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THE ICON OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP
AND THE REDEMPTORIST CHURCH IN KRAKÓW IN
KAROL WOJTYŁA'S LIFE AND MINISTRY
IN THE YEARS 1941-1978

The great philosopher of mediaeval Europe, Bernard of Chartres, uttered these timeless words:

We are like dwarves perched on the shoulders of giants, and thus we are able to see more and farther than the latter. And this is not at all because of the acuteness of our sight or the stature of our body, but because we are carried aloft and elevated by the magnitude of the giants dwarves.¹

One of these spiritual “giants” for the world and the Church at the turn of the millennium was Saint John Paul II, the first Slavic Pope ever. In the context of his canonization, in numerous venues and among so many cultures, his admirers are recalling how he touched their lives. For to them he was a great pope, a unique spiritual leader, and at the same time a son of the Polish Church.

This article attempts to focus on one such collective memory. It recalls the encounters of Karol Wojtyła, the future pope, with the Redemptorist community and with the devotees of the Virgin Mary under the title of *Our Mother of Perpetual Help* in her sanctuary located in the district of Podgórze in Kraków, Poland. The unique background of this article is that in 2014 there coincide the proclamation of Wojtyła as a saint of the Church, and the celebration of the 150th jubilee of the Redemptorists' receiving custody of the original icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Both as pope and before his papacy Wojtyła was very devoted to Mary of Perpetual Help.

¹ J. Le GOFF, *Inteligencja w wiekach średnich* [Intelligentsia in the Middle Ages], Warszawa 1966, 25.

The first contact of Karol Wojtyła with the Redemptorist church in Kraków (local people called it *kościół na Górcze*, “the church on the Hill”) occurred after the 1939 Nazi invasion of Poland. Young Karol was then living with his father in a district called Dębniki. He had been pursuing Polish studies at the Jagiellonian University before it was forcibly closed. Then, like other Poles, he had to adjust to the repression and persecution by the invaders, and, when possible, to defy them. But the basic task during the terror of occupation was to survive.

Feeling a strong concern for his father and for himself, he stood long hours in lines to get pitifully small portions of food. He did what he could to procure a bit of sugar on the black market, and, in wintertime, a small sack of coal.² During this time, the staple diet in his home was potatoes “dressed with a bit of onion and margarine.”³ In these conditions, along with the obligation to work, there was always the shadowy threat of being sent away to a brutal labor encampment in Germany.

Thanks to the influence of some acquaintances, Karol Wojtyła was registered as a manual laborer in the Zakrzówek quarry in Kraków in September 1940. In a letter to friends, he described his job:

Currently, I am a worker. I am working physically in the quarry. Do not be terrified! So far, I have not cut quarry stones. I am only laying railroad tracks, the railway between the quarry and the Solvay [Chemical Company] plant [...]. My pay is very good (relatively good); the most precious thing is the workers' allowances. In fact, most of my colleagues have such jobs. And these jobs are very beneficial [...]. You become more fully a man.⁴

² G. F. SVIDERCOSCHI, „Poznałem nazizm i komunizm”, in: *Karol Wojtyła – Papież pomiędzy dwoma totalitaryzmami*, [“I came to know Nazism and Communism”], in: *Karol Wojtyła – Pope between Two totalitarianisms*, Marki 2002, 26.

³ G. WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope: the Biography of Pope John Paul II*, New York 1999, 55.

⁴ K. Wojtyła to the Kotlarczyks, Kraków 7 October 1940, in: *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły* [*Calendar of Karol Wojtyła's Life*], ed. A. Boniecki, Kraków 1983, 63.

In October 1941, Karol was moved to work in a different Kraków suburb where there existed another installation of the same Solvay chemical firm that had been constructed some years earlier. Interestingly, it was named the *Ostdeutsche Chemische Werke* ["East German Chemical Works"]. Although it was a bit more distant from his home than was the quarry at Zakrzówek, the working conditions were much better. The 23 year-old Karol Wojtyła was assigned to the water purification unit. One of his main tasks was to lug buckets filled with lye hanging from a special yoke over his shoulders, the lye being used as a water softener. This job differed from his previous one in that the work involved revolving shifts. According to the report of Professor Edward Görlich, "Karol Wojtyła liked best taking the night shift. Then it was very calm. It was known that after he completed the necessary activities he could kneel and pray the breviary."⁵ The student-worker, or as he described himself at the end of his life, the "man in clogs," was accustomed to go into the nearest church on his way home, to pray and to participate in the Sacrifice of the Mass.⁶

This "nearest church" was that served by the Redemptorists in the Kraków district of Podgórze. Besides joining in the celebration of Mass in the early morning, Karol could – if he wished – approach the sacrament of Reconciliation because priests were available for this.

In those years the rector of the community, which numbered more than twenty members, was the veteran missionary and retreat-director, Father Tadeusz Grodniewski. This residence in Kraków also served as the headquarters of the Redemptorist Polish Province, whose superior was Father Franciszek Marcinek.⁷ Collectively, this residence and its members served as a well-known missionary center. It sponsored retreats and pastoral guidance, and had a charitable outreach program for the needy. In addition it was also an educational center because of its clandes-

⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶ M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptorystowskie ślady na drodze życia Karola Wojtyły w latach 1941-1978* [*Redemptorist Traces in Karol Wojtyła's Life in the Years 1941-1978*], in: *Studia Redemptorystowskie* 3 (2005) 10-11.

⁷ *Catalogus Congregationis Ss. Redemptoris Provinciae Polonicae*, 1940, 3-4.

tine activity as a *juvenate* (generally equivalent to a high school or *gymnasium*) for young Redemptorist candidates.⁸

However, in the general area of Kraków it had a special character because of its image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. This was a beautiful reproduction of the miraculous image whose fourteen-century original was, and is, preserved in the Church of St. Alphonsus de Liguori in Rome. Since the beginning of their ministry in Kraków, the Redemptorists had spread and encouraged devotion to Our Lady under her title of Perpetual Help. Even as a young altar server and then as a lector in his home parish in Wadowice, Karol Wojtyła had often prayed before the image of Mary of Perpetual Help which had been placed in a chapel of the parish in Wadowice.⁹

Later as an adult, Wojtyła frequented the Redemptorist church at Podgórze. For, as it was located in a district of working people, Kraków's Archbishop Adam Sapieha had ordered special Sunday evening Masses to be celebrated there. He explicitly said that he did so out of concern for the souls of these young war-time workers.¹⁰ As pope in 1971, Wojtyła returned to Podgórze and to this Redemptorist Church, and he vividly recalled:

⁸ M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy w latach 1939-1945* [Polish Redemptorists in the Years 1939-1945], Kraków 2005, 100-124, 196-216, 264-280.

⁹ The special devotion to Our Mother of Perpetual Help is testified by the words of the future pope spoken in Wadowice on November 14, "It was here, in this sanctuary, that [Mary] spiritually revealed herself in her motherhood as the one in whom we should have full confidence [...]. It was here, in this chapel, that all schoolboys and college students from Wadowice came to entrust to her our school itself, and our academic problems; and to draw near to her, and reveal to her as our Mother these matters of our youth which were sometimes real difficulties along our path (*Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły...*, 431). Cf. M. JAGOSZ, *Z Podgórza na Watykan – z Watykanu na Podgórze* [From Podgórze to the Vatican – from the Vatican to Podgórze], in *Przez Podgórze na Watykan* [Through Podgórze to the Vatican], ed. M. Cholewka, Kraków 1998, 16.

¹⁰ Archives of the Redemptorist Monastery in Kraków (hereinafter: AKRK), *Księga ogłoszeń przy kościele OO. Redemptorystów p.w. Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w Podgórzu od 1.01.1938 do 16.09.1945* [The Book of Notices of the Redemptorist Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help at Podgórze from January 1, 1938 until September 16, September 1945], 216; cf. S. DOBRZANOWSKI, *Archidiecezja Krakowska podczas okupacji niemieckiej 1939-1945*, [Archdiocese of Kraków during the German Occupation 1939-1945], in: *Księga Sapieżyńska* [The Book of Sapieha's Activities], ed. J. Wolny, vol. 1, Kraków 1982, 452-454.

I must make a special confession before you and within these very walls [...]. This church was connected with my personal life in an extraordinary way. You know well that during the Occupation I was a manual laborer for four years and I worked for the Solvay plant at Borek Fałęcki. Many a time, on my way home from work, I stopped at this church, especially after the night shift, to attend early morning Mass and receive Communion. From there I gained the strength to carry on through the difficult times of the years of Occupation. During these years, while being a worker, I began preparing myself for the priesthood at the clandestine Major Seminary in the Archdiocese of Kraków. That is why I recollect your church with gratitude.¹¹

Later, as Archbishop of Kraków, Wojtyła used similar words referring to his visits to the Redemptorist Church. In 1991, as Pope John Paul II, speaking to the Redemptorists in the Church of Saint Alphonsus in Rome, he said:

Your Congregation is strongly present in the Church and has contributed much to the history of the Church in Poland, especially through your parish missions. That is why, coming here [to St. Alphonsus in Rome], I remember, yet again, my past, the days of my youth. This is why I want to thank Divine Providence and Our Mother of Perpetual Help who has always been my “perpetual help” in difficult moments; I dare to say – in very difficult moments.¹²

As he said himself, he also used to go to confession in the Redemptorist church, and he pointed to the confession box

¹¹ *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły...*, 71; cf. G. WEIGEL, *Witness to Hope: the Biography of Pope John Paul II...*, 57.

¹² “I remember the Nazi occupation in Poland during World War II,” said John Paul II on June 30, 1991, in the Church of St Alphonsus in Rome, “I worked in one of the factories in Kraków. After work I often stopped at the Redemptorist church on my way home. In that church I prayed before the Image of Our Mother of Perpetual Help, which I regard as extremely beautiful” (*L'Osservatore Romano*, No. 149, Jul1-2, 1991, 8). Cf. S. PIECH, *Kult Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w kościele redemptorystów w Krakowie-Podgórzu* [The cult of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in the Redemptorist church in Kraków-Podgórze], *Folia Historica Cracoviensia*, No. 6, [1999], 237-238; ID., *Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w Krakowie-Podgórzu (1903-2004)* [The Shrine of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Kraków-Podgórze (1903-2004)], in: *Studia Redemptorystowskie 2* (2004) 42-43; cf. M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy...*, 278-279.

where Father Błażej Hop, a spiritual director greatly appreciated by young penitents, used to hear confessions.¹³ In 1959, Redemptorist Father Kazimierz Plebanek was a witness to a recollection of Wojtyła as the then Archbishop of Kraków. According to what Father Plebanek recorded:

Proceeding from the entrance, and moving toward to the altar [the Archbishop] Wojtyła saw the side chapel and asked me since I, as a catechist, was at his side: “Does Father Błażej still hear confessions there?” “Yes, he does,” I affirmed, “and those people are waiting for confession... [Archbishop Wojtyła] reacted, and then said, “I used to go to confession there.... [Father Błażej] would tell me to pray one decade of the rosary for my penance [...].¹⁴

The Polish Cardinal Stanisław Nagy (1921-2013), who served on a number of Vatican Commissions, expressed his own personal recollections of Pope John Paul II's connections with the Redemptorist Church in Kraków-Podgórze:

Here Karol Wojtyła probably decided about his priestly vocation. [His was] a conversion from being an artist to a priest of God. He remembered the confessor, whom I knew well, the great Father Błażej Hop. That is why this church is entitled to thank the Most Holy Mother for the fact that Wojtyła became such a man, after making his way from [his factory work at] Borek Fałęcki to you, to the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.¹⁵

Both Archbishop Adam Sapieha and Father Jan Piwowarczyk (who was the rector of the major seminary in Kraków) expressed their confidence in the Redemptorists of those days of struggles during the Occupation. They agreed to invite Father Witold Czaplinski, C.S.S.R., in October 1941 to conduct retreats for the local diocesan seminarians who found shelter in the arch-

¹³ M. BRUDZISZ, *Redemptoryści w Krakowie 1903-2003* [The Redemptorists in Kraków 1903-2003], Kraków 2004, 73.

¹⁴ Report of Father Kazimierz Plebanek, Tuchów, December 20, 2006.

¹⁵ The Archives of the Mother of Perpetual Help Parish in Kraków-Podgórze (hereinafter: APMNP), [without any call number] Cardinal S. Nagy, *Homilia na uroczystość odpustową w Sanktuarium Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w Krakowie-Podgórzu* [Homily spoken on the feast in the Mother of Perpetual Help Shrine in Kraków-Podgórze], Kraków, June 25, 2006, [unauthorized text].

bishop's palace after they had been expelled from their seminary building. Two years later similar spiritual exercises were conducted by the Redemptorist Rector Tadeuz Grodniewski.¹⁶ Father Czapliński said that he also conducted retreats for several individual seminarians who were living in hiding in the archbishop's residence in Franciszkańska Street, and one such seminarian was Karol Wojtyła.¹⁷

After the war, Karol Wojtyła's contacts with the Redemptorist Church in Kraków-Podgórze were renewed after he had been selected to serve as the Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków. Thus we have his recorded words as Pope:

I continued going to this church after I had become Bishop and Cardinal of Kraków. I often prayed and offered pastoral help in your church, especially by ministering the sacrament of Confirmation. These bonds were close and they were firm.¹⁸

In the 1958 chronicle of the Redemptorist residence of Kraków-Podgórze, in the midst of details about Communist limitations on religious instruction in schools, and the lists of apostolic works of this religious house, one finds the first, although very brief, notice concerning Wojtyła. It reads: "Finally, [we have] a concrete date – 28 September, [1958], [for] the episcopal ordination of Wojtyła as Suffragan Bishop of Kraków."¹⁹

¹⁶ AKRK, *Kronika domu Zgromadzenia Najśw. [ięszego] Odkupiciela pod wezwaniem Matki B. [ozej] Nieust. [ającej] Pomocy w Krakowie na Podgórzu*, [Chronicle of the Mother of Perpetual Help House of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer in Kraków, Podgórze], vol. 3 (1924-1944) 1013; the Archives of the Warsaw Redemptorist Province in Tuchów (hereafter: AWPR), Lists-Statistics 1938-1945: *Conspectus laborum apostolicorum anni 1943. Domus Cracoviensis CSsR ad B.M.V. de P.S.: Exercitia spiritualia clausa pro clericis in seminario, Kraków 12-18 December 1943*, 25 participants, 24 sermons 24. Cf. J. KRACIK, *Krakowskie Seminarium Duchowne w latach 1911-1951* [Kraków Major Seminary in the years 1911-1951], in: *Księga Sapieżyńska*, ed. J. Wolny, vol. 1, Kraków 1982, 202-203; M. BARCIK, *Wydział Teologiczny Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (1939-1954)* [The Faculty of Theology of the Jagiellonian University (1939-1954)], Kraków 2001, 82-85.

¹⁷ AWPR, Personal acts of Father Witold Czapliński: Report of Father Witold Czapliński, Tuchów, November 10, 1991, cf. M. SADOWSKI, *Redemptoryści polscy...*, 242.

¹⁸ *Przez Podgórze na Watykan*, ed. M. Cholewka, Kraków 1998, 241.

¹⁹ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego CSsR*, vol. 6 (1954-1959) 432.

Less than a year later, in June 1959, the community of the Redemptorists at Podgórze hosted their new bishop, Karol Wojtyła, on the occasion of the sacrament of Confirmation administered to the local youth: “His Excellency Bishop Karol Wojtyła [...] arrived according to the schedule, at 16:30”. This was noted by the chronicler Father Konstanty Franczyk, who then continued:

In front of the church door, children and clergy greeted him. Besides the Redemptorist Fathers there were the following priests: [Michał] Rachwał, Jan Kowalczyk and one Pauline father. Inside the church there were 263 young people awaiting the sacrament of Confirmation, and there was a large group of adults who had been invited by the youth. After a short prayer [His Excellency] the Bishop walked through the church, asking numerous questions! It lasted almost one hour. Just after the [Confirmation] the Perpetual Novena started since it was a Wednesday. During the first Novena, following the request of [the prefect of the church] Father Józef Bułka, the Bishop spoke to the gathered faithful. He spoke about the role of the sacrament of Confirmation in Christian life. Both the Redemptorists and the faithful were astonished that instead of going to the monastery refectory for a solemn dinner, the bishop expressed his desire to remain in the church for the second Novena, to attend the Mass and hear the sermon. This unexpected change of the schedule was especially noticed by the preacher of that day – the newly ordained Father Stanisław Mróz, who did not think that he would preach *coram episcopo* [in the presence of a bishop]. However, he managed to do that and was gratified that his first preaching was delivered in the presence of the Bishop.²⁰

In the next years, the Bishop and then, later, Metropolitan of Kraków – Cardinal Wojtyła, paid many visits to the Redemptorist church in Kraków-Podgórze.²¹ The occasion for these occasions of prayer and also non-liturgical meetings with the reli-

This visit was omitted by Father A. Boniecki in the quoted *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły* (see *ibid.*, 171).

²⁰ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 6, 498-499. A similar ceremony of Confirmation took place on June 10, 1965 (*ibid.*, vol. 7, 497).

²¹ See the Supplement: “Calendar of the official visits and pastoral ministries of Bishop Karol Wojtyła in the Redemptorist Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Kraków-Podgórze”.

gious and faithful in the *na Górcze Church*' was always his zealous concern for a genuine quality of pastoral ministry and close relationships between the shepherd of the archdiocese and the people who had been entrusted to him.

Of a special character was his visit to the Redemptorists on April 12, 1964. This was an integral part of the canonical visitation of St. Joseph's parish in whose territory the Redemptorist residence was technically located.²² It was the first official visit of Karol Wojtyła after it had been announced that he had become Archbishop. The chronicler of the Redemptorist house – Father Tadeusz Henneberg – described this event:

The Archbishop arrived at the side door of the church at 6:45 A.M. He entered the church and went to the confessional to hear confessions! He confessed people until 7:50. Then he was invited for coffee with Father Provincial [Kazimierz Hołda]. At 8:30, he sat down on the bishop's throne in the presbytery to be present at the Mass for the youth.²³

Thus his schedule was filled until the midday meal, and in the afternoon he administered the sacrament of Confirmation to the local youth and adults. The chronicler noted with relief that the visitation was successful and at the end of his note he placed the following meaningful comment, "Archbishop Wojtyła showed much simplicity and directness during this visitation. As far as I know, he conducts himself in that way!"²⁴

During this visitation, he entrusted to the Redemptorists the spiritual care of the community of the Albertine Brothers, and those under their care, in the Home for the Needy which the Brothers conducted on Krakowska Street, a service that the Redemptorists perform faithfully to this day.²⁵

²² T. GÓRSKI, *Pełniejsze zbliżenie. Ks. arcybiskup w krakowskiej parafii św. Józefa* [A fuller approach. The Archbishop visiting St. Joseph's Parish in Kraków], in: *Słowo Powszechne*, April 25-26, 1964.

²³ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 7, 387.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 388.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 510; cf. the Archives of the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków (hereafter: AKMK), file "Redemptorist Fathers. Indults. Personal data. Juridical examinations": the Albertine Brother Bonawentura Mróz to the Metropolitan Curia, Kraków, August 9, 1962.

The zeal of the Redemptorists at Podgórze and the versatility of their ministry were appreciated when, despite the objections raised by Communist authorities, Cardinal Wojtyła, issued a decree on August 27, 1972, which created a distinct "Pastoral Center at the Redemptorist Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help."²⁶ Before this became a reality, it was necessary to have many meetings in the bishop's office attended by Cardinal Wojtyła, the Redemptorist Provincial, and other key Redemptorists.²⁷ This decision by the Cardinal occasioned considerable pressure which arose from within the civil government's Department of Denominations. It seems that this department of the local National Council based in Kraków believed that their authority had been bypassed. Despite these civil complaints Cardinal Wojtyła did not revoke his decree, and he successfully proved that he had broken no law in entrusting certain pastoral responsibilities to the Redemptorists so as to benefit the members of St. Joseph's Parish. Wojtyła maintained that no new parish was created, nor were any boundaries of St. Joseph Parish changed. In fact, he had simply addressed an existing problem, namely, that Kraków's diocesan parishes had grown so unbearably huge both in numbers and territory.²⁸

The cardinal's decisions were confirmed by his presence on October 11, 1972. This day marked the formal opening of the Pastoral Center at the Redemptorist Church in Kraków. It was also the twentieth anniversary of the beginning of the Novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and included the blessing of the new polychromatic interior of the church.

²⁶ APMNP, *Kronika Parafii Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy w Krakowie*, vol. 1, 1, 10-11; The State Archives in Kraków, (hereinafter: APK), UMKWyz. 311, c. 63-67: Note from the conversation with Father Stanisław Kuczek, superior of the Redemptorist Monastery in Kraków, made by the inspector A. Horwacik, [Kraków] September 19, 1972.

²⁷ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 7, 47, 61, 78.

²⁸ APK, UMKWyz. 311, c. 37-39: Cardinal K. Wojtyła to the Presidium of the National Council of the City of Kraków, Kraków, May 15, 1973; the Archives of the Curia of the Redemptorist Province of Warsaw (hereinafter: AKPWR), manuscript [without any call number] Archbishop K. Wojtyła to Provincial Jan Piekarski, Kraków, September 29, 1966.

The community chronicles contain this entry composed by Father Bronisław Motyka:

Several minutes after 6:00 P.M. Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, accompanied by his chaplain [Fr Stanisław Dziwisz], arrived. The orchestra members were somewhat crowded among those who were gathered in great numbers in the front of the church. [Their music began, causing those who had already taken their seats inside the church to rise, as it was announced to the inhabitants of Podgórze that the ceremony had just begun. After his entrance into the church, praying momentarily before the altar, the Cardinal was seated to listen to the words of welcome. A pre-school boy, dressed in a Kraków folk costume, recited a very long poem of greeting. He then sealed his poem by kissing the Cardinal on the cheek.

This part of the ceremony was completed by the first leader of the Redemptorist Pastoral Center, Father Andrzej Rębacz, who addressed the future pope as our “leader, father and friend.” Then Rębacz handed Cardinal Wojtyła a faithful reproduction of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. In his homily, this new shepherd of the Kraków Church expressed his joy flowing from the origin of the Pastoral Center now under the care of the Redemptorists at Podgórze, and thanked the faithful for their generosity during the renovation of their church.²⁹

Despite the eventual necessity of becoming involved in this quasi-canonical parish ministry in post-war Poland, the main task of the Redemptorists in the Archdiocese of Kraków was the preaching of missions and retreats. The peak period of such preaching was during the Great Novena leading up to the Millennial jubilee of Christianity's beginning in Poland, the so-called “Baptism of Poland.” Examining the record of the years 1965-1966, one finds that the Redemptorists of Kraków conducted 143 retreats and missions.³⁰

Archbishop Karol Wojtyła wrote a special letter, in appreciation of what the Redemptorist community had contributed in the spiritual renewal of his archdiocese. He reminisced about the

²⁹ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 8, 81-84.

³⁰ AKRK, *Księga prac apostołskich domu krakowskiego* [1965-1968], 2-7.

17, 1977. It was during the final days of a retreat led by Father Andrzej Madej, O.M.I., and also it was the fifteenth anniversary of the so-called "Academic Community" at the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.³⁸ Father Aleksander Kałużewski, in charge of the house chronicles, noted:

Towards the end of Mass the Cardinal arrived [...]. He proceeded to give a short talk, explaining why he came here. [...] He expressed his wishes that the participants of the retreat would benefit abundantly in true growth of spirit, and he wished the priest-chaplain of the pastoral centre and the whole Academic Community much success in their pastoral work. Finally, he expressed his Christmas greetings to all the faithful gathered in the church and shared with them the Polish "Christmas Wafer," first with the clergy and then with numerous young people. This sharing took up a lot of his time, but one could see how all the people were moved. The meeting ended after 10:00 P.M.

After the ceremony the Metropolitan remained in the Redemptorist residence and spoke with his hosts and with the Oblate Father Andrzej Madej about his retreat ministry.³⁹

As the shepherd of the Kraków Church, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, having once experienced the life of a day laborer, was very sensitive to the problems of working groups. His pastoral care embraced the streetcar drivers employed in the Kraków City Transport. Before the war, there had been the so-called "Masses for Streetcar Drivers" celebrated in St Joseph's Church on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.⁴⁰ However, after 1969 and beyond there were notices about Masses for streetcar drivers which appeared in the chronicles of the Redemptorist church.⁴¹ The organizers of these ceremonies were the workers of the so-called "Fourth Depot at Podgórze," and one of them, a man named Stanisław Rudko, recalled that,

³⁸ APMNP, *Kronika Parafii Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy...*, vol. 1, 59; cf. *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły...*, 792.

³⁹ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 8, 291-292.

⁴⁰ S. RUDKO, *Moje wspomnienia z działalności katolickiej przy MPK Kraków (1978-1997)* [My recollections of the Catholic activities at the Kraków City Transport], Kraków 1997, 1-3, [typed copy].

⁴¹ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 7, 650.

Cardinal Karol Wojtyła was present at almost every one of these Masses from the late 1960s onward. When he was in Kraków, he used to come and celebrate the Eucharist for the intentions of the streetcar drivers. He held the streetcar drivers in esteem for their faithful adherence to the Church.⁴²

The chronicles of the Redemptorist house, written in the 1970s, have three notices of Cardinal Wojtyła's presence at those Masses celebrated on February 2, the feast of Our Lady.⁴³ His presence on that day in 1978 is of special note, since later that year he would be elected Pope. No longer would he preside at the special Mass for streetcar drivers, nor would he again "make just a friendly visit" to the Kraków Redemptorist Church.⁴⁴

However, on February 2, 1978, as he had presided at the streetcar drivers' liturgy, he sang the praises of these Kraków City Transport workers for all of the inhabitants of the Royal Capital City of Kraków to see and acknowledge. He thanked them for their dedicated work and he spoke of his special wishes for them and their families:

We rejoice in your being here [...] and also are glad that you are here wearing your uniforms, along with your banners; also, that you cherish this [celebration of Mass] above all else. We rejoice since we see it as an expression of civil courage. At the same time, we can see some need of your being just [hard workers] as you are, which is a fundamental condition of humanity. [...] I wish that you may receive suitable pay for your work, and most of all, that your pay might meet the objective needs of your families of which you are fathers and mothers, and for whom we are responsible. May God bless your personal lives.⁴⁵

After the Eucharist, during supper in a dining room, the archbishop, with his usual cheerfulness and directness, said to the drivers jokingly, *How long will you clang and bang along Franciszkańska Street at night, not allowing your cardinal-friend to sleep?*⁴⁶

⁴² S. RUDKO, *Moje wspomnienia...*, 2.

⁴³ AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 8, 138, 311-313.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 312; APMNP, *Kronika Parafii Matki Bożej Nieustającej Pomocy...*, vol. 1, 64; *Księga ogłoszeń duszpasterskich (1974-1976)*, 311.

⁴⁵ *Kalendarium życia Karola Wojtyły...*, 803-804.

⁴⁶ S. RUDKO, *Moje wspomnienia...*, 31.

ate vivid memories of the spiritual legacy that both the Redemptorists and many inhabitants of Kraków have cherished in their hearts.

May the words of thanksgiving written at the Perpetual Novena on October 18, 1978 by an anonymous devotee of the Madonna of Podgórze be a meaningful and sincere epilogue to the facts as presented:

O Best Mother, Stewardess of God's graces, our Patroness before God! I want to thank you fervently, from the depth of my heart, with cordial tears of affection for this great grace you have given to us, the people of Podgórze, on the 75th anniversary of your guiding presence.⁴⁸ What joy we experienced when Father Rector⁴⁹ announced that our Beloved Cardinal Karol Wojtyła had become pope, for which "*Te Deum*" was sung during the Rosary and after the Mass [...] We implore you: watch constantly over our Pope. Mother of Perpetual Help, embrace him with your care and direct his steps as you did when he decided about his service for Christ, praying before your Picture.⁵⁰

The crowning of this special relationship between the Podgórze church and Karol Wojtyła, the seminarian-worker "in clogs," priest, bishop and cardinal, is the meaningful signature, which he, as Pope John Paul II, placed on the document issued on the occasion of the coronation of the miraculous Icon – Our Mother of Podgórze – which took place on June 26, 1994.

Since that memorable day of April 2, 2005, at the beginning of the beatification process of John Paul II, before this Picture (where he used to pray), continuous prayer for him has been lifted on high. For he was the greatest Pole, a spiritual giant, at the turn of the millennium, and he carried the hopes of generations by the *greatness of his stature*.

⁴⁸ On 15 October 1978, there was the 75th anniversary of the cult of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Kraków-Podgórze (AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego...*, vol. 8, 390-393).

⁴⁹ In the year 1978 the office of rector was filled by Father Stefan Koper, C.S.S.R.

⁵⁰ APMNP, *Prośby i podziękowania na Nieustanną Nowennę 1978* [Requests and thanksgiving for the Novena 1978], part 2, c. 135.

Less than two months after the beatification of our Polish Pope, on June 22, 2011, Cardinal Stanisław Dziwisz of Kraków, who once had been the Pope's secretary, unveiled a commemorative bronze tablet dedicated to John Paul II in the Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Kraków, and he offered the Pope's relics to the Redemptorist sanctuary.

APPENDIX

Calendar of the official visits and ministries of Bishop Karol Wojtyła of Kraków in the Redemptorist Church of Our Mother of Perpetual Help in Kraków-Podgórze:⁵¹

June 10, 1959 – Sacrament of Confirmation (263 people); participation in the Perpetual Novena and a sermon delivered by him on this occasion.

April 1, 1960 – Participation in the funeral of Father Kazimierz Majgier.

April 29, 1962 – Sacrament of Confirmation.

April 14, 1964 – Visitation of the Redemptorist church while making a canonical visitation of St. Joseph's parish.

June 10, 1965 – Sacrament of Confirmation.

January 18, 1967 – Participation in the funeral of diocesan priest, Father Michał Rachwał, a Redemptorist oblate.

April 8, 1968 – Sermon delivered during the visit of the "Pilgrim Icon" of Our Lady of Częstochowa.

October 11, 1972 – Mass, and sermon delivered on the 20th anniversary of the Perpetual Novena; also, solemn inauguration of the Pastoral Center at the Redemptorist church in Kraków-Podgórze and blessing of the new polychromatic interior of the church.

January 29, 1973 – Welcoming address for the symposium on the Sacrament of Penance for missionaries and preachers.

February 2, 1975 – Mass for the workers and families of the Kraków City Transport.

February 2, 1978 – Mass for the workers and families of the Kraków City Transport.

⁵¹ Source: AKRK, *Kronika domu krakowskiego CSsR*, vol. 6 (1954-1959), vol. 7 (1960-1970), vol. 8 (1971-1982).

SUMMARY

This article has been inspired by this year's canonization of John Paul II and the approaching jubilee of the 150th anniversary of the Redemptorists having the care of the Miraculous Icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help at St. Alphonsus de Liguori Church in Rome. John Paul II venerated this same Icon almost all his life. Moreover, the article attempts to show the relationship between the future saint, then Karol Wojtyła, and the Redemptorist community and the worshippers at Our Mother of Perpetual Help Church in Kraków-Podgórze, Poland. This close association had its beginning during World War II, when Karol Wojtyła, as a young worker, used to visit the Redemptorist church on his way home from work, praying before the image of Our Lady, and approaching the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Then as Bishop and Cardinal of Kraków he often visited the Redemptorist Church and the community which ministered there, for which many generations remembered him as *Pastor Bonus*.

RESUMEN

Este artículo está motivado por la canonización del Papa Juan Pablo II, celebrada este año, y por la proximidad del jubileo de los 150 años durante los cuales los Redentoristas han custodiado el icono milagroso de nuestra Madre del Perpetuo Socorro en la iglesia de San Alfonso María de Liguori de Roma. Juan Pablo II fue devoto de este icono casi toda su vida. El artículo quiere mostrar la relación entre el futuro santo, Karol Wojtyła, y la comunidad redentorista y los fieles de la iglesia de la Virgen del Perpetuo Socorro de Cracovia, Polonia. Esta estrecha relación comenzó durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, cuando Karol Wojtyła, que era entonces un joven obrero, solía entrar en la iglesia de los redentoristas, al volver a casa después del trabajo, para rezar ante el icono de la Virgen y acercarse al sacramento de la reconciliación. Más tarde, como obispo y cardenal de Cracovia, visitaba frecuentemente la iglesia de los redentoristas y la comunidad que atendía el culto. Muchas generaciones lo recuerdan como *Pastor Bonus*.