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A New Jewel in the Crown of Cracow

For at least two centuries Cracow has had the proud status of the spiritual capital of Poland. The old royal city took over that function in the partition times. In this city, situated at the foot of Wawel Hill, in its historic monuments and among the tombs of the Polish kings and heroes, the nation deprived of its own state found the strength necessary to survive. The Cracovians themselves greatly contributed to the special status of their city. It was also due to their efforts that Cracow became the most important academic circle in the Polish lands. It happened owing to the spectacular development of the Jagiellonian University and the establishment of the Academy of Sciences. Cracow was also the main centre of Polish art (many talented people studied at the School of Fine Arts, which in 1900 changed its name into the Academy of Fine Arts) and Polish literary life, especially in the so-called Young Poland epoch. The grand, national celebrations that were held annually and the splendid celebrations commemorating the important anniversaries of historical events transformed the old Piast and Jagiellon capital into the most important centre of Polish national life. Also then Cracow became the most important centre of Polish religious life besides Częstochowa. In its many churches, the pilgrims from all over the country would seek spiritual support. Also the religious orders exiled by the Prussians and Moscovians would find their shelter here. It is worth reminding that the Felician sisters expelled from Warsaw settled in Cracow in 1865. In 1874, the discalced Carmelite nuns exiled from Poznań found shelter in our city, and two years later the Ursuline nuns from Poznań also came here. St. Philip Nereus Oratorians expelled from the region of Poznań, as well as the Uniates suffering persecutions in Podlasie and the region of Chełm also found their shelter here. Cracow opened its gates ajar to the high-ranking clergy of the Catholic Church exiled from other occupied lands. Among them were: the Archbishop of Warsaw, Zygmunt Szczęśny Feliński (he spent 20 years in Siberia, then he settled in Cracow, where he died in 1895 in the aura of sanctity); Bishop Jan Chryzostom Janiszewski exiled from Poznań for helping the insurgents of the Springtide of Nations (he was received by the Missionaries in Stradom); the Bishop of Vilnius, Adam Stanisław Krasiński (arrested in 1863 for supporting the January insurgents,

exiled to Wiatka; in 1882 he came to stay in Cracow with the Piarists); Bishop Paweł Rzewuski (he was in charge of the Warsaw diocese in the years 1863-65; accused of helping the insurgents he was exiled to Astrachan, in 1887 he found shelter with the Resurrection Community); the Bishop of Płock, Franciszek Albin Symon (for his patriotic activity during the January Uprising he was exiled to Odesa; at the turn of the 19th century he found shelter at St. Mary's Church, where he became the parson).

In the universal consciousness of the Poles, already in the Middle Ages, Cracow was perceived as the happy city of saints. We can find here the relics of St. Stanislaus, the patron of the Kingdom of Poland, as well as of many other saints: St. Jacek Odrowąż (in the Dominican church), Blessed Salomea (in the Franciscan church) and Blessed Bronisława (in the church of the Premonstratensian nuns). In the late Middle Ages, several new names were added to the community of the patrons and spiritual guardians of Cracow. They were St. Jan Kanty, St. Jadwiga the Queen, Blessed Szymon of Lipnica, Blessed Stanisław of Kazimierz (Kazimierzczyk), Venerable Izajasz Boner and the saintly: Michał Giedroyc and Świętosław the Silent. In the times of national slavery several more figures became the guardians of the city situated at the foot of Wawel Hill. They were: St. Brother Albert (Adman Chmielowski), Blessed Angela Zofia Truszkowska (the founder of the Felician convent), Blessed Józef Sebastian Pelczar, Blessed Franciszka Siedliska (the founder of the female order of the Holy Family of Nazareth) and a large body of other people who lived and died in the aura of sanctity.

Remembering all that, one should not wonder that at the turn of the 19th century in our city appeared such special personalities as Blessed Aniela Salawa, who for almost twenty years worked as a housemaid, or Sister Maria Faustina Kowalska, a great mystic full of humility and devotion and an advocate of the worship of God's Mercy. Saint Faustina, canonised by Pope John Paul II in April 2000, lived in the Order of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, which has existed in Łagiewniki in Cracow since 1868.

The worship of God's Mercy rooted by her among the nuns and then popularised among the wider and wider circles of believers transforms the tiny church in Łagiewniki into a bedrock on which a great sanctuary is being built. It is one of those places from which emanates the grace of the Lord. Thanks to Saint Faustina a new jewel is added to the crown of Cracow, the Polish Jerusalem. This jewel is the Sanctuary of God's Mercy. In the third millennium of Christianity it will add splendour to the former capital of Poland.

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