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Jasna Góra - the Sanctuary of the Church

The Pauline Order, sanctioned by Pope Urban V in 1369, came to Poland from Hungary as early as 1382. The first monastery was the now world-renowned Jasna Góra. The fame, the power to attract people and the evangelical mission is all thanks to the painting of Our Lady, known as the Lady of Jasna Góra or the Black Madonna. The particular presence of the Holy Lady carries “consolation and sterling hope”¹ to all worshippers of Jesus Christ coming to this place. At first Jasna Góra was a sanctuary only for Poland. Yet, at the beginning of the 15th century it became a destination for pilgrimages also from the Czech lands, Slovakia, the Ukraine, Hungary, Lithuania and even England, and after the Second World War from all over the world. Every year the Jasna Góra monastery is visited by approximately 4 million pilgrims, amongst which the Shepherd of the Church, John Paul II, has come four times during his pontificate. A particular feature of Jasna Góra is the number of pilgrims that come every year on foot (in recent years about 200 thousand), including representatives of other nations. The significance of Jasna Góra as the Sanctuary of the whole Church is due to both pilgrims from Europe and the whole world as well as thanks to shepherds, who lead the Universal Church and also prayers spoken here “for the freedom of the Church in the world”.²

1. The place of pilgrimages - the sign of sacredness

In the history of redemption God’s plan is linked with certain places on Earth. This redemptive plan for all mankind has been realized by God on a small piece of land as if on the cross-roads of people’s routes - on the border of Europe, Asia and Africa. These roads were travelled by our Saviour who was born from the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem, died and resurrected in Jerusalem, nowadays the centre of the three greatest religions of the world. Some mountains mentioned in the Bible have an exceptional role that is permanent and glorious. A place of genuine revelations is Mount Sinai, sometimes called simply “God’s Mountain”. It was there where the appointment of Moses, giving the Law to the people and the revelation of God’s glory took place.

Jerusalem as a place of cult and of people meeting God, and especially Mount Zion, which protects from idolatry, allows contact with God, acceptance of His message and fulfilment of his will. An example of this is Abraham who in this very place (Mount Moriah) gave a sacrifice to God and through his faith opened himself to the “day of Jesus” (see John 8: 56). The eschatological perspective and full reference to Jasna Góra is linked with Mount Zion: *And it shall come to pass in the latter days, that the Mountain of Jehovah’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills;* (Is 2: 2) and all nations shall flow into it (11: 9), Yahweh will be King there (23: 23). He shall prepare a feast on the mountain (25: 6-10).³

What is taught about sacred mountains in the Bible, what is also the most important manifestation and mission of Jasna Góra is that they lead to Christ in a way that God really wants to be worshipped in the spirit and mission of Jasna Góra and not on any other mountain (John 4: 20-24). The Apostle says: *God, having in olden times spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son* (Hbr 1: 1-2).

Jasna Góra - a place of pilgrimages and particularly the painting of Our Lady with Child famed for its miracles allows us to “*raise our eyes to the mountains*” (Ps121: 1). It opens up heaven above our very heads, guides our thoughts to a different life, towards what is eternal, the purpose of which is the liberating meeting of man with God.

The tower of Jasna Góra is symbolic in character. It is the sign of the Lord’s assistance. The image of its attitude to God always helps the pilgrims to notice the new dimensions of matters and situations. The fact that pilgrimages give the chance of a new view of life reminds one that our whole life is a pilgrimage. And that by living here on earth, we are on the road to our homeland which is in heaven. Jasna Góra, and in it Mary, brings about consolation in suffering and helps us to accept it as a sign of belonging to Christ. It also reminds us of our death, about the fact that we shall all die, but also that we are not departing into an abyss, but eternal life with Jesus awaits us.

The role of Jasna Góra has the function of discovery, a formative meaning for all pilgrims, no matter where they come from, as it is a reflection of the choices made on earth. These choices and decisions have ultimate consequences, that are eschatological, bringing about final joy or eternal loss. The pilgrims that arrive at the sanctuary expect God and the Holy Virgin to intervene in their personal life and the lives of their relatives, thinking quite frequently about settling temporal matters. Yet, when they stand within the walls of the monastery, praying before the painting of the Mother of God, a new perspective opens wide. It is the only true one from the Christian standpoint, namely: redemption, resurrection, eternal life, the perception of God and His glory. By coming to this sacred place they find the truth about the holiness of God and the holiness of their lives. The want of temporal wealth ceases to be of paramount importance and is replaced by the birth of a need to be close to God and to become like Him. There arises a desire to be holy as God is holy.

Man starts to discover his place as a fragile creature. He gives primacy and right to God - just as the Virgin Mary did.

Therefore, Jasna Góra is first of all a sign of tension between temporal and eschatological expectations and finally leads the pilgrims to the discovery of the laws of God's Realm, to a meeting with God. The collision of human weakness and sinfulness with God's holiness that is experienced in the sanctuary does not lead to a breakdown and abandoning of the route shown by the Virgin Mary, but awakens trust in God's mercy and urges us to "*rise from even the greatest fall*".⁴ It is here that the secret of God's love becomes apparent. Jesus, as the real true temple, is a sign of this love. In it, man receives not only light for his life, but also with it - the gift of redemption.

The Church is a temple, a sign of sanctity, a community of those who believe in Christ. In this way it is also a sign through which man has "*easy access to the Father*" (See Eph 3: 12). Therefore, in the same sense each Christian, according to the Apostle Paul, is also a temple inhabited by the Holy Ghost. This temple constitutes a visible sign, placed in the middle of the world that shows the permanent heritage of all God's children.

Our Lady of Czestochowa, through her real presence, invites us to be within the world. She causes the continuous formation of a righteous conscience that signals approval when good appears and remorse when evil is done. This is the primary evangelic function of the sanctuary. Jasna Góra is definitely a place, like Guadalupe in Mexico, Lourdes and Fatima, which fulfils its mission in such a way that serves each individual person and the whole Universal Church.

2. Jasna Góra - the Sign of Hope of the Universal Church

The international dimension of Jasna Góra's influence has been visible since the beginning of the monastery's existence. The pilgrimages from outside Poland in the 15th century are evidence of this. Because of the development of the pilgrim movement connected with Jasna Góra, King Władysław Jagiełło (Ladislaus Jagiello) wrote a letter in 1429 to pope Martin V in order to obtain graces of plenary indulgence. The institution of apostolic confessors developed in those days.⁵ The sanctuary enjoyed the interest and approval of the popes. The events of the 17th century, particularly the years 1655 and 1656, i.e. the victorious defence of the monastery from the invading Swedes, played an enlivening role for the Jasna Góra sanctuary in Poland, also abroad and for the whole Church. The war begun by the Swedes did not only aim at installing Charles Gustav on the Polish throne and the conquering of the Polish Kingdom. The military actions were targeted by Protestant Europe against Catholic Poland. A dangerous Protestant evangelization, meaning a liberalization in the theological sciences as well as in the moral life of many countries in Europe developed at that time. It seemed that nothing could stop this modern wave. Yet, the Jasna Góra monastery with the wonderful Image of Our Lady became a bastion of defence of the Catholic faith, of loyalty to the Apostolic Capital and

the worship of the Virgin Mother. Our Lady of Częstochowa proved to be stronger than the modern trends which seemed destined to gain universal acceptance. The defence was organized under the command of Prior Augustyn Kordecki and saved not only the sacred dwelling, but also the throne for the legitimate king, Jan Kazimierz (John Casimir), and the independence of Poland. The defence of Jasna Góra in 1655 saved the Catholic faith in Poland and protected the integrity of the faith and connection with Peter's Capital in Rome. This had a beneficent effect on Christianity. The spiritual power of the defenders, and especially the protection by Our Lady, caused an awakening of conscience, revitalization of faith and worship of the Virgin Mary. These events culminated in the act of naming the Lady of Jasna Góra - the Queen of Poland in 1656. Even today, these events cause people to rethink and change their mentality and attitude to life, they form the integrity of the present generation's conscience by a persistent calling for moral awakening and strengthening of faith.⁶ Therefore, it is essential to renovate the Jasna Góra bulwarks and the bastion of St. Roch which are not only a remembrance of those heroic days, but have also become a sign of the Catholic Faith's heritage which should be protected by each generation.

The protection of Christian Europe from the Islamic flood of 1683 was linked with Jasna Góra, as Jan III Sobieski, on his way to Vienna, prayed in front of the Image of Our Lady for blessing from God. In order to strengthen his heart and as a guarantee of reliable protection from the Queen of Jasna Góra, he received the sword of the heroic knight Stanisław Żółkiewski from the Pauline provincial. The sword bore the words of prayer and the motto of the commander of battles with the Turks: *ego sum mancipium Mariae* (I am the tool of St. Mary). This Jasna Góra school and *Jasna Góra road* - as later said by John Paul II - is the grace and gift for people and the entire Church.

Jasna Góra has become a symbol of Hope, together with the particular presence of the Virgin Mother for the Church of our century. In evidence of this are the ties of the preceding Popes to Jasna Góra:

St. Pius X:

- in 1904 he established the Feast of Our Lady of Częstochowa;
- in 1906 he granted a special indulgence to the rebuilders Jasna Góra Tower and the participants at its blessing;
- in 1906 the church at Jasna Góra received the rank of a smaller basilica;
- in 1910 he gave two gold crowns for the temples of Our Lady and the Infant Jesus.

Pope Pius XI:

- as the first papal nuncio in reborn Poland Achille Ratti started his mission with a pilgrimage to Jasna Góra (15th August 1918) and stayed with the Poles through the Bolshevik invasion in 1920 and the so called "miracle on the Vistula". He commemorated the latter event with a special painting in the papal chapel of Castel Gandolfo (next to the painting of the Częstochowa Defence from the Swedes);

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- he placed a copy of Our Lady of Częstochowa, the gift of Polish bishops and Jasna Góra, in the papal chapel in Castel Gandolfo;
- in 1924 he established the patronal feast for Poland of the Virgin Mary the Queen of Poland.

Pope Pius XII:

- defended Poland attacked by Hitler;
- frequently comforted the Polish nation, for example in the words: *Look towards the Mountain from which help will arrive on time, the mountain that your first fathers called the Light (Jasna), where the Virgin Mary, your Queen set up her tent, where in a motherly way her Painting smiles at the praying;*
- granted special rights to Father Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński to manage the Church in Poland.

Pope John XXIII:

- a strong friend of Poland and Jasna Góra;
- an exceptional worshipper of the Black Madonna.

Pope Paul VI:

- in 1923, still a young priest and working at the nunciature in the Vatican, he went on two pilgrimages to Jasna Góra;
- asked - on the day of his coronation - for a daily prayer for him in front of the painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa;
- in 1966 he tried to be present in person during the ceremonies at Jasna Góra that were to commemorate 1000 years of Christianity in Poland.

Pope John Paul I:

- chosen for the Apostolic Capital on 26th August 1978 on the feast of Our Lady of Częstochowa.

Pope John Paul II:

- his entire youth, vocation, ministry, bishophood, cardinalate and ultimately the mission of Peter have been connected with Jasna Góra. This is best shown by his motto as bishop "*Totus Tuus*";
- four times already - during each pilgrimage to his homeland - he has visited Jasna Góra, showing his love to the Lady of Częstochowa. He sees the history of the Church as tied to the Queen of Poland;
- he places the whole Church in the hands of the Jasna Góra Mother of the Church and gives her the mankind, Europe and all continents;
- he spreads the cult of the Jasna Góra Lady in Rome and every place on earth where he goes with his apostolic pilgrimage.

The pontificate of John Paul II is under the particular sign of the Virgin Mary of Jasna Góra. Due to the attitude and ministrations of the Pope, the Jasna Góra Lady is becoming the Patron of the Universal Church. Many pilgrims from foreign countries are motivated to come to the Sacred place out of a desire to meet the Madonna of John Paul II. ⁷

3. Jasna Góra - the place of great prayer

Of the many names given to Jasna Góra by John Paul II, the most important seems to be: a great place of prayer. He himself learned to come as a pilgrim to Jasna Góra and to pray at the feet of the Lord's Mother, in accordance with the tradition of his own nation. As priest, bishop and cardinal, he showed his friends, groups, diocese and the whole nation the need of prayer to the Lady of Jasna Góra. Of great importance in his life was his work at the Conference of the Episcopate of Poland and direct co-operation with Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński. The whole ministry in Poland after the War was based on Jasna Góra. It has always been a symbol of *consolation and hope*, especially in times of repression and persecution, it was a *place of evangelization and conversion*. John Paul II when announcing the invitation for the 6th World Youth Day wrote the following: *We are going to the sanctuary which is of particular importance to the Polish nation, it is a place of evangelization and conversion in moments of greatest difficulty, the Polish nation found the power of faith and hope, its own dignity and heritage of God's Children at the home of the Mother.*⁸

A great prayer once said at Jasna Góra was the act of placing Poland in the hands of the Virgin Mary in 1920 to save the nation from the coming Bolshevik invasion. The offering of the Polish nation - as Pope Pius XII did - to the Immaculate Heart of the Holy Virgin Mary was also a great prayer. The Jasna Góra Vows of 2nd August 1956, which were repeated annually during the preparation for the Millennium of Christianity in Poland were a great prayer. A really great prayer, sacred and celebrative was the Millennium Act of Dedicating Poland to the Lord's Mother, into the motherly bondage of love for the freedom of the Church in Poland and the world. Obviously this Act was itself the most complete millennium prayer of the nation, directed at the future, springing from the spirit of the Second Vatican Council which dealt with the presence and mission of the Church in the world. The Millennium Prayer of Poles became a means of introducing the matters of the Universal Church into the Church in Poland. This prayer placed the nation into slavery of the Virgin Mother, wanted to activate secular Catholics, to interest them in the needs of the Church as a whole and awaken responsibility for the Church.

The Millennium Act was not an ordinary surrender to the Virgin Mary, it was not protecting the particular interest of people and the whole nation but was a burnt-offering for the good of the Universal Church, the Church in the entire world.⁹

The Millennium Act, connected with Jasna Góra (stated on 3rd May 1966) found the approval of Pope Paul VI, who sent a special document showing his appreciation of the Poles' profession of faith and accepting the millennium offering of the whole nation for the good of other nations and the whole world with gratitude. The words of Paul VI were as follows:

Like Prince Mieszko I who gave his land to St Peter's Capital, now you, who are the most zealous children of the Queen of the Heavens, desire,

through repetitive acts, to devote your nation to the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Church. By this you want to obtain the expansion of Christ's Kingdom among all nations as well as real freedom and prosperity in our times from the Most Holy and Highest God. You ardently want this jubilee Millennium Celebration to become a new christening which will allow for a more profound, more effective and powerful influence of the Councils decisions on the life of all nations (...). On the 3rd day of May of the Millennium year thou shall sing the anthem *Te Deum Laudamus* in front of the Painting of Our Most Holy Lady of Częstochowa and publicly sacrifice yourself to the Sweetest Mother and Queen of the Holy Church.¹⁰

Pope Paul VI understood the intentions of the Shepherds of the Church in Poland well, he saw the maturity of the Polish nation. He placed the Millennium Act very high when comparing it to the event of baptising Mieszko I. He noticed that no other nation had ever placed itself in the hands of St. Mary to protect its goodness. The Millennium Act was devotion for other nations, for the Church which is the Body of Christ.

The place of Jasna Góra and its mission for the Universal Church is shown by the statement of Pope John Paul II, who during his first pilgrimage to his Homeland, at Jasna Góra once again commented on the Millennium Act of Placing Poland in the Hands of the Virgin Mary. Let his words close these thoughts about the relation of Jasna Góra to the mission of the Universal Church. The words of the Polish Pope have a specific and at the same time universal meaning:

*Starting with 1956 the Great Novena began before the One Thousand Year Anniversary of Poland's Christening. And in the year of the Polish Millennium, i.e. on 3rd May 1966, here, in this place through the lips of Poland's Primate, the Act of Poland's Submission to the Lord's Mother for the freedom of the Church in Poland and in the contemporary world was said. The words of this Act, spoken in the language of Polish historical experience, of Polish suffering, but also of Polish victory, had prophetic implication in that particular moment of the history of the Church and the world. It was after the Second Vatican Council on 3rd May 1966 when the Episcopate of Poland added to this fundamental work of the Council its Jasna Góra Act... It is an original reading of the truth concerning the presence of the Virgin Mother in the secret of Christ and the Church, as stated by the 8th chapter of the Lumen Gentium Constitution. The reading is of great importance according to the tradition of the holy.*¹¹

Notes:

- ¹ Konstytucja dogmatyczna o Kościele (The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church), *Lumen Gentium*.
- ² The Millennium Act of Putting the Nation into the Hands of the Virgin Mary on 3rd May 1966.
- ³ See *Słownik teologii biblijnej* (Dictionary of Biblical Theology), ed. X.Leon-Dufour.
- ⁴ John Paul II, The First Pilgrim to the Homeland, speech to the Paulines on 6th June 1979.
- ⁵ See *Częstochowska Matka Boża* (The Lord's Mother of Częstochowa), in: *Encyklopedia Katolicka* (The Catholic Encyclopaedia), vol. 3, 1979, pp. 866-871.

- ⁶ See Stefan Kaczorowski, *Cud Jasnej Góry* (The Miracle of Jasna Góra), London 1962.
See Stefan Rożej OSPPE, *Okaż się nam Matką* (Prove to be Our Mother), Warsaw 1989, pp. 24-27.
- ⁷ See *Tyś wielką chlubą naszego narodu* (Thou Art the Pride of Our Nation), ed. Father Konstancjusz Kunz OSPPE, Częstochowa - Jasna Góra 1991, pp. 125-156.
- ⁸ John Paul II, *Orędzie na VI Światowy Dzień Młodzieży* (Message for the 6th International Youth Day), Vatican, 15th August 1990.
- ⁹ See Card. Stefan Wyszyński, *Do uczestników Kongresu Mariologicznego* (To the Participants of the Mariological Congress, 5th August 1967), in: *Głos z Jasnej Góry* (The Voice from Jasna Góra), p. 245.
- ¹⁰ *Milenijny List Ojca Św. Pawła VI* (The Millennium Letter of Pope Paul VI), in: P. Rain, *Te Deum Narodu Polskiego* (Te Deum of the Polish Nation), Olsztyn 1991, pp. 26-27.
- ¹¹ John Paul II, Jasna Góra, 4th June 1979, in: *Matka Odkupicielka, Matka Kościoła* (The Redeeming Mother, The Mother of the Church), Warsaw 1990, pp. 57-60.