again upon his canonization.

(slide 106-107) The cassock marked with the blood from the assassination attempt is kept in the upper chapel. **(slide 108)** The upper church is adorned with beautiful mosaics **(slide 109)** depicting biblical stories and life experiences of JP11. We were excited to soon meet Cardinal Stanislaw who worked tirelessly to bring this shrine to reality.

(slide 110) Meeting at the personal residence of Cardinal Stanislaw was the highlight for many of us. He was an aide to Pope JP11 for almost 40 years. **(slide 111)** He served as Metropolitan Archbishop of Krakow from 2005-2016. He was ordained a priest by Karol Wojtyla in 1963, and created a cardinal in 2006 by Pope Benedict XVI. **(slide 112)** We will always remember this afternoon with fondness. It was an unexpected blessing for us, and I felt for him too. He seemed genuinely interested in our little group, gave us each a gift, **(slide 113)** took individual photos with each of us, and gave us his blessing as we went on our way. A truly spectacular man of God who has experienced so much and walked so closely with a saint. **(slide 114)**

Dinner at a local restaurant with live entertainment. **(slide 115-118)**

(slide 119) October 11th DAY 9

(slide 120) Depart Krakow for Niepokalanow to see St. Maximillian Kolbe Shrine and celebrate Mass. **(slide 121)** Priest, Pole, patriot, and prisoner, Raymond Kolbe was born in 1894. At this time, Poland was only a future hope based on a noble past, as its territory had been completely conquered by surrounding nations. Kolbe as a youth had a passion for all things military and dreamed of a military career to liberate his beloved Poland. **(slide 122)** He was offered two crowns by Our Lady; a red crown for martyrdom and a white crown for heroic virtue. He enthusiastically accepted both crowns.

He was the founder of the Knights Immaculata, a publication which was widely distributed in order to evangelize in times of heavy persecution of the Church.

(slide 123) He was also founder of the Militia of the Immaculata. **(slide 124)**

The old wooden chapel still stands and is where we celebrated Mass. **(slide 125)** During the war, this campus served as a shelter for 3000 refugees of whom 2000 were Jews. This was closely watched by the Gestapo, and Kolbe and four other friars were arrested on February 7, 1941. **(slide 126)** Kolbe was transferred to Auschwitz where he gave up his life for a fellow prisoner.

(slide 127) In the cemetery of Niepokalanow rests the grave of this prisoner Franciszek Gajowniczek. He had survived 5 years in the camps, and then spent the rest of his life telling the story of Maximillian Kolbe. He was present at the canonization of St. Maximillian in 1982, and he died in 1995. He is buried in the intended grave for Kolbe. Since Kolbe was cremated, there would have been no relics. **(slide 128)** Thankfully, a barber had thought to cut his beard before he was taken. We revered this relic at the altar after Mass.

We ended our journey where we started, arriving back in Warsaw for a farewell dinner with Fr. Mitch's family. **(slide 129-130)**

October 12th DAY 10

We celebrated our last Mass in Poland at a church in Warsaw. We arrived safely home at midnight that same day, filled with the blessings of our time together, but thankful to be headed back to our own beds.

(slide 131) Last Mass celebrated on the way to the Airport at the St. Jacob the Apostle Church

(slide 132) Goodbye slide

Move to witness talks...