

MM presentation by Witold Ortonowski on February 22, 2014

I would like to take you this morning for the journey. Let's go back 33 years to far country located in Easter side of Central Europe - Poland and to its capital city Warsaw. Poland at year 1981 was dark, gray, colorless place with very little lights on the quiet streets with very series and sad peoples faces. Empty stores, with very little to eat. Faces disappointed again and again. Hope and joy of new elected pope John Paul II and first free workers union in Easter block Solidarity was shattered by declaration of martial law - December 13, 1981. Poland again became crushed by totalitarian system and it's cronies from Kreml, Russia. Solidarity leaders with Lech Walesa and thousands of others were imprisoned in unknown locations.

I will never forget this December morning! My last year of high school
Very cold Sunday morning with so much snow everywhere.

And the total surprise: no TV signal, just the black and white aunts on the glass screen and empty scary noise that was so powerful. Then dead phone no signal just deep silence. I looked through the window of my apartment in Warsaw old town and saw soldiers with machine guns. At that moment I knew that something extremely huge and bad is happening to my homeland. for some strange reason I remember all this moment like would just happened.

It was that winter 1981-1982 when slowly one name started to circulate by word of mouth all over Warsaw and Poland. We were nation without the voice again.

No telephones, no press, no any media of communication.

Silence started to be our voice and powerful force. Poles were united in silence against socialistic regime.

I was still teenager when I heard first time of father Jerzy Popieluszko.

So slowly I wanted to know more about him myself. My father started to bring home under grand publications. When my father took me first time to the basement and opened old suitcase and I saw in it hundreds of forbidan literature I felt at that moment I became trusted man. I saw printed homily of father Jerzy Popieluszko that he said during his monthly holly mass for the homeland. I was amazed by simplicity and power of his words at the same time. I wanted to really know this priest and everything about him. At that time I didn't know that this was only beginning of great lifelong journey.

I am still on it.

Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko was born September 14, 1947, on a farm in the small village of Okopy located in North Eastern Poland. Blessed Jerzy was a fragile and quiet child.

Each morning before classes began Bl Jerzy would walk three miles to serve Mass, and then after classes, in the evening, would return to the Church to pray the Rosary.

After graduating high school in 1965 while his friends were at the school ball, Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko was on a train headed for the seminary in Warsaw. He had chosen Warsaw due to its closeness to the monastery of St Maximilian Kolbe, a favorite saint of Bl Jerzy. Although

against the agreement of 1950 between the Church and State, after one year of seminary training BI Jerzy was drafted into the military for a two year tour in a special unit for clerics in Bartoszyce.

The plan for drafting clerics into the service was to indoctrinate them with the communistic ideal and cause them to lose their vocation. On one occasion, when BI Jerzy refused to crush his rosary beneath his heel he was cruelly beaten and placed in solitary confinement for a month. Also on account of his refusal to remove a medal from about his neck he was forced to stand for hours in the freezing rain. The results of this barbarity were that on the completion of his two year tour, BI Jerzy had to undergo a life threatening surgery to undo the damage done to his heart and kidneys from his beatings. The recovery caused his ordination to be delayed, but on May 28, 1972, he was ordained by Cardinal Wyszynski.

In the summer of 1980, BI Jerzy became the chaplain of the striking workers. BI Jerzy was helping families suffering from the loss of their jobs and livelihood as a result of defending the Faith. The government grew more and more frustrated with BI Jerzy as more and more people flocked to him, and at the monthly Mass for the homeland had guards stationed at every block corner to watch him. BI Jerzy went out of his way to be kind to these guards, calling them his "Guardian Angels" and even bringing them coffee in the cold Polish winter. On December 13, 1982, a bomb was left on BI Jerzy's doorstep which would have killed him if he had answered the door. The next year, in August of 1983, the police opened a formal case against him and in December he was summoned to the prosecutor's office. While detained, the police broke into his house to fill it with explosives and anti-government propaganda so they could have a cause to arrest him and launch a slur campaign.

BI Jerzy was interrogated 13 times between January and June of 1984. In September he was planning his annual pilgrimage to Jasna Gora when he received threats warning him, "If you go to Jasna Gora you are dead." National shrine of Black Madonna 200 miles south of Warsaw.

On October 13, 1984, an attempt was made on his life by means of a staged car accident, though BI Jerzy was saved due to his excellent driving ability. On October 19, 1984, after offering Mass in Bydgoszcz, BI Jerzy left with his driver for the 161 mile return trip to Warsaw. Thirty minutes into the drive the car was flagged down by three uniformed men for a traffic check near the village of Tourn. The uniformed men were actually officers of the security service and, asked the driver to hand over the keys to the car, handcuffed him and forced him into the back seat of their vehicle at gunpoint. BI Jerzy was then grabbed and brutally beaten with fists and clubs and thrown into the trunk of the car, which then sped off.

A few miles later Driver managed to escape the car and ran to the local Church to alert the authorities. Meanwhile, the three officers stopped the car to fasten down the trunk and gag BI Jerzy, who was shouting and had almost managed to open the trunk. BI Jerzy momentarily escaped them and ran into the woods, but was soon recaptured and beaten so savagely that his face and hands were unrecognizable. He was then driven to a reservoir on the Vistula River. BI Jerzy's hands and feet were tied with a noose fastened around his neck so that if he

straightened his legs it would suffocate him. His mouth was stuffed with cloth, blocking the airway, and his nose was closed with sticking plaster. Finally, having tied a bag of rocks to his feet, they threw him into the reservoir.

The body of Bl Jerzy was not discovered until ten days had passed, on October 30th. An autopsy revealed that he may have still been alive when thrown into the reservoir. His funeral was held on November 2. It was the largest gathering for funeral in Poland history, over 1 million people present. Among them was me. That day also effected me spiritually for life.

On December 19, 2009, Pope Benedict signed the decree recognizing the martyrdom of Bl Jerzy Popieluzko. On June 6th, 2010, in the presence of his mother, who was over 90 years old, Bl Jerzy was beatified in Warsaw.

The last public words spoke by Blessed Jerzy Popieluzko during the meditation on the rosary October 19, 1984, give a summary of his life and may serve as a guiding star in ours.

“In order to defeat evil with good, in order to preserve the dignity of man, one must not use violence. It is the person who has failed to win on the strength of his heart and his reason, who tries to win by force...Let us pray that we be free from fear and intimidation, but above all from the lusts for revenge and violence.”

Every month ten of thousands were coming to listen his simple, yet profound, powerful and famous already homilies. First mass for homeland he said on February 28th, 1982. There were 25 to follow, always on last Sunday of the month.

These are few parts of his sermons that impacted me at that time and molded me to who I am today.

He said "One doesn't suffer when one suffers for Christ".

September 26th, 1982

"We can bear our sufferings and crosses jointly with Christ because the trial of Christ is still going on. The trial of Christ is going on in His brothers because actors of the drama and the trial of Christ are still alive, only their surnames and faces, their dates and places of birth have changed. Methods change but the trial of Christ goes on. Its participants are all those who inflict pain on their brothers and make them suffer, and those who oppose the values for which Christ gave His life. Its participants are all those who try to construct the world around on the basis of lie, falsehood and half-truth. It is finally those who humiliate the dignity of human being, the dignity of God's child, and who deprive their fellow citizens of the value so much esteemed by God himself – freedom."

This one was from mass for the homeland he said on October 31, 1982:

"You have to live in Truth to remain spiritually free. Life in Truth consists of giving testimony, acknowledging the Truth and defending it in each situation. Truth never changes. It cannot be destroyed by any decision or legal act. Our slavery stems from our surrender to the rule of lie, our failure to unmask lie and to protest against it in everyday life. Instead of correcting lie we keep silent or pretend to believe it's true. This means living in falsehood. Telling the Truth with courage is a way leading directly to freedom. A man who tells the Truth is a free man despite external slavery, imprisonment or custody. Overcoming fear is a key element in the process of setting Man free. Fear springs from threat. We fear suffering; we fear the loss of some goods, the loss of freedom, health or job. This fear makes us act against our conscience and it is by means of conscience that we measure Truth. We overcome fear the moment we agree to lose something for the sake of higher values. If Truth becomes a value worth suffering for, worth taking a risk, then we will overcome fear that keeps us in slavery. On many occasions Christ said to His apostles: "Do not fear. Do not fear those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do" (Lk 12, 4)."

And during mass for homeland December 4th, 1983 blessed father Jerzy said this:

"Work, especially hard work, shapes love and social justice. It happens only when work is ruled by the proper moral order. If there is no moral order at work, in place of justice creeps hurt, and in place of love - hate. That is why those who in recent decades have destroyed and are still destroying the moral order do such harm to the working people and the whole society. When they want to replace Christian morality, rooted in a thousand years of tradition, against the will of all with so-called secular morality, in a Christian country there will always be a purulent wound. They do harm when they exclude God from the workplace, and believers are discriminated and usually can not occupy high positions. The workers of August 1980 called more for moral order than for higher wages.

And the last piece of The Sermon of 25 September 1983:

"Our country, our Fatherland, our own native culture, every event in its history, be it a source of joy or grief, is our common heritage. The riches of our language, our works of art and music, our religion and our customs, are all a part of it.

I invite you to ponder awhile in our meditation today upon this word 'culture' . I realise that it is as vast as the ocean. I shall therefore try to point out only certain aspects of it, certain problems connected with this complex word.

Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul 11, said to a gathering of young people: 'Culture is a manifestation of the human spirit in men. It is a confirmation of their humanity. Man creates culture and through culture forms himself. Culture is the common good of the nation..'

"What is important today is to claim with great courage the rights due to us 'as a nation: the right to God, to love, to freedom of conscience, to our culture and to our national heritage~ A nation cannot advance into the future if it cuts itself off from its past and it should be remembered that

the road upon which we have walked as a nation is a Christian road. It is unwise to sever the roots of a past lasting more than a thousand years. The tree without roots will soon be toppled over.

One cannot expect that a nation can abandon its past and start again from scratch. And we must not remain silent when our culture, our art and literature, is treated with contempt by those responsible for the education of our children; when Christian morality is replaced by a dubious socialist morality; when teachers in Warsaw schools openly declare to Christian parents that their children's education will be secularised.

To ban Christian truths, which for centuries have formed an intimate part of our national life, from the presence of children is to begin the destruction of their national identity. The school must teach our young people to love their country, to be proud of their national heritage. It cannot be an institution which is set up by the State for today only. The school must preserve and teach the vital link which binds our tomorrow with our yesterday. When our schools fail in this vital area of national life, the task becomes the duty and added responsibility of the Christian family.

The culture of a nation is also its morality. A Christian nation must be guided by our centuries-old and proven Christian morality. A Christian nation has no need of so-called secular morality, which, in the words of the late Cardinal Wyszyński, has no face and offers no hope. It creates a permanent threat to all the spiritual values of a nation and weakens the forces binding it together."

And what really touched my heart until today is that he just was regular man first, fragile and very sensitive, yet amazingly unique in his sermons that whole country was listening and talking about. communism propaganda was so hopeless and week regarding blessed father Jerzy. They just didn't know what to do and how to deal with him! At that time, I was study at university. I experienced many, many graces through this one young priest. He made all communist party and secret police go absolutely crazy to destroy his image. But They did just opposite every time until the very end. On the end they just killed the priest! sounds familiar? After martyrdom of father Jerzy communism party never regain any power. The days of socialist Poland were over. Communism regime lasted 5 more years but these years were just dying process.