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GIETRZWAŁD, FATIMA AND THE MIRACLE OF THE VISTULA THE ROAD TO POLISH INDEPENDENCE



Icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Gietrzwałd



Jerzy Kossak's "The Miracle of the Vistula"

Society of Christ in Auckland



Love One Another!

St. Bernadette's Parish



1918 - 2018

The Centenary of Polish Independence

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St Bernadette's Parish Mt. Wellington, Auckland, New Zealand

The Road To Polish Independence In 1918

POLAND is the land and nation of the Poles, a Slav people whose history stretches back well over a thousand years. As a Nation, Poland dates to the year 966 when its rulers accepted Christianity. Since that time the Polish Nation has faithfully remained within the orbit of the Latin faith and its western culture. At the same time, it became the bulwark of Christian Europe as well as its most reliable defender over the many centuries that Christian Europe was invaded or faced imminent threat of invasion by successive enemies of Christianity.

Over the centuries, the Polish Nation develops and blossoms, producing exceptional royal, political, religious and military leaders as well as renowned saints, academics, artists and scientists whose faith and intellect, knowledge and discoveries would change our understanding of the world and even the cosmos.

The period of greatest growth and development for the Polish State was during the 16th century, during which Poland became a European power as well as a very wealthy and prosperous nation. By the 18th century however wars and revolts had weakened the Polish State to the point where it could not defend itself against its neighbours. At the end of the 18th century it was gradually annexed (invaded) in a piecemeal fashion by its stronger neighbours: Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1772, Russia and Prussia in 1793 and again finally by Russia, Prussia and Austria in 1795. As a result Poland as a nation disappeared from the map of Europe for 123 years.

Poland regained its independence in 1918 at the end of the Great War but its right to independence was only confirmed in 1920 by the Battle of Warsaw, also known as the "Miracle of the Vistula".

These two events, key not just for Poland but also for the whole of Europe, are the subject of this presentation, especially in light of the protective intervention of Our Lord that was preceded by the supernatural events (apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary) at Gietrzwałd in 1877 and Fatima in 1917 that preceded the "Miracle of the Vistula" in 1920.

The apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Gietrzwałd - one of the most important events leading to Polish Independence in 1918

The apparitions began on the 27th of June and ended on the 16th of September 1877. At that time the Bishop of Warmia was Philipp Kremetz while the Gietrzwałd Parish Priest was Father Augustyn Weichsel. The Blessed Virgin Mary was to appear a total of 160 times.

The main visionaries were two young village girls, thirteen year old Justyna Szafrzyńska and twelve year old Barbara Samulowska. Both came from impoverished Polish families. The Blessed Virgin Mary as they later related spoke to them in Polish, “in the language that is spoken in Poland”, an important fact stressed by Father Franciszek Hipler at a time when Poland had been partitioned for about 100 years.

As the visionaries explained, Our Lady called for a profound change in how people lived their lives to avoid drunkenness, return to the Faith and to daily prayer. She also stressed the importance of the sacraments especially to attend Mass regularly and She encouraged reciting the Holy Rosary daily. She assured the visionaries “Do not be afraid, I am always with you”.

The apparitions at Gietrzwałd occurred at a very difficult period of history for the Polish people. The negative influence of Kulturkampf (The cultural war that sent the message that the Poles were somehow inferior to Germans), the forcible Germanisation of Polish society in regions annexed by Prussia and severe limitations on the influence of the Catholic Church were all occurring at this time. In spite of this, the apparitions led to a blossoming of Polish culture and pride in being Polish in the region of Warmia as well as a rebirth in religious life throughout all the ethnic Polish regions seized during the partitions.

Prof. Father Krzysztof Bielawny, the author of a book titled “Independence started in Gietrzwałd” believes that Polish Independence after 123 years of foreign occupation and domination started in the little village of Gietrzwałd in Warmia in 1877. Fr. Bielawny links these apparitions with a sermon given by Pope Pious IX during a private audience in Rome with a group of Polish pilgrims in 1877.

The Pope told his audience that the road to freedom for the Polish nation should not be by force of arms but through prayer and that it is sin that causes the greatest misfortune and damage to people and nations.

When one analyses the message of Gietrzwałd, it appears that the Blessed Virgin Mary is telling us very clearly about our flaws and weaknesses as a nation: drunkenness and immorality. Also promiscuity, which destroyed families. We are all aware of the changes in society during the 19th century, especially among the elite who shaped the consciousness of the nation. Among this group it was considered a positive thing to have a second “wife” and to discard the moral values that underpinned the Catholic faith. In spite of this, the ordinary people retained their faith and it was this that allowed these Catholic values to become Polish national values.

The words of Pope Pius IX in the context of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Gietrzwałd became a programme for those Poles still longing for independence and freedom after the unsuccessful insurrections of 1830 and 1863.

From 1864 armed insurrection ceased and after the apparitions at Gietrzwałd was replaced by a pilgrimage movement. It is estimated that about 10% of all ethnic Poles in all three areas of partition (Russian, Prussian and Austrian) came to pray at Gietrzwałd - about 1 million people from a total Polish population of 10 million. Poles obeyed the message of Gietrzwałd and the words of Pius IX and instead of reaching for their swords reached instead for their rosaries.

If we accept that one million pilgrims visited Gietrzwałd and started praying the Holy Rosary regularly, when they returned home and passed this message onto four or five friends or other family members then it would not be long before half of the ethnic Polish population were regularly praying the Holy Rosary. Father Bielawny, writing about the events at Gietrzwałd and their effects on the ethnic Polish population stated that independence was granted because we Poles asked for it on our knees and with rosary in hand. In his opinion the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary at Gietrzwałd resulted in a revival of the Polish spirit, a return to prayer and to morality and a rebirth of Polish society in all three areas of partition, not just in Warmia.

Let us stress once again the words of Pope Pius IX: „Your greatest misfortune is sin”. This issue is the link between the words of the Pope and the apparitions at Gietrzwałd. The Blessed Virgin Mary also spelt out clearly the many sins afflicting the Polish people, among them alcoholism, immorality and conceit. Following the apparitions and thanks to the regular praying of the Holy Rosary there was not just a rebirth of national awareness but also a moral rebirth of Polish society.

Prof. Fr. Bielawny pointed out that Gietrzwałd was the place where, 40 years before Poland regained her independence, the Polish Nation was united. According to the professor “Gietrzwałd became the de-facto source of wisdom for the nation, shaping the national and religious attitudes of the Polish people, (...)amongwhom a national awareness was reborn. Key to this was the fact that the Holy Mother of God spoke to the visionaries in Polish. She encouraged people to pray the Holy Rosary. The Polish people became proud of being Polish. A moral rebirth took place”.

According to Prof. Fr. Bielawny, what occurred in Gietrzwałd are some of the most important events leading to Polish Independence in 1918.

Fatima and the Miracle of the Vistula

Our Lady made us realize at Fatima that atheism, stubborn persistence in sin and refusal to reform, are the greatest threats to mankind. Soon after the last Fatima revelation, atheists took power in Russia.

The Reverend Dr. Mieczysław Piotrowski SChr

In Fatima, Our Lady asked people to pray for the reformation of atheists and the dedication of Russia to her Immaculate Heart. She said: "If my wishes are fulfilled, Russia will reform and peace will reign; if not, godless propaganda will spread its false teaching across the world, causing war and persecution of the Church; good people will be martyred and the Holy Father will have much to suffer. Various nations will be annihilated."

The people who took over power in Russia in 1917 professed the satanic ideology of Communism, which was based on atheism, opposition to God, hatred, and the promotion of state sponsored crime. The new rulers of Russia intended to spread their ideology to other countries, choosing to impose their diabolical ideology by force, first on Poland and then on the rest of Europe. On November 11, 1918, Poland finally regained independence after 123 years of captivity, but barely a month later, on December 18, 1918, Soviet troops began an invasion of Polish territory.

Struggle against the "Living Incarnation of the Spirit of the Antichrist"

Newly reborn Poland found herself poised against formidable odds. Most European countries sympathized with the Communist government in Moscow. The Red Army was five times more numerous than the Polish forces. From a military point of view, defeating the Bolsheviks seemed impossible. For almost two years, the Poles had heroically defended their country but they eventually had to retreat. In the summer of 1920, the Red Army approached the Polish capital. Lenin was certain that his armies would capture Warsaw within days.

For believers, it became absolutely clear that without divine intervention the Polish forces would not be able to defeat the Soviet army. Therefore, the Polish Episcopate called upon the entire nation to pray fervently and fast. Polish bishops wrote a letter to Pope Benedict XV, which read: "For two years, our country has been fighting against the enemies of Christ's cross – with the Bolsheviks [...]. If Poland succumbs to the Bolshevik onslaught, the entire world will be threatened with defeat. A new deluge will flood us."

The Polish Episcopate issued an appeal to the bishops of the world, which read: "For not alone are we threatened. For the enemy, Poland is only a stepping stone on the road to conquering the entire world [...]. Those who steer Bolshevism carry in their blood eternal hatred for Christ. Bolshevism is the living incarnation and revelation of the spirit of the Antichrist on Earth [...]. We ask you today to beseech God, to pray for Poland! May prayer wake up the conscience of nations, because it is in a state of slumber in Europe."

Believers grasped how serious the situation was. They knew that the fall of Poland will bring about the destruction of Christianity across Europe. They also knew that the power of evil could be successfully opposed only by praying and fasting. If people live in sanctifying grace and pray, they let Almighty God act and win the victory through them.

Faced with this mortal danger, the Poles besought God for help. Turning to its own people, the Episcopate called on the entire nation to start a nationwide crusade of prayer for their country, to pray the rosary fervently and adore the Blessed Sacrament all day. In all Polish churches people confessed, participated in the Eucharist, adored the Blessed Sacrament and prayed the rosary.

On June 19, 1920, the lay and spiritual authorities entrusted Poland to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary, and repeated the solemn act in the Chapel of the Jasna Góra Shrine on July 27, 1920.

As the Red Army was approaching Warsaw and the situation was apparently growing increasingly hopeless, all the diplomatic missions closed. The papal nuncio, Cardinal Achille Ratti, later Pope Pius XI, was the only member of the diplomatic corps who stayed.

Soon, on August 15, 1920, on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, the fervent prayers by the Polish people were answered. God intervened miraculously, changing the course of Poland's and Europe's history.

The Miracle of the Vistula

In the Battle of Warsaw, on 14th – 15th August 1920, a stretch of the front line near Ossów was defended on the Polish side by the 1st and 2nd Company of the 236th Academic Regiment. This was made up of volunteers, secondary-school pupils and students, who had not seen any active service before. On the Bolshevik side, experienced soldiers of General Khakhanyan's 79th Brigade fought. A daring attack by the Bolsheviks at 3.30 A.M. sent these inexperienced teenage boys retreating and fleeing to Ossów. The Bolsheviks, certain of their victory, pushed forward. Near Ossów, Polish troops managed to attempt a counterattack. A chaplain, Fr. Skorupka, was with them. Holding a cross with the cry, "For God and Country!" he led the youngsters into battle. Soon, however, after being hit directly in the head, he fell dead on the battlefield.

From this moment on, the battlefield witnessed unusual and inexplicable developments. Battle-tested Bolshevik troops, until then certain of their victory, took to flight in panic. The main reason for the retreat was not the counterattack by the Polish troops. Why did the Russians drop their arms in great panic and flee? The answer came from the Russian soldiers themselves, some of whom had been taken prisoner. They said that in the course of the battle, against the still dark sky, a figure of the Mother of God, who shone with an extraordinary light, appeared

to them! The sight scared them so much that they took to flight in great panic. The soldiers of the Soviet Communist army were atheists; they held nothing sacred, indulging in stealing, raping and brutally torturing and murdering prisoners of war and defenceless civilians. And it was those cruel soldiers, devoid of any moral principles, who saw against the darkened sky the shining figure of a woman and recognized her to be the Mother of God.

They saw Our Lady deflect shells shot at the Polish forces. One of the scared Bolshevik soldiers, who hid in a Polish house, said that he saw Our Lady cast shells away. The sight of the figure of Our Lady, blazing with supernatural light, awoke consciences and faith, but also scared the Russian soldiers out of their minds. They dropped their rifles and abandoned their guns and vehicles, and fled the battlefield in great panic. Many regained their composure only after fleeing for several dozen kilometers. They told Polish villagers: "You did not see it, but we did. Close to Warsaw, a great army stood. We saw Our Lady, who was protecting the Poles."

Russian soldiers, who were militant atheists and were guilty of killing priests and believers, saw Our Lady wrap Polish forces in the embracing folds of her gown. These soldiers spoke of this without fear.

Our Lady on the Front Line at Radzymin.

On August 14, 1920, Lieutenant Stefan Pogonowski, commanding officer of the 1st Battalion, 28th Regiment of Kaniów Riflemen, of the Polish forces, was with his men on alert along another part of the front line, at Radzymin. Suddenly, at 1:00 A.M. on August 15th, contrary to Gen. Żeligowski's orders, Lt. Pogonowski, driven by some inner impulse, decided to launch a surprise attack on the superior enemy forces – the 27th Red Army Division. The daring attack by the battalion took the Bolsheviks by surprise. A fierce battle ensued in which Lt. Pogonowski fell. By now the Bolsheviks were gaining the upper hand, but then all of a sudden they began dropping their rifles and fleeing the battlefield.

What was the main reason for their unexpected behavior? As the Russian soldiers said later, during the battle they also saw the figure of Our Lady blazing like a mysterious light in the sky. The Immaculate Virgin Mary, who wrapped the Polish capital in her gown, was surrounded by winged mounted knights and her figure deflected the shells fired by Russian soldiers.

The apparition of Our Lady scared the Russian soldiers so much that they all dropped their guns in great panic and fled the battlefield. Villagers remembered that the fleeing soldiers were so scared that they looked for any place to hide. Some, on their knees, begged Poles to give them protection. Their teeth chattered out of fear, which was the sign of a great nervous shock. They explained that they were fleeing from the Tsarina – Our Lady.

The revelation of Our Lady during the Battle of Warsaw became a widely known fact, owing to courageous testimonies by Russian soldiers, who in prison-of-war camps, spoke of the miracle to doctors, nurses, and other Poles employed there. The prisoner-of-war camps ended up holding over 60,000 Russian soldiers. They willingly bore witness that during the Battle of Warsaw they saw Our Lady and they testified that these were the most shocking moments in their lives. They said that the light radiating from the figure of Mary was so dazzling that they had to cover their eyes, causing them to flee in panic, losing their shoes, rifles and other equipment.

The spectacular miracle of the appearance of Our Lady during the Battle of Warsaw was the main reason behind the ultimate victory of the Polish forces. Thus, an extraordinary, miraculous divine intervention saved Poland and Europe from the nightmare of Communist captivity.

This event changed the course both of European and world history. The great miracle of the appearance of Our Lady was an answer to the fervent and persistent prayers of the Polish people.

As in the life of nations, in the life of every man, too, the most important spiritual struggle rages between the forces of evil, which want to drive us into hell, and the forces of good, which want to bring us to eternal salvation. We shall win the struggle only if we give ourselves to the disposal of the Virgin Mary and let her teach us how to believe, pray and always trust in Jesus. Jesus assures us: "Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive" (Matthew 21:22). Christ will give us all we need for our salvation but we must desire it and ask for it in persistent daily prayer.

Jesus, in the words addressed to the mystic Alicja Lenczewska, makes us realize that: "Without me you can do nothing; in other words you can do nothing that is of a positive value. Many perish, with the world being plunged into darkness, because there is no prayer and no communion with me. The efforts, work and energy of so many people, on whom I have bestowed my gifts in abundance, produce only bad fruits, poisoned with the venom of hell. The bad fruits are always found where there is no confident and sincere prayer being offered to me, where my Wisdom and Will are not relied on. There should be as much love, wisdom and peace in your heart as there is prayer. As much as you have taken from me during prayer, that much you can give back – of what is worth giving – to another man (Word of Instruction, 223).

Source: Fr. J.M. Bartnik SJ, Ewa J.P. Storożyńska, *Matka Boża Łaskawa a cud nad Wisłą (Our Lady and the Miracle of the Vistula)*, Warszawa 2011.

"Those who steer Bolshevism carry in their blood eternal hatred for Christ" (The Polish Episcopate to the bishops of the world)

The Act of Consecration of the Polish Nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, Jasna Góra, September 8, 1946

O ever Immaculate Virgin, Mother of God most pure!

Just like in the past after the invasion of the Swedes, King John Casimir chose You as the Patroness and Queen of Poland, entrusting to Your special care and protection our country, in the same way, we, children of the Polish Nation, stand before Your throne to pay homage to You, with love, warm-hearted respect and gratitude.

To You and Your Immaculate Heart we consecrate ourselves, our Nation and the resurrected Poland, promising to You our faithful service, complete dedication and reverence for Your places of worship and altars.

To Your Son, our Redeemer, we pledge to be faithful to His teachings and laws, to defend His Gospel and Church, and to expand His Kingdom.

Most Holy Lady and Queen, we fly to thy protection. Spread your motherly protection over the Polish family and guide its sanctity. Fill our parishes with the supernatural spirit and piety. Protect your people from sins and misfortunes. Strengthen shepherds of the Church and give them your grace. For the Polish Nation, intercede for unwavering faith, sanctity of life and understanding of its mission. Unite it in harmony and brotherly love. Give this Polish land, permeated with blood and tears, a quiet and glorious life in truth, justice and freedom. Our Queen and Lady, be an inspiration and Patroness of Poland.

Our Lady, Help of Christians!

Spread your mantle of protection over the Pope and the Holy Church. Be his shield during persecutions. Intercede for his sanctity and apostolic zeal, free and effective work. Stop the flood of godlessness. For those who left the Church, show the way of return to the unity of Christ's fold. Show to nonbelievers the Sun of truth and win their souls with the affection of Your Immaculate Heart.

O Queen of the World!

Look tenderly on the worries and mistakes of humankind. Take it from torment and chaos, dishonesty and sin. Intercede for sincere and lasting reconciliation between nations. Show them the way of return to God, encourage them to build their lives based on His truth. Give all of us lasting peace, based on justice, brotherhood and trust.

Take our sacrifice and pledge Mary, Mother of God and Our Mother.

Gather us all into Your Immaculate Heart and unite us forever with Christ and His Holy Kingdom.

Amen.



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