

*...Souls who spread
the honor of My mercy
I shield through
their entire lives
as a tender mother
her infant...*

THE GIFT OF MERCY

The Testimony

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A ceremonial procession through the streets of Vilnius with the first image of Merciful Jesus in 2016 at the end of the National Congress of Mercy as part of the celebrations of the Year of Mercy.

MY STORY

I

In this testimony, I tried to show the real action of God's providence in my life and in the difficult yet beautiful ministry of spreading the devotion to Divine Mercy. Over time, with the firm suggestions of the participating people, I want to show the fruits of God's providence, which despite many neglects, doubts, human weaknesses, and lack of guidelines on how to act, were realized in a specific place and time. I want to share my experience of how, through the aroused readiness to do God's Will, God can enable us to perform actions that surprise, surpass, and amaze us, especially when having nothing, we receive everything that is needed at a given moment.

*"...do what is in your power to spread the honor of my mercy, I will complete what you lack. (...) Souls that spread the honor of my mercy, **I protect throughout their lives, like a tender mother her infant...**"*

("Diary" of Saint Sister Faustina, 1075).

I was born at the beginning of World War II (spring 1940). As a child, I experienced hunger, cold, fear of fires, and staying in dark rooms. The memories of this nightmare and above all the post-war poverty cannot be erased from memory. In the house rebuilt after the fire, for several years after the war, there was no electric light and no comforts. I had no toys or books. On long winter evenings, the whole family gathered by the kitchen stove and one oil lamp.

From that time, I remember my grandmother, who had a set time and place for daily prayer and reflection on handwritten fragments of the Bible, and my grandfather, who strictly ordered the grandchildren to keep quiet during that time.

When I was in my teens, my grandmother told me about her extraordinary experience – returning to life from clinical death and how she didn't want to leave her seven children. During the war, my grandparents also lost their home, and for some time we lived together in the countryside. When they moved to another rather distant village, my contact with my grandmother became sporadic. Influenced by conversations with my grandmother and warm relations with the parish priest, as a teenage girl, for the first nine first Fridays of the month, I walked 5 km on foot, partly through the forest, to church for morning Mass. There was also an older lady living near the church who participated in them, and only once did my mother accompany me. I had to cover the same distance to school every day.

Although my parents declared themselves as Catholics, after my grandparents moved out, they no longer led a deeply religious life. The ties in our family were not strong enough to serve as a model for the children to follow in adult life. A series of personal failures and lack of support from close ones distanced me from religious practices for a long time, although the faith in God deeply implanted by my grandmother remained in me.

In the urban environment where I started living independently, I witnessed behaviors completely contrary to my sensitivity. Combining family duties with work and education, without any help, I had to manage in this difficult time for me.

The change of residence (Łódź, 1985) significantly improved my living conditions, but did not meet my expectations regarding the new environment. Gradually, I felt a growing desire to return to participating in the life of the Church. Gradually, my desire to return to the life of the Church grew. Although I did not participate in services at that time, I often visited various temples, and many times it was a stay at the Jasna Góra Sanctuary in Częstochowa.

One evening on television (in August 1988) on Łódź News, I heard information about a walking pilgrimage to Jasna Góra departing the next day (at 6 am). Spontaneously, without proper preparation, I joined this pilgrimage. Surrounded by the kindness of strangers, during its eight days, I did not feel any lack. Prayer and the effort of pilgrimage strengthened me in my determination to make specific changes in my life.

Invited by friends, I attended various meetings while searching for my place. This experience proved very helpful in the discernment prayer when, in 1990, I joined the prayer group of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit "Kanaan" at the Jesuit Fathers' Church in Łódź, engaging in evangelistic activities.

Over time, the desire to deepen my spiritual experiences encouraged me to go on a pilgrimage to Fatima. Unexpectedly, this trip turned out to be very difficult for me. Traveling in the summer by bus without air conditioning, and also without the possibility of opening the windows, was hard to bear and did not foster mutual relations among the pilgrims. Additionally, due to the poor technical condition of the bus, we could not cross the German border. Although the negotiations lasted about two hours, the organizers had to change the planned route.

Standing next to the border crossing with pilgrims patiently waiting for the problem to be solved, I was considering withdrawing from the trip. Meanwhile, a bus arrived at the border crossing, from which a man with a large cross on his chest got out. I was convinced that he was a Catholic bishop accompanying other pilgrims. He came to our group and, even though I was standing in the middle, he approached me and, without saying a word, gave me a picture of Our Lady of the Mystical Rose (Spiritual). Later it turned out that in this group of pilgrims, besides the priest, I was the only one who knew this image and had such a medal in my purse. After this event, I tried to adapt to the situation, trusting in the care of Our Lady. Although I already realized that this was not the pilgrimage I expected, but rather a tourist trip. We visited various beautiful places, but the unpleasant memories of this trip and the vulgar dialogues of the unbelieving drivers left me with a long-lasting aversion to any pilgrimage.

As an animator involved in organizing prayer meetings, I felt that I was in the right place and had no need to seek spiritual experiences far away. With the leaders of our group, Bogusław and Anna Klimowicz, we organized trips to the meetings of the Renewal groups in the Holy Spirit at Jasna Góra, as well as to meetings with the Holy Father during his pilgrimages to Poland. These were one-day trips, and although several buses left at the same time, it did not cause us any major problems. We also went on organized retreats for Polish and German families to Duszniki Zdrój.

At one of the animators' meetings, Father Andrzej Batorski SJ, at that time the guardian of our group, told us about the apparitions in Medjugorje. He wanted to go there, because despite the ongoing war, pilgrimages were being organized. Soon, Father Batorski SJ left for studies in Rome, and the trip to Medjugorje became unrealistic for him. However, the desire to go remained in the community, and someone constantly reminded us about it. After the experiences of the trip to Fatima, for a long time, I did not entertain such thoughts.

During a family retreat in Duszniki Zdrój, my friend Bogusława Rolkiewicz, who was participating in it, returned to the topic of the trip to Medjugorje. Not wanting to continue the conversation, I told her that if she found a bus with a believing driver, I might try to organize such a trip. I was sure it was unrealistic.

After a short time, Bogusia gave me the phone number of the driver, assuring me that he was definitely a believer and had been to Medjugorje several times before. This information caused a great commotion in the community—everyone wanted to go, but each at a different time. We decided with the leader that we would accept the date proposed by the driver. We had three weeks to prepare for the trip.

I didn't really know how such a foreign trip should be organized. With the driver, who was also the owner of the bus and lived 400 km away from us, I agreed to pay for the pilgrimage upon his arrival in Łódź. I collected the due money from the participants and on the day of departure, I waited with great anxiety for the arrival of the bus. My anxiety disappeared when I saw a bus driving up to the square in front of the Jesuit Fathers' Church with an emblem of the Image of Our Lady of the Mystical Rose (Spiritual) on the door. It wasn't the only surprise, as it turned out that there was a statue of the Mystical Rose in the bus, which accompanied the driver, Mr. Tadeusz Szymański, on every trip. The biggest surprise for all the pilgrims, however, was that Mr. Tadeusz turned out to be not only a believer but also an extraordinarily talented man. Gifted with a beautiful voice, he enriched our entire journey with the singing of religious songs. Father Eugeniusz Śpiołek from the Order of Piarists in Łowicz provided spiritual care for this pilgrimage.

The trip to Medjugorje* in the autumn of 1995 was our first foreign pilgrimage. It was a time of ongoing war there. Both the organizers and participants had to cope with many inconveniences related to accommodation, food, and mutual acceptance. Anna and I did not have a moment when someone did not need something from us. It was a very difficult experience for us. When there were only two hours left until our departure from Medjugorje, our desire was to spend some time in silence and solitude. To our surprise, this suddenly came true, as everyone dispersed to fulfill personal needs for purchasing souvenirs. We decided to spend this time separately on Apparition Hill. For me, it was a time of grace that changed my life.

After walking several dozen meters along a rocky path surrounded by thorny bushes on Apparition Hill, I sat on a stone to rest. Then something very strange happened, as I momentarily lost my sense of reality. I could not control the stream of tears that flowed spontaneously. I saw an image of my entire life up to that point—like in a film, my irretrievably lost time devoted to material things as well as various events in which my neglect nullified good intentions. Since childhood, I had a natural gift of compassion and helpfulness to others. However, in adulthood, I did not understand that only completely selfless help has value, and I should not resent the people I helped for not showing gratitude.

It was extraordinary, as I had the impression that everything was happening simultaneously. This experience cannot be recreated or accurately described. This experience stirred great sorrow and a desire for change in me. After that, there was peace and a sense of relief that I had never felt before. I could not have known then that I would be given the grace to spread the devotion to Divine Mercy, and without the received gift of inner peace, patience, and perseverance, I would not have been able to fulfill this ministry.

* Medjugorje, a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, located 25 km southwest of Mostar. Since 1981, it has been a well-known place of prayer for pilgrims from around the world. "It is one of the most vibrant places of prayer and conversions in Europe, with a healthy spirituality" - Archbishop Henryk Hoser SAC.

In a wave of ongoing enthusiasm, I decided that for everyone who approached me, I would organize a trip to Medjugorje. I so greatly desired to share the happiness I experienced then with others. This decision was also a surprise to me, but I no longer felt fear or anxiety.

This is how my long pilgrimage ministry began. Amazingly, for several years, only as many people as there were seats on the bus signed up. I never had to refuse anyone a trip. Initially, I was assisted by various prayer animators as well as nuns participating in the pilgrimages. Over time, this service was taken over by Halina Kocik, an animator from our prayer group. The pilgrimage program included retreats on the road, always under the spiritual guidance of a priest. This continued until I clearly felt that this stage of service should come to an end.



Retreats on the Way to Medjugorje

The spiritual formation shaped in the community and the hardships of pilgrimages resulted in many years of service to the Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus, despite this, yet my bond with the prayer group remained.

II

One autumn day in 1996, when I was in the countryside, I had the desire to attend Mass, but it was too late to return to Łódź. I went to the new church in Andrespol. There was no Mass at that time, but while staying in the temple for a while, I saw that it was still unfinished inside. I saw that it was still unfinished inside. I felt the need to make an offering and wondered what it could be. I noticed the altar with a very modest image of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. The idea of funding a new image raised my doubts, because perhaps the image in the altar had an unknown spiritual value for the parishioners, and my proposal could offend someone. After returning home, I tried to forget about it.

I had my doubts about financing a new painting, because perhaps the painting on the altar had a spiritual value unknown to me for the parishioners, and my proposal might offend someone

The call to make an offering persistently returned to me. I told about it at the animators' meeting of our prayer group. After discernment prayer, I heard that my idea for an image was probably good, but it should be an image of the Merciful Jesus. I accepted this without any doubt, as I already had a picture of Jesus the Merciful. Not knowing yet the promise of special graces associated with it, due to the circumstances in which I received it, it was a precious keepsake for me.

I received the picture at the office along with the death certificate and photo from the cancelled ID of my mother, who died at the Copernicus Hospital in Łódź in December 1981, a few days after the announcement of martial law in Poland. The picture was given to my mother by the Jesuit Father Kazimierz Kraśniewski with a note about receiving the last rites. I didn't live in Łódź at that time.

Often visiting my sick mother, and also earlier during my two stays in that hospital, I met a priest in the chapel who made an impression of a holy person. This aroused in me the desire for personal contact with him, to ask for help in arranging my very tangled life at that time.

Already participating in prayer meetings at the Jesuit Fathers' Church, only after a long time did I realize that this same priest had become an important person in my life.

After discussions in the community, I went to the pastor of the church in Andrespol, Father Marian Górka, with the proposal to donate an image of Jesus the Merciful. The priest said that he had already considered the need to acquire such an image, only he was wondering whether it should be a copy of the first image painted by Eugeniusz Kazimirowski.

I then learned that the first image of Jesus the Merciful exists in Vilnius. Not knowing this image, I did not understand what the priest's doubt was about. We agreed that he would consider what the size of the image should be and would inform me about it by phone. I waited a long time for this information (we didn't have mobile phones yet) and concluded that maybe the priest had given up. However, the urge to fulfill this obligation returned in my thoughts.

Wanting to solve the problem, I commissioned a familiar painter, Mrs. Jadwiga Szmidt, to paint a copy of the image by Adolf Hyła, located in Krakow-Łagiewniki.

When the image was painted, I was intensely looking for a place to put it, as I still had no contact with the priest. It was an internal problem for me, causing many doubts. Wherever I entered a church, the image of Jesus the Merciful was already there.

In this spiritual struggle, a lot of time passed, until one late evening an unknown man, called me, interested in a pilgrimage. In the conversation, he suggested the need to take the image of Jesus the Merciful to Medjugorje. This idea was welcomed in the community, which prompted me to take steps to deliver the image.

It often happened in difficult situations that a known person came to my mind, whom I could ask for help. This time I went to talk to the then Prior of the Convent of the Brothers Hospitallers in Łódź, Brother Franciszek Salezy Chmiel. I knew that he maintained contact with the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy and was once interested in a trip to Medjugorje. My visit was not a surprise to him. Jokingly, he said that the previous day during prayer, a note with my phone number fell out of his breviary.

He was interested in the idea and willingly agreed to help in its realization. He organized a two-day stay for me in Krakow so that I could discern the realization of this project at the tomb of Saint Sister Faustina, with the prayer support of the Sisters. I had the feeling that the image should be taken to Medjugorje and placed in a place where it would be welcomed with joy and surrounded by prayer.

The Franciscan parish in Medjugorje, which we asked to accept the image, agreed, proposing to place it in storage, which did not align with our feelings. Brother Franciszek suggested praying the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for nine days for this intention, and then advised me to visit all the chapels during my next stay in Medjugorje and find a clear sign for me where this image should be placed. It was an exceptionally difficult task; I couldn't imagine how it would happen and whether I would be able to recognize such a sign.

The quarters of my pilgrims were next to the "Blue Cross" at the foot of Apparition Hill and near the "Oasis of Peace," where there was a chapel of perpetual adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Burdened psychologically with the entrusted task, in a free moment, I went to the "Oasis of Peace" chapel for prayer. Entering, I was surprised by the sight of beams of light coming from the Tabernacle directed straight at the entrance. This phenomenon aroused my curiosity, and I went forward to the Tabernacle, on which I saw a small picture of Jesus the Merciful (it was the version of the image spread in Italy, with the rays coming from the Heart of Jesus on this image depicted as straight lines). There were no pilgrims in the temple at that time; I stayed there for a long time and calmly considered whether this was the sign I was supposed to find. It was strange to me that earlier that same day, I had already been to this temple to show the pilgrims the place for personal adoration and prayer, and none of us noticed anything.

* The Marian Community "Oasis of Peace" has been recognized by the Church as a "Public Association of the Faithful" and carries out activities in accordance with all the duties and rights arising from the norms of Canon Law.

A few months ago, I participated in an event that confirmed this and made me realize that Jesus had prepared everything in advance.

The memory relates to the time when, at the invitation of Father Ryszard Grewkowicz, an international group of brothers from the "Oasis of Peace" community, led by the general superior from Italy, Father Gianni Sgreva CP, she led retreats in his parish.

This group came to Łódź to visit places related to the stay of Sister Faustina in this city. They also wanted to visit her birthplace. The leader of our prayer group, Anna Klimowicz, who served as a German translator at these retreats, knew that I had been there a few days earlier, so she asked me to help organize a trip for them.

Late in the evening, with the help of Andrzej Puchowski, we managed to organize a trip to Świnice Warckie. Warmly welcomed by the then parish priest, Father Stefan Spsychalski, around midnight, while visiting the family home of Saint Sister Faustina, accompanied by guitars and a sky full of stars, each in their own language, began to sing and pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

We calmly awaited the response to the request sent to the general superior of this community in Italy to accept the image. His response surprised us with its content – we will gladly accept the image into our chapel and surround it with prayer.

It was the time approaching Easter. We made efforts to have the image blessed by Cardinal Franciszek Macharski before departure, which was done in Krakow on the Feast of Divine Mercy in 1997.

During the next pilgrimage, I agreed with the superior of the "Oasis of Peace" community in Medjugorje on the date for handing over the image. I was accompanied by a French translator with whom we had previously established a friendship. The conversation took place in a very joyful atmosphere. It turned out that it was her birthday (April 25), and the previous day was my birthday; we took it as a heavenly gift for this occasion.



The Chapel in the "Oasis of Peace"

Feeling relief and joy, after two days I went to the "Blue Cross" to thank God for everything that had happened. Being alone, I could calmly analyze the entire sequence of emotional events with the image. I was happy with the successful conclusion of the matter, not suspecting that it was just the beginning of my difficult many-year ministry.

During these reflections, I was given the feeling that this was not all I should do. I'm supposed to start preparing and sending out folders in all possible languages with information about the promises of mercy for the dying, including an excerpt from Saint Sister Faustina's Diary. I had the impression that I could see this text, which I later found in the Diary; it was the paragraph:

"...I defend every soul at the hour of death as My own glory that will say this chaplet [to the Divine Mercy] or when others say it for a dying person – the same indulgence applies. When this chaplet is said by the bedside of a dying person, God's anger is placated, and unfathomable mercy envelops the soul..."

(Diary, 811).

This experience astonished me greatly because I had never been interested in editing publications and had no idea how to do it. Perplexed, and more so terrified that this was not possible and could not concern me at all, I returned to the quarters where two friends from Krakow were waiting for me, who had come to meet me – one was an Italian translator, the other a French translator.

Worried by my appearance, they asked what had happened for me to return in such a bad state. Since they were people I knew earlier, I told them about my experience. One of them had accompanied me two days earlier as a translator at the "Oasis of Peace" when I was arranging the time to deliver the image of Jesus the Merciful. My friends, seeing how unreal it all seemed to me, reassured me by informing me that such folders were already ready in Krakow and could be acquired and brought to Medjugorje. They offered me their help – which at the time alleviated my anxiety.

I talked about my experience with several priests, and they all responded similarly, saying that it was a beautiful idea and should be continued. One of the confessors, who had been in Medjugorje for a long time, encouraged me to take on this challenge, adding that the information about the promises of graces for the dying in the form presented to me should be extended to other Marian sanctuaries.

For a long time, I remained convinced that I should find someone who would start editing such folders, discussing it with many people. Since I already knew that there were no folders or pictures in Krakow with information about the promises of Divine Mercy for the dying through the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and no one else was printing such folders.

During another trip, while walking with a group of pilgrims to Apparition Hill, I entrusted Our Lady with the problem of my inability to carry out the entrusted task. Unexpectedly, a calm dialogue and understanding appeared in my thoughts that this was my task, and I had to start realizing it.

My thoughts focused on what would happen to the pilgrims I had committed to bringing. I understood then clearly that my declaration of this difficult ministry had been accepted for some time because it was needed so that I could grow spiritually – literally, to learn to accept people as they are.

I felt a great need for solitude, so I left my pilgrims with the priest on Apparition Hill. I returned to the "Blue Cross" to pray and ask God for the grace to properly understand what I had experienced. Then, in inner peace, fully aware of my lack of predispositions, I expressed my readiness to begin the entrusted task.



After this event, only the previously prepared groups of pilgrims went on the trips because my phone stopped ringing. In the following years, I limited the trips to ensure that during these occasions, I could deliver the printed folders and pictures to Medjugorje.

Reflecting on the church in Andrespol, out of curiosity, I went to Father Marian Górká, the pastor, to find out why he had declined the offered gift. It turned out that the priest was convinced that I had given up, as he had also been trying to make contact all the time, but without success. Not searching for the cause of this misunderstanding, I made efforts to fund an image for this church as well.

Analyzing my helplessness and the psychological burden of growing doubts, I organized a pilgrimage to Italy. In the sanctuaries visited, and especially at the relics of St. Padre Pio, St. Francis, and St. Clare, I asked for help and guidance. At Padre Pio's, each pilgrim could choose a card with words of the message. Mine contained three words: *Misericordia, Misericordia, Misericordia*.

With the prayer group "Kanaan," I also went to the Hour of Grace at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Fatima in Zakopane (December 8). On the way, at the tomb of St. Sister Faustina in Krakow-Łagiewniki, I renewed my readiness, asking Jesus for the gift of humility and understanding of what I should do to be in accordance with His Will.

I returned from these pilgrimages strengthened and determined to attempt action. I asked for help from Father Józef Jańca, the director of the Archdiocesan Publishing House in Łódź, who willingly provided initial guidance. The problem was that I did not have and did not know how to use a computer.

During one of the prayer meetings, a young man named Maciej Kubiak approached me. Knowing that I organized pilgrimages, he offered his help. He stated that he had a lot of time and wanted to engage in something useful voluntarily. We had not known each other before, and he did not realize that I intended to do something beyond organizing pilgrimages. It turned out that he had completed studies in Polish philology and worked in printing, knew English, and could communicate in three other languages.

Mr. Kazimierz Stępień also took an interest in my problem and, on his initiative, installed an internet connection in my apartment and gave me a computer, providing initial operating instructions.

Maciej helped me for a long time in preparing prints and during trips when a translator was needed. His negotiation skills in English proved indispensable at the main office of Lithuanian telecommunications. This concerned permission to organize the first broadcast from Vilnius for "Radio Maryja" in 2000, the broadcast of the conclusion of a 9-month novena in the Church of the Holy Spirit (more information in the further text). At that time, completing the necessary official formalities was extremely difficult, and it seemed impossible from a human perspective.

I knew that Maciej was experiencing some personal problems, but I never asked him about it. After a longer stay in Medjugorje, he felt the need to stabilize his life. In Medjugorje, he met his future wife – they live in Italy with their three children.

Pilgrimage participants, although there were various situations, some unpleasant as well, left me with wonderful memories, strengthening my faith with extraordinary testimonies of God's action in their lives. They were the greatest reward for the hardships of pilgrimage, as they confirmed God's presence in fulfilling this mission.

Through contacts with pilgrims, my ministry also took shape. It was the participants of the pilgrimage to Medjugorje, Izabela and Ireneusz Otulscy, who told me about the circumstances in which the first image of Jesus the Merciful in Vilnius was created and about the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, founded by Father Michał Sopoćko, which encouraged me to take a greater interest in the text of Saint Sister Faustina's Diary.

To start spreading the devotion to Divine Mercy, I needed the approval of church authorities. I tried to reestablish contact with the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. However, the planned trips to Krakow for various independent reasons repeatedly did not come to fruition.

*Father Michał Sopoćko, the confessor and spiritual director of St. Sister Faustina, was directly associated with the mystery of the revelations of Jesus the Merciful. God assigned him an extremely important role – the realization of the mission entrusted to Sister Faustina. He dedicated almost his entire life to this work.

** The Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, founded in 1947 by Blessed Father Sopoćko in Vilnius, in response to Jesus' request, is a multinational contemplative-active community spreading the devotion to Jesus the Merciful. The congregation conducts apostolic activities in several dozen religious houses in Poland and abroad, responding to the current needs of the Church. The sisters, among other things, run hospices, homes for the protection of unborn life, give retreats, and teach catechism. The congregation is a Religious Institute of pontifical right.

Taking into account the previous information, I went to Gorzów Wielkopolski with Father Ryszard Grewkowicz and the leader of the prayer group, Anna Klimowicz, to contact the Congregation. We were warmly received by Sister Helena Świątek, who at the time was serving as the superior of that convent. She shared with us the history and charism of the Congregation.

To Mother General of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, Sister Maria Kalinowska, I explained what led me to decide to prepare a folder with information about the promises of graces associated with the new forms of devotion to Divine Mercy, especially the promise of mercy for the dying.

Sister Maria received my proposal with understanding and kindness. After the Congregation obtained an imprimatur from the Curia of the Diocese of Szczecin, with the significant date of November 16 (the Feast of Our Lady of Mercy) in 1998, I began printing folders and pictures of Jesus the Merciful for evangelistic purposes. I reproduced the image from a photograph given to me by Sister Maria, taken a few years earlier by Father Professor Stanisław Świdziński. The content of the folder also included information about Blessed Father Michał Sopoćko. I always consulted the texts and graphic designs with Sister Maria. It was a very challenging time for me, making efforts to present the content in a simple, understandable way for everyone and translating it into several foreign languages.

The trust that Sister Maria placed in me was something extraordinary in my life, becoming an impetus for increasing my sensitivity to the need to share with others what I had received from God without my own merits.

The Cenacolo Community in Medjugorje gladly accepts and distributes images in different languages. When I personally participated in pilgrimages, with the permission of the Franciscan fathers, I could leave packages with images in the sacristy of St. James Church so that priests from various countries could take them to their parishes. In the "Oasis of Peace" chapel, a special place was made available where folders and images were displayed for pilgrims.

In the "Oasis of Peace," a young man named Julián Gonzalez of Italian-Argentine origin took an interest in the folders. While staying in Medjugorje, he was trying to discern God's plan for his future. After reading the content of the folder in Spanish, he felt an exceptional closeness to Father Michał Sopoćko, to the extent that he eventually wanted to adopt him as a model in his priestly life. After a short time, he began studying in a seminary, first in Italy and then in Vilnius, where he received priestly ordination – he became the initiator of the Community of the Brothers of Jesus the Merciful.

By chance, while visiting a friend in Poland, he found out who was delivering these folders to Medjugorje. He wanted to meet me to tell me how that event helped him discern his vocation to the priesthood, and how, to a significant extent, I had contributed to this, personally thanking me.



Photo: Osservatore Romano

Although sporadic, I maintain contact with Father Julian, the current superior of the community. One of the pleasant events resulting from our contacts was an unexpected gift – a photograph from St. Peter's Square, where Pope Francis is blessing a copy of the image of Jesus the Merciful, which I had earlier sent to Father Julian.

Vatican, St. Peter's Square
Pope Francis General Audience,
May 8, 2013

A missionary I met in Medjugorje, who serves in Russia, asked for as many images of Jesus the Merciful as possible in Russian. He mentioned that the Divine Mercy Message conveyed by St. Faustina is known in Russia and that for the images to be accepted, they should be copies of an icon intended for veneration, created according to the procedures required in Orthodoxy (adherence to the message, selfless intention, offering of fasting, suffering, and personal prayer). All of these were followed by St. Faustina while painting the first image of Jesus the Merciful.

One of the first recipients of the images of Jesus the Merciful was Father Mieczysław Łabiak (now deceased), a Polish missionary in Belarus. He managed to transport several packages of images despite strict border controls. He said he was risking it because he felt God's protection and didn't know how it happened that customs officers did not see the packages.

He informed me that he would be coming to Poland in a few days and asked me to prepare images in Polish, Belarusian, and Russian. As I didn't have those images at the time, nor the money to print them, I ordered the print, hoping that I would manage somehow.

On my way to an organizational meeting with pilgrims, I stopped at a kiosk to photocopy the pilgrimage program. There was also a lottery point. I had a thought to fill out a ticket but dismissed it because I wasn't a fan of gambling. While paying for the service, a medal with the relic of St. Padre Pio fell out of my wallet. When I picked it up, the same thought returned, only more insistently, to fill out a ticket. Although it seemed a bit amusing, I thought I would fill it out as maybe it was His matter (I meant Padre Pio). After a week, when I was photocopying documents again, I saw the unchecked ticket in my wallet and, for formality's sake, asked for an automatic check.

The news of the win, which turned out to be exactly the amount needed at that moment to settle the printing bill, knocked me out of normal functioning for a few days (it was 2001).

I had never before experienced such an untroubled sense of freedom in giving away something that would have been very useful to me at that time, as I had a broken washing machine and other urgent needs. I kept the lottery ticket and the medal of St. Padre Pio as a memento.



In addition to the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, many missionaries and priests, as well as volunteers serving in prisons and hospitals, have been involved in distributing the folders and images. A wider range of laypeople also engaged, including:

Violetta Wawer in Paris – co-founder of the association "For Mercy." This association, in French, promotes the message of Divine Mercy in various available forms.

Czesław Mazur and his family have been sponsoring prints of the image of Jesus the Merciful in Spanish for various churches worldwide for many years in Madrid. Through his mediation, several houses of the Congregation of the Missionaries of Charity, including the general house (Mother Teresa's) in Calcutta, received the image of Jesus the Merciful.

Julitta Nazdrowicz-Woodley in London maintained contacts with missionaries in many countries, sponsoring prints of the image of Jesus the Merciful.

Thanks to the pilgrimage ministry and the support of my activities by the Congregation of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus and the generosity of so many people, I have been able to print and deliver multilingual images and folders for evangelization purposes to many places for over 20 years. In the parish of St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Andrew Bobola at the Jesuit Fathers in Jastrzębia Góra alone, during the stay of Father Józef Łągwa SJ, about 200,000 images were distributed.

One of the prison chaplains suggested the need to print images of Jesus the Merciful not only with the information about the promises of grace but also with the full text of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy: Our Father, Hail Mary, I Believe in God, justifying that this is very necessary not only for prisoners.



Jezu, ufam Tobie

Obraz Jezusa Miłosiernego namalowany na życzenie Zbawiciela, według wskazówek św. siostry Faustyny w 1934 r. w Wilnie. Obraz ten jest czczony w Sanktuarium Miłosierdzia Bożego w Wilnie.

Pan Jezus powiedział: „Obiecuje, że dusza, która czcić będzie ten obraz, nie zginie. Obiecuje także, już tu na ziemi, zwycięstwo nad nieprzyjaciółmi, szczególnie w godzinę śmierci” (Dz. 47).

„Przez obraz ten udzielać będą wiele łask, a przez to niech ma przystęp wszelka dusza do niego” (Dz. 570).

KORONKA DO MIŁOSIERDZIA BOŻEGO

Koronkę do Miłosierdzia Bożego podyktował Pan Jezus św. siostrze Faustynie w Wilnie 13-14 września 1935 r. jako modlitwę o uproszenie łaski miłosierdzia Bożego dla grzeszników.

„Przez nią uprosisz wszystko, jeżeli to, o co prosisz będzie zgodne z wolą moją” (Dz. 1731).

„Odmawiaj nieustannie tę koronkę, której cię nauczyłem. Ktokolwiek będzie ją odmawiał, dostąpi wielkiego miłosierdzia w godzinę śmierci. Kapłani będą ją podawać grzesznikom jako ostatnią deskę ratunku; chociażby grzesznik był najzawziętszy, jeżeli tylko raz zmówi tę koronkę, dostąpi łaski z nieskończonego miłosierdzia mojego” (Dz. 587).

„Każdą duszę bronię w godzinie śmierci, jako swej chwały, która odmawiać będzie tę koronkę albo przy konającym inni odmówią – odpustu tego samego dostępują” (Dz. 811).

***Do odmawiania na różańcu:** „Na początku: **Ojcze nasz**, który jest w niebie, święć się imię Twoje, przyjdź królestwo Twoje, bądź wola Twoja, jako w niebie, tak i na ziemi. Chleba naszego powszedniego daj nam dzisiaj i odpuść nam nasze winy, jako i my odpuszczamy naszym winowajcom, i nie wódz nas na pokuszenie, ale nas zbaw ode złego. Amen.*

***Zdrowas Maryjo**, łaski pełna, Pan z Tobą. Błogosławionas Ty między niewiastami i błogosławiony owoc żywota Twojego, Jezus. Święta Maryjo, Matko Boża, módl się za nami grzesznymi teraz i w godzinę śmierci naszej. Amen.*

***Wierzę w Boga**, Ojca wszechmogącego, Stworzyciela nieba i ziemi. I w Jezusa Chrystusa, Syna Jego Jedynego, Pana naszego, który się poczył z Ducha Świętego, narodził się z Maryi Panny, umęczon pod Piłatem Pilaćtem, ukrzyżowan, umarł i pogrzebion; zstąpił do piekieł; trzeciego dnia zmarłych wstał; wstąpił na niebiosa; siedzi po prawicy Boga Ojca wszechmogącego, stamtąd przyjdzie sądzić żywych i umarłych. Wierzę w Ducha Świętego; święły Kościół powszechny; świętych obcowanie; grzechów odpuszczenie; ciała zmarłych wstanie; żywot wieczny. Amen.*

*Na dużych paciorkach (1 x): **Ojcze Przedwieczny**, ofiaruję Ci Ciało i Krew, Duszę i Bóstwo najmilszego Syna Twojego, a Pana naszego Jezusa Chrystusa, na przebłaganie za grzechy nasze i całego świata. Na małych paciorkach (10 x): **Dla Jego bolesnej męki miej miłosierdzie dla nas i całego świata.***

*Na zakończenie (3 x): **Święły Boże, Święły Mocny, Święły Nieśmiertelny, zmiłuj się nad nami i nad całym światem” (Dz. 476).***

(Fragmenty „Dzienniczka” św. siostry Faustyny)

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During one of the prayer meetings, a young woman sat next to me whose behavior indicated she had a serious problem and was about to leave. I was inspired to give her the folder and asked if she could take it. She gladly accepted, and after making contact with her, she felt more secure and stayed for the meeting.

This woman later tried to find me to tell me about her experience and to thank me for the meeting she attended, which she had been compelled to by her family. The next day, she was supposed to leave permanently for a sect with which she had been in contact for some time. Her mother, in a moment of despair, asked her to do something for her and attend just one prayer group meeting at the Jesuit Fathers' Church, which she had previously refused.

On the way back, she read the folder and experienced something she described as an epiphany and the restoration of her senses. When we met, she said she had already been to confession and had returned to the Church.

My direction of travels and type of ministry gradually changed. It required even greater availability and commitment to focus on new tasks:

- Fulfilling the decision by the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful to conserve the first image of Jesus the Merciful in Vilnius.
- Developing extensive texts for websites and later the book *Jesus, I Trust in You: Love and Mercy*. The scope of spreading information about the promises of graces associated with new forms of devotion to Divine Mercy, especially the promise of mercy for the dying, was increasingly broadening.

III

In the "Kanaan" prayer group, the custom of pilgrimages for the Feast of Divine Mercy took hold – we were in Krakow, Rome, and Medjugorje (1998), where an interesting incident occurred.

When the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy ended in the chapel full of pilgrims at the "Oasis of Peace" after 3:00 p.m., unexpectedly, someone from outside the temple (not from our group) asked that the person leading the prayer read a text of the Act of Consecration of Poland to Divine Mercy, written by Father Michał Sopoćko

In 1999, as the Feast of Divine Mercy approached, the superior of the Jesuits, Father Józef Łągwa SJ, asked me if I was planning any trip because he thought I should go to Vilnius. I did not feel the need at that time and said that maybe I would go there someday.

When at the animators meeting, we considered the possibility of a trip for the Feast of Mercy, and when I heard that it would be good to go to Vilnius this year, I felt awkward because Father Józef had previously suggested such a trip.

So I went to Father Józef to tell him that I could organize a trip to Vilnius soon. When I specified the planned date, Father Józef showed me the same date noted in his notebook for the pilgrimage he had prepared, with a bus booked, accommodations arranged, and a group of willing participants registered. We concluded that in this situation, we would not change anything. I asked Father Józef to take four people on this pilgrimage: two Sisters from the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, Halina Kocik, and myself. Father Józef agreed. I cannot explain why I spontaneously suggested the participation of these four people in the pilgrimage at that time. The General Mother of the Congregation agreed to the departure of Sister Bernarda Sural and Sister Stanisława Gontarz.

Together, we decided that the main goal of our pilgrimage to Vilnius would be to pray in the Church of the Holy Spirit, where the first image of Jesus the Merciful was located. On the fourth day of the pilgrimage, on the Feast of Divine Mercy, as previously agreed, our four-member group went to the Church of the Holy Spirit. Father Łągwa SJ and the pilgrims planned to join us for Mass at 3:00 p.m.

The several hours spent in prayer before the image of Jesus the Merciful passed as one moment, and when it was almost 3:00 p.m., Halina handed me the Bible and asked me to open and indicate the Word of God. It was the Book of Zechariah 6:1-8.

"...There they go, the four chariots of heaven going forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. The black horses are going toward the north country, the white ones toward the west, and the dappled ones toward the south... Powerful horses will go out, eager to patrol the earth. And he commanded: Go forth and run around the earth! And they drove to the ends of the earth..."

In the Church of the Holy Spirit, I saw how very damaged this first image of Jesus the Merciful was. Placed in a dark side altar, it did not attract any attention from pilgrims or tourist groups visiting the church.

I was already printing folders and various images with this depiction and excerpts from Saint Faustina's Diary about the promises of Divine Mercy associated with it. I realized how great a disappointment could await someone who decided to come to this church. A sense of responsibility and a desire to do something about it arose in me.

Upon returning, I discussed with the Sisters various possibilities for revitalizing this place. Considering the Word of God and our feelings, we con-

cluded that it could not be a one-time action, as it would have no lasting effect. One idea was a long-term novena.

The Sisters in the Congregation continued for some time to discern God's Will in our ideas, considering the conditions for their realization.

Three months later, after I had forgotten about our conversation, Sister Teresa Szalkowska informed me of the Congregation's decision and asked for help in organizing a nine-month Novena in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius. This involved monthly trips with organized groups of pilgrims for a three-day adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and the image of Merciful Jesus. Without hesitation, I agreed, not considering how difficult it would be to fulfill such a commitment and the conditions in which we would have to travel for so many months—unsnowed roads in winter and enduring adoration in a damp, unheated church.

The novena began in August 1999 and ended in April 2000 on the Feast of Divine Mercy. It later turned out that Pope John Paul II had scheduled the canonization of Sister Faustina for that day.

I had less than a week to organize the first trip. During the implementation of this venture, I experienced extraordinary care from Divine Providence. This included organizing a car, accommodation, and a priest willing to participate in the Novena.

My friend Bogusia Rolkiewicz suggested that her husband go with us to Vilnius in their new car.

For the planned stay, we needed affordable accommodation. I knew no one in Vilnius, but I remembered a recent letter from London, in which Anna Mitura (now Anna Karczewska), who was studying there and whom I knew earlier from the prayer group in Łódź, felt the need to share with me that she had met Inga Mrych from Vilnius, who told her many important things about the first image of Jesus the Merciful. Her mother took care of a sick Lithuanian woman who, together with a Polish woman, had taken the image from the church of St. Michael in Vilnius in the 1950s when it was being closed by the Soviets. Anna was convinced that I should meet Inga's

* The Lithuanian and Polish women were protégés of Father Michał Sopoćko during their studies at Vilnius University and were informed about the new forms of Divine Mercy devotion and the value of the image. According to the Lithuanian woman's account, Father Sopoćko, forced to leave Vilnius, concerned about the fate of the image, authorized a friendly priest to take care of it. This priest, whose name Mrs. Jadwiga did not remember, oversaw the situation by providing 300 rubles to buy the image from the church that was being closed.

mother because everything she heard from her would be very interesting to me. She gave me the phone number of Inga's mother, Jadwiga Adaško.

I contacted Mrs. Jadwiga, and thanks to her efforts, the Sisters of the Eucharist provided us with hospitality for the entire duration of the Novena. For Mrs. Jadwiga, the mission we undertook was also a need of her heart, and she offered us selfless help throughout our visits. Our friendly bond lasted for many years.

During the Novena, the presence of a priest was essential for the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I knew that Father Ryszard Grefkowicz, after a two-year stay at the "Oasis of Peace" in Medjugorje, had returned to Łódź and had time since he was awaiting a parish assignment. He agreed to the proposed trip to Vilnius without asking for details. When we set out on the road, only after driving a few kilometers did Father Ryszard ask why we were actually going to Vilnius. After learning the purpose of the trip, he said he now understood why he felt the need to return home and take the Missionary Cross.

In a conversation with the General Mother of the Congregation, I expressed concern that, apart from the pastor's consent, there was no information about the Novena in Vilnius and that only our five-person group was to start the great Novena. The Mother's response was completely incomprehensible to me at that time, as she said that everything needed had been prepared, and it was enough for me to trust, and that Jesus, if it was in accordance with God's Will, would take care of the rest.

To my surprise, on the third day of the first Novena, about 50 people were participating in the prayer, and in the following months, there were more and more. Gradually, residents of Vilnius and the surrounding areas joined the adoration. The Sisters of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful animated the prayer throughout the Novena. With great emotion, I listened to the prayers spoken in beautiful Old Polish by the elderly individuals who joined in, entrusting to Merciful Jesus the many human problems and the issues of the entire world. I had never before participated in such sincere, heartfelt spontaneous prayer.

In organizing subsequent trips, in which different people always participated, various obstacles arose, but the grace of patience and courage given to me at that time did not leave me until the end. Our pilgrimage welcomed

the new millennium with a night adoration before the image of Merciful Jesus in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Vilnius.

Father Eugeniusz Śpiołek SchP, founder of the Queen of Peace Community in Krakow, whom I had met earlier during trips to Medjugorje, showed me great kindness and help during this difficult time. He provided concrete assistance in organizing trips and spiritual support in fulfilling the commitments undertaken.

My acquaintance with Father Piotr Andrukiewicz CSsR, met in Medjugorje, who served at "Radio Maryja," also bore fruit. It led to three broadcasts on the radio (using my mobile phone at the time) of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy prayer from the ongoing Novena in Vilnius.

At the conclusion of the Novena on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2000, "Radio Maryja" conducted an official broadcast of this celebration. Father Piotr also supported me later in distributing images of Jesus the Merciful during "Radio



The Image of Jesus the Merciful at Jasna Góra walls

Maryja" family meetings at Jasna Góra and placing a large copy of the first image of Jesus the Merciful on the Jasna Góra walls for these celebrations.

Toward the end of the Novena visits, I managed to persuade Father Jan Kasiukiewicz, the then-pastor of the Church of the Holy Spirit, to agree to illuminate the image. I had the feeling that he only agreed due to my persis-



This did not cause any discouragement. During the next Novena visit to Vilnius, we installed the appropriate lamps purchased in Częstochowa on the side pillars of the altar. The effect was surprising, as despite the visible damages and stains, the image was beautifully showcased.

tence because, in our conversations, I often heard that my efforts made no sense and that the image was naturally dark and very unattractive.

After the Novena ended, there was a change of pastor at the Church of the Holy Spirit. The new pastor, Father Mirosław Grabowski, proposed that the Sisters serve in the church. Taking advantage of the invitation, the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful, with the approval of the Vilnius Curia, established a new religious house in Vilnius and, within their means, took care of the image. The Sisters' stay in Vilnius began under very difficult material and housing conditions—they had to change their place of residence multiple times. It was only in 2004 that the Sisters achieved stability in their religious life. The Vilnius Metropolitan Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis allocated two buildings at 4a Rasų Street for the residence and activities of the Congregation. This is the place where the first image

of Merciful Jesus was painted in 1934 and is now a convent chapel visited by many pilgrims.

IV

With Sister Maria, the General Mother of the Congregation, I had many discussions about the urgent need for the image's conservation. However, after the hardships of the nine-month pilgrimage to Vilnius, I was reluctant to get involved. Sister Helena Świątek, the former superior of the convent in Vilnius, had made multiple unsuccessful attempts to secure funds for the image's conservation. She reached out to the Polish Senate and Professor Andrzej Stelmachowski, the president of the "Polish Community" Association.

As a result, the Association sent a conservator to Vilnius to assess the image's condition. The conservator returned pleased with the pastor's hospitality but was very critical of the image, stating it was not worth the cost of conservation and suggesting simply painting over the damages and stains.

Sister Helena was not convinced by this opinion and still hoped to find funds for the image's renovation. She asked me to find another conservator to reassess the image's true condition.

A friend recommended Professor Dr. Ewa Marxen-Wolska, a renowned conservator and art historian in Łódź. Mrs. Wolska was elderly and was very excited about the proposal to conserve the first image of Jesus the Merciful because she knew of its existence and greatly desired to see it. She stated that due to her age, she could only consult on the project and would assign the actual work to another person she vouched for, ensuring the work would be of such quality that she could sign off on it. That person was Mrs. Edyta Hankowska-Czerwińska from Włocławek, an art conservator and a graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

Mrs. Wolska and Mrs. Czerwińska planned a joint trip to Vilnius to see the image, assess its condition, and explore the possibility of conservation. However, this became impossible because, after a few days, Mrs. Wolska lost

her sight due to complications from an illness. Hoping this condition would pass, she asked us to start the project without her. Unfortunately, Mrs. Wolska's health did not improve, and she remained blind for the rest of her life.

After contacting Mrs. Edyta, we went to Vilnius so she could decide on-site whether she could independently carry out the conservation. After carefully examining the image, she agreed. However, due to various unfavorable circumstances, the work was delayed, including the continued lack of funds.

Several months passed, and the issue of conserving the image resurfaced. Father Jan Góra OP, the organizer of the Nationwide Youth Meeting at Lednica Fields, planned a play about Divine Mercy for the 2003 youth gathering. He had the idea to reveal a very large image of Jesus the Merciful during the event under the "Fish" altar and wanted each young person attending the meeting to receive a small image with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. He needed about 120,000 small images, as he expected that many participants.

Father Góra OP turned to Sister Maria with this request because he highly valued having a copy of the first image of Merciful Jesus from Vilnius. He knew that we printed such images for evangelization purposes and that a foundation was registered for this purpose. However, to create such a large enlargement of the image, a high-resolution photograph or slide was needed, which no one had, and it was impossible to make due to the damages and extensive stains on the image. Sister Maria and I discussed how disappointing this would be for Father Góra OP and how we should tell him it couldn't be done.

The next day, Mr. Kazimierz Stępień, who had often supported my activities (e.g., funding posters for all the church bulletin boards with information about obtaining the grace of mercy for the dying through the prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy), called me. He asked if he could drop by since he was nearby. He was interested in what I was planning to do next.

I told him about the problem of printing the image of Jesus the Merciful for Father Jan Góra OP at Lednica. Mr. Kazimierz evaluated the situation quite differently – he believed we should not give up. According to him, if the ob-

stacle is the lack of conservation of the painting, then it should have been done as soon as possible. There were still three months until the celebration at Lednica.

Our continued conversation focused on determining the potential costs of conservation. I was already aware that to start the work, we needed at least 10,000 PLN. I didn't have that amount of money. Mr. Kazimierz, without hesitation, declared that he could donate that sum. His gesture surprised me because he was not a wealthy man, and I did not expect it. I informed Sister Maria and asked what I should do in this situation. Her decision was unequivocal – we should take the risk of carrying out the conservation. She asked me to go to Vilnius to obtain permission, and then we would see what happens.

Father Mirosław Grabowski, the parish priest, easily received approval from the Vilnius Curia. Later, it turned out that no one in the Curia knew that the first image of Jesus the Merciful was in Vilnius and that the request for conservation concerned this image.

After conveying the good news to Sister Maria and Mr. Kazimierz, the funds were in the account of the previously established Foundation the next day. I once asked Mr. Kazimierz how it happens that he unexpectedly appears with selfless help exactly when it is most needed. He said he didn't know, but the opportunity to help in such a matter was a great happiness for him.

Since a year and a half had passed since our first contacts with the conservator Mrs. Edyta, I informed her of the opportunity to proceed with the conservation. I wanted to know if she was still interested in carrying it out. It turned out that now there was a significant problem because she had a nine-month-old daughter whom she was still breastfeeding, and as a result, she would have to travel with the child. Additionally, she would need someone to take care of the child while she worked.

We needed to decide whether we could manage to organize Mrs. Edyta's trip with her child and ensure appropriate care. The Sisters decided to adapt to the situation while sticking to the previous arrangements.

When everything was ready for the trip, an unpleasant surprise occurred. A representative of the "Polish Community" in Vilnius informed me of the

absolute obligation to transfer the money the Foundation had received for this purpose, as they had decided to carry out the conservation themselves.

I responded that I had no such obligation because it was my Foundation, and I saw no obstacles for them to do it on their own. After a few hours, Father Grabowski informed me that he had been misled and asked to continue organizing the trip.

Father Józef Łągwa SJ helped organize the trip by asking a friend to accompany us to Vilnius. He had a large car, allowing us to load the items needed for the image's conservation and the child's equipment (including a crib) for an extended stay. With all the gear and a child crying from the long journey, we reached Vilnius. The conservator stayed at the house of the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful. The conservation work was carried out in the chapel of this house.



Initially, there was a problem with the child, as she did not immediately accept the caretakers in black habits.

The following day after our arrival, a printed copy of the image was placed in the frame in the Church of the Holy Spirit, replacing the original image. While everyone in the church was busy installing the copy, the sexton casually took the original image under his arm and started walking to the Sisters' house, where the conservation was to take place. The situation highlighted the lack of awareness of the image's value in Vilnius. Worried about the image's safety, I ran out onto the street to catch up with the sexton, who had already gotten quite far, to ensure the image did not attract attention from passersby I wrapped it in a blanket. Thus, with the image wrapped in a regular blanket, we walked through the streets of Vilnius to the Sisters' house, which was then located near the train station.

How difficult it is to compare that event with what I saw on my computer screen thirteen years later. I received a text in Lithuanian to be translated for the website www.faustyna.eu, and to place it on the website, we needed the Lithuanian language internet code. For this purpose, Mr. Tomasz Perek opened the Lithuanian page www.l24.lt by chance (Mr. Tomasz has been preparing print materials and websites for me for about twenty years, and Mr. Jarosław Śmigielski updates the prepared files on the server selflessly).

Unexpectedly, we were surprised by the view of a live broadcast of a religious event in Lithuania, the conclusion of the National Congress of Mercy as part of the Year of Mercy celebrations (2016). A solemn procession with the beautifully flower-decorated image of Jesus the Merciful was moving through the streets of Vilnius, with the participation of the papal legate Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican Secretary of State, Lithuanian hierarchs, priests, monks, nuns, and a large crowd of the faithful. The Lithuanian church sought to fulfill the promise and implore the blessings of Merciful Jesus for the city.

This sight brought me great joy, although for a moment, I felt a human sense of regret that I could not be there, as I knew nothing about the planned celebration.



Fot. Marian Paluszkiewicz

"When the image was displayed, I saw the living motion of Jesus' hand, which made a large sign of the cross. That same evening, I saw the image moving over the city, and the city was covered with a net. When Jesus passed, he cut through the nets".

(Diary of Saint Sister Faustina, 416).

Among other things I brought lamps borrowed from Mrs. Wolska enabling the observation of the painting in UV lighting. Accompanying the restorer, I could see in details the numerous over-paintings and the results of unprofessional renovations which completely distorted facial features of Lord Jesus, as well as numerous damages resulting from the turbulent history of the painting. I watched the arduous work of removing all over-paintings and the amazing end result, when the true, full of majesty Image of the Merciful Jesus with his contemplative full of merciful love gaze was revealed. I also saw the marks after corrections made by the painter Kazimirowski*, when at the request of sister Faustina, he modified a few times the position of hands of Lord Jesus. I also saw the marks after numerous removals of the painting from the frames – the painting was preserved in its original size (it was not cut off).

We eagerly awaited the completion of the restoration to make a slide needed to print an enlarged copy of the image for Lednica. When it became possible, I went to Vilnius with Ewa and Sławomir Śmigielscy, my friends from the community. Sławek took on the task of creating the slide and made every effort to ensure that the figure of Jesus was as large as possible. However, upon returning, we found that the image was only 2 cm high on the slide, and the entire slide encompassed its surroundings. We weren't sure if anything could be done with it.

I contacted Mr. Marek Kiecana from Warsaw, who financially supported the printing of folders and posters (including sponsoring posters for church bulletin boards with the image of Jesus the Merciful and the Divine Mercy Message, which we sent to all parishes in Poland through the Curia with an accompanying letter from the General Mother of the Congregation. He also initiated the Congregation's website).

I asked where such a large image could be printed, remembering our earlier conversations about advertising prints for his company. I explained the need for the image for Lednica and that I only had a 2 cm slide and doubts about its sufficiency. Mr. Kiecana asked me to bring the slide to his company so they could check the printing possibilities. I could cover the cost of the printed image (considering my savings) only up to 6 meters high, so I requested an attempt to enlarge the image to that height.

It turned out that Mr. Kiecana had been to Lednica before, and in his opinion, the image of the size I proposed would not be visible across the entire field. He insisted on enlarging it to 10 meters. The gentlemen discussed for a long time, consulting a company about the technique of making it. The goal was for the figure of Jesus, made from such a small slide, to be visible. After a short time, I heard it would be done, and the order was already placed.

I hadn't mentioned earlier that enlarging the image would be a significant financial burden for me, but accepting the fait accompli, I asked where and to whom I should pay for it. Mr. Kiecana told me I could return home calmly, as the matter no longer concerned me. He would take care of printing the image and delivering it to Father Jan Góra OP at Lednica himself.

The assistance of Divine Providence in critical moments of my ministry is beyond words. The accompanying sense of happiness was always what I longed for when undertaking new tasks.

Father Jan Góra OP sent me a thank-you note with invitations to the celebration. I went with friends – Halinka, Ewa, Sławek, and Andrzej. During this beautiful ceremony, there was an incredibly moving moment. During the devotion to Divine Mercy celebrated by Bishop Edward Dajczak, the illuminated image of Jesus the Merciful was revealed on a high crane against a backdrop of white and red beams of light.



The sight of the illuminated image of Jesus the Merciful accompanied the youth as they sang the Chaplet of Divine Mercy. Bishop Edward Dajczak, after ensuring that everyone had received images with the depiction of Jesus the Merciful and the text of the Chaplet, asked them to keep these images, calling them "**tickets to Heaven.**"

Lednica is a lake in central-western Poland, which is considered a very likely site of the baptism of Poland in 966. The Lednica Fields are important for Polish history and Christianity, known for the annual Youth Prayer Meetings featuring a specially designed enormous gate in the shape of a fish. These gatherings bring together thousands of young people to celebrate faith, unity, and spiritual renewal. The symbolic fish-shaped gate represents early Christian symbols and serves as a powerful reminder of the historical and religious significance of the site.

The Sisters from the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful took part in the solemn procession and prayer at Lednica. It was also a great joy for us to participate in such a beautiful and uplifting atmosphere of worship—the first public presentation of the copy of the image of Jesus the Merciful after its restoration. The image, created in an atmosphere of prayer, suffering, and personal involvement of St. Sister Faustina and Blessed Father Michał Sopoćko, had its original appearance and shape restored during the conservation process and was returned to the Church of the Holy Spirit.

However, to reproduce the image in offset printing, we still needed a slide that captured its beauty in detail. By engaging a professional photographer, I arranged with Father Grabowski to conduct a photo session of the image.

Julitta Nazdrowicz-Woodley, a friend interested in spreading the image, who lived permanently in London but frequently stayed in Łódź, mobilized me to do this. She eagerly got involved in organizing the session. She brought a specialized camera from London, which could produce a 20-centimeter slide. Father Paweł Dziejczak, then an academic chaplain at DA "Piątka" in Łódź, helped organize the trip to Vilnius by offering to drive us in his car.

It turned out that this was the last opportunity to conduct such a session, as interest in the image surged (in 2004). Within a week, various controversial claims regarding the image began, preventing any further actions. The dispute concerned the decision by the Vilnius Metropolitan Cardinal Audrys Juozas Bačkis to move the image from the Church of the Holy Spirit (where Masses and services are conducted exclusively in Polish) to the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy.

This situation, which lasted several months, did not hinder me from printing the post-conservation photocopies of the image for the Congregation's evangelization needs and making them available for evangelization purposes worldwide.

One of the slides made at that time was given by the Vilnius Metropolitan to the Marian Fathers in the USA.



Perpetual Adoration at the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Vilnius, located at 12 Dominikonų Street, where the first image of Jesus the Merciful is housed.

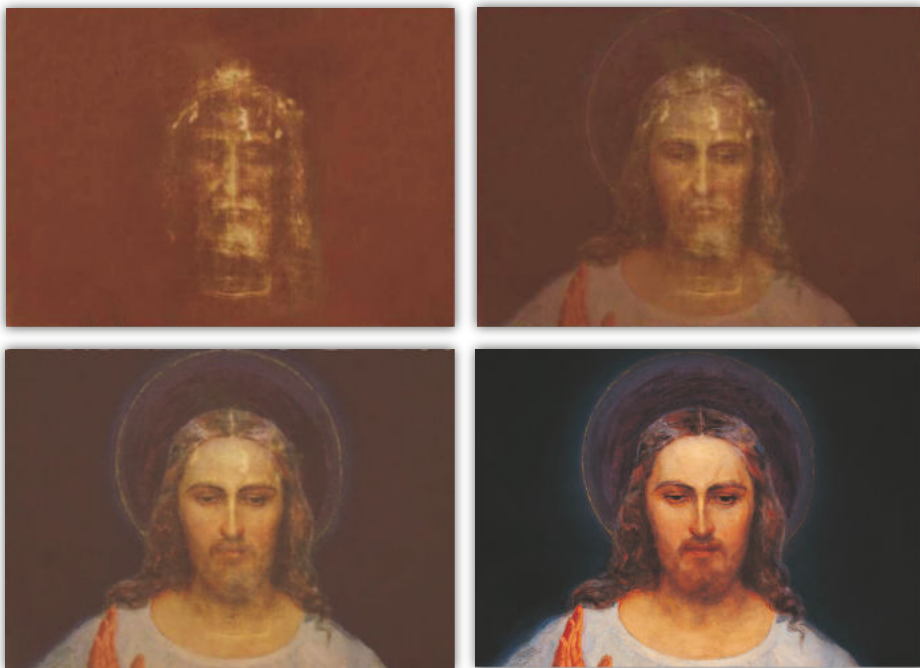
"Through this image, I will grant many graces..., so let every soul have access to it." (Diary of St. Sister Faustina, 570).

The desire to fully fulfill the wish of Jesus had been in my heart for a long time. It motivated me to make copies of the image of Jesus the Merciful available to anyone who wanted to have it in their home, chapel, or church. For this purpose, I registered the domain: **www.merciful-jesus.com**. For some time, something kept hindering its launch because we were focusing on other tasks.

One day, I suggested to Mr. Tomasz Perek to develop this domain. The next day, when the installed domain was already functioning, the conservator, Mrs. Edyta, with whom I sporadically keep in touch, called to ask if I knew what had happened. I was convinced she had seen the domain with the image ready for printing. However, that was not the purpose of her contact. She wanted to tell me that exactly 70 years had passed since the death of the painter Eugeniusz Kazimirowski, and there were no longer any restrictions on disseminating the image.

Another interesting experience related to the Internet concerns the animation of the image. I asked Mr. Tomasz to try animating photos: a fragment of the first image of Jesus the Merciful with a fragment of the Shroud of Turin. I remembered that in 1998, when I was in Białystok with Sister Maria at a meeting with Father Serafin Michalenko MIC, he showed enlarged images comparing their sizes during a conducted conference.

Mr. Tomasz, somewhat skeptical, agreed to try. During the attempt to overlay the images, he was astonished by the consistency of details in the photographed parts. The unexpected effect of the images blending surprised him so much that, despite the late hour, he woke up his wife to share with her the view of the activated animation, which gave the impression of recreating the moment of Jesus' resurrection*.



Animacja obrazu: www.faustyna.eu

* Father Sopoćko, in his publications, confirms that the image was painted exactly according to Sister Faustina's instructions. The remarkable care taken to recreate the Holy Image of the Savior, as remembered by Saint Faustina, is evidenced by the fact that the figure in the image of Jesus the Merciful perfectly matches the size of the figure depicted on the Shroud of Turin.

In my decades-long ministry, in moments of doubt or fatigue, I repeatedly experienced strength through extraordinary circumstances that no person could have orchestrated as they were. After such experiences, I always regained strength and inner peace.

Amid growing difficulties and discouragement, I decided to stop working on the website. I went to Vilnius to complain to Jesus and tell the Sisters that I couldn't handle it, as I didn't know how to do it and lacked the necessary skills.

As usual, I stayed with the Sisters in their convent. During lunch, a lady from Australia, whom one of the sisters was speaking with in English, was sitting across from me. From the Sisters' previous accounts, I knew that she had been praying for several hours before the "Holy Image" of Jesus the Merciful at the Divine Mercy Sanctuary.

Driven by curiosity, I asked the Sister to find out what had prompted this lady to come to Vilnius. She replied that after learning about the history of the first image of Jesus the Merciful on the website www.faustyna.eu (which I had developed), she felt such a great need to come to Vilnius that she spent all her savings on the trip.

It wasn't the first time Jesus resolved my significant problem in such a clear and understandable way for me.

A few months later, in 2008, I participated in the First Divine Mercy Congress in Rome. During one of the Masses at the Congress, when it was time to exchange the sign of peace, I turned and shook hands with the same lady from Australia whom I had met in Vilnius. It was a very joyful sign of peace for both of us. I went to the Congress in Rome with the Sisters from the Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful. During the Congress, with the help of the Sisters and Mrs. Violetta Wawer from Paris, we distributed several thousand folders in various languages to all participants.

* In the history of apparitions, there is only one event known where Jesus expressed the desire to have an image painted with His likeness. He presented and approved its artistic representation Himself, repeatedly revealing His living presence to Sister Faustina in the form depicted in the painted image in Vilnius. Additionally, by promising special graces to the devotees of this image, He endowed it with extraordinary religious value.

The direction of evangelization was earlier indicated by various events. While already in the prayer community, I found myself in a very difficult situation. It concerned a close person who was in a hospital in a terminal state and had not participated in the sacrament of reconciliation for about 50 years.

On that critical day, around 11:00 PM, I was asked to leave the hospital, being informed that all pharmacological possibilities had been exhausted and there was no chance of recovery. In the feeling of helplessness in this situation, I placed under the pillow of the dying person an image of Jesus the Merciful with a relic (threads from the habit) of St. Sister Faustina.



While waiting for a phone call from the hospital, praying in unity with the morning Mass in Licheń ordered for this intention, I had the impression that I was in the hospital by the patient's bedside, participating in an ongoing dialogue with the dying person and two unknown figures present there. The sight of the dying person was extremely distressing. One of these figures, holding the dying person with great care, asked, "Do you desire to meet God?" And he also asked, "Do I still have such a chance?" "Yes, but you must desire it," was the reply. "Yes, I desire it," he said. Joining the conversation, I asked, "Should I go fetch a priest?" I heard, "Not yet."

When my rational thinking returned, I hurried to the hospital, convinced that I would receive news of death. It was around 8:00 AM, and the head doctor and the entire medical staff were already present in the ward.

I saw the strange behavior of doctors and running nurses. This situation was caused by the sight of my patient, conscious and sitting on his hospital bed by his own strength. The patient was holding an image of Jesus the Merciful with a relic of Sister Faustina, found by a nurse changing the bedding.

The life of the person struggling with an addiction that was destroying his body took different turns. However, during the next extended stay in the hospital, the appropriate time came for a consciously made decision to go to confession and receive the sacrament of the sick. This service was provided by Father Józef Kozłowski SJ, who had previously been made aware of the critical situation.

After receiving the news of the patient's death, during the evening Mass, I asked God for the grace of salvation for him, wondering what else I should do for this intention. That night, not fully awake, I had a strange experience. I had the impression that my room had no walls or ceiling, only an endless beam of pink light flowing into open space, and within it, an image that squeezed my heart: an immense multitude of lost, suffering, sad, and poorly dressed people.

I did not see Jesus, but I was aware of His words:

"See in what situation are those who have no one to intercede and ask for them."

By spreading information about the promises of graces that Jesus associated with the new forms of worshipping Divine Mercy, especially the grace of Mercy for the dying, in various available forms, I tried to fulfill the charism recognized in the Community of Renewal in the Holy Spirit, remembering the inspirations received in Medjugorje and the record in the testament left by Saint Sister Faustina (Diary, 1680).

*"...that sinners might turn to Your mercy, experiencing the inexpressible effects of that mercy, **especially for dying souls...**"*

The Congregation of the Sisters of Jesus the Merciful and the Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, in communion with the devotees of Divine Mercy, have been continuing the unceasing prayer of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy for several years, asking for the graces of Divine Mercy for the dying.

My pilgrimage trips naturally directed themselves to Medjugorje and Vilnius, drawing my attention to the fact that the culmination of extraordinary works with God's blessing in these places occurred at the same time and under the same circumstance – **the 1900th anniversary of the Redemption of the World.**

At the beginning of 1934, the residents of the parish in Medjugorje decided to build a cross on Mount Križevac. Such an undertaking required the involvement of many people, who were poor rural parishioners, and they could have no knowledge that they were preparing a place of prayer for thousands of pilgrims.

It is hard to imagine carrying several tons of building materials on their backs or donkeys' backs up a high mountain with sharp, protruding rocks. How greatly they must have been gifted with determination and the grace of faith to recognize God's plan and ensure it was precisely carried out in the right place and time. On the cross they built, an inscription was engraved: ***"To Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of humanity, as a sign of faith, love, and hope, in memory of the 1900th anniversary of Jesus' Passion."***

On August 30, 1984, Our Lady said in a message to the parishioners in Medjugorje: ***"The Cross was in God's plans when you built it."***

Multiple visits to Vilnius helped me discover the traces of the presence of Saint Sister Faustina and Blessed Father Michał Sopoćko there, as well as the traces of their mission, marked by great suffering. This concerned the transmission of new forms of worship of Divine Mercy. One of these forms is the image of Jesus the Merciful, which, thanks to their joint efforts, was painted **at the beginning of 1934** and was first publicly venerated during the solemn conclusion of **the Jubilee of the Redemption of the World – the 1900th anniversary of the Passion of the Savior.** Sister Faustina participated in this ceremony, and the sermon on Divine Mercy was delivered by Father Sopoćko, as Jesus had requested.



Mount Krizevac
in Medjugorje



The image of Jesus
the Merciful
displayed at the
Gate of Dawn
during the Feast
of Divine Mercy.
Contemporary view.

*“At the Gate of Dawn, the three-day celebration of the conclusion of **the Jubilee of the Redemption of the World – the 1900th anniversary of the Passion of the Savior** – was held solemnly. Now I see that the work of Redemption is linked with the work of Mercy that the Lord demands...”*

*“When Father Sopoćko began to speak about this great mercy of the Lord, **the image took on a living form, and the rays penetrated the hearts of the gathered people...**” (Diary of St. Sister Faustina, 89; 417).*



Pilgrims at the Church of St. James in Medjugorje




Pilgrims on the "Apparition Hill" in Medjugorje

The power of Divine Mercy in Medjugorje is revealed through the atmosphere of omnipresent prayer both inside and outside the church. This is evidenced by the lines at the confessionals and the prayers resounding on the hills from the continuously arriving pilgrims from the farthest corners of the world, eager to experience

THE LOVE OF THE MOTHER AND THE MERCY OF THE SON.




JESUS, I TRUST IN YOU



Hosting monks from the "Oasis of Peace" in Poland, who wanted to visit places associated with Sister Faustina and Father Maksymilian Kolbe, I learned how the chapel in the "Oasis of Peace" was created. In the place designated for the temple, the monks built walls from stones taken from that place, and since they had no money for this purpose, where there should have been beams for the roof, they laid stones, and under them, images of Jesus the Merciful.

In a small camping trailer, they remained in prayer, entrusting the ongoing construction to Divine Providence. After a short time, a ready-to-install roof was brought.

From the beginning of the apparitions in Medjugorje (1981), when the Message of Divine Mercy was not yet widely known, the foothills of Apparition Hill, where the "Cenacolo" and "Oasis of Peace" are located, was called the Field of Mercy.



In my testimony, I tried to document some extraordinary events in my decades-long ministry of spreading the cult of Divine Mercy. Gratefully remembering those from our community and religious congregation who have already passed into eternity, who, of their own initiative, shielded my sometimes very bold and risky undertakings with their prayers.

I thank God for the grace of faith, and I thank everyone whom God has enabled to provide selfless help in carrying out this mission, including my family, who, by independently managing their daily lives, allowed me to be fully available to perform this extraordinary service.



In 2002, Urszula Grzegorzcyk, Maciej Kubiak, monks from the "Oasis of Peace," and Father Ryszard Grefkowicz during a pilgrimage to Niepokalanów



On December 18, 2018, participants of the 40th-anniversary celebration of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit group "Kanaan": Sławomir and Ewa Śmigielscy, Bogusław and Anna Klimowicz, Urszula Grzegorzcyk, Halina Kocik. The current group guardian, Father Józef Łągwa SJ.

**Nagroda
im. bł. ks.
Michała Sopoćki**



Miesięcznika
Archidiecezji Białostockiej
„Drogi Miłosierdzia”

**MICHAŁ
2020**

**ŚWIADEK MIŁOSIERDZIA
BOŻEGO W ŚWIECIE**

**Urszula
Grzegorzczak**

Dear Sister Superior of the Sisters of Merciful Jesus.

I have read the "Testimony" on the website www.faustyna.eu, I realized how much work was put into making it possible to distribute the image of Merciful Jesus.

A few years ago, I had the idea to spread Divine Mercy in the United States by bringing images of the Merciful Jesus from Łagiewniki. I discussed this with the pastor of my parish, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, asking if he could find a place for such an image in our church. It so happened that I wasn't traveling to Poland at the time, and the matter dragged on.

After some time I noticed that the parish priest had purchased and placed a small painting of the Merciful Jesus in the church hall. It was not a painting painted by Mr. Adolf Hyla, but a painting I knew from my childhood, which hung in our church of the Sacred Heart of the Lord Jesus in Szczecin. A large group of people resettled from the Borderlands lived in Szczecin. I think they were the ones who brought the Devotion to the Divine Mercy.

After returning from Church, I began searching the Internet for information about the image that I remembered from my childhood. On the website www.fau-styna.eu I learned that it was the Original Image, painted according to Sister Faustina's instructions by Mr. E. Kazimirowski. What's more, the Image of the Merciful Jesus has been made available on your website for evangelization purposes. The first print and shock, I was impressed by the beauty, quality and accuracy. This allowed the images to be printed and distributed.

The images were sent to the Missionaries of the Holy Family in Papua New Guinea and Madagascar. To the Diocese in Nigeria, which is the target of attacks by Boko Haram Islamists. To the Images of the Merciful Lord Jesus, we also added images of Our Lady of Jasna Góra.

Współpracujemy z Misją Zakonu Felicjanek na Haiti, gdzie obrazy trafiły do kilku kościołów, także w innych diecezjach niż ta w której pracują Siostry. Niestety, ze względu na groźące niebezpieczeństwo, Siostry musiały uciekać z Haiti. This year we sent the first paintings to Cuba, where one of the paintings ended up in a church whose construction was negotiated by St. John Paul II. This is the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Diocese of Pinar Del Rio. The paintings have been donated to Churches in Michigan, and a painting is being prepared for Florida.

In the parish of St. Therese of Lisieux, Sister Mary Andrew leads the pastoral care of the sick. The sister initiated the Hidden Treasure program. Sick people who are bedridden are offered participation in a "hidden" prayer group. I support this program with small 10x20 cm Images and a large-printed Chaplet of Divine Mercy.

All Images of the King of Mercy are printed on high quality Hahnemuhle Daguerre canvas and then protected with UV and hard coating. According to the literature, they should last 150 years.

I kindly ask you to share my e-mail with Mrs. Urszula Grzegorzcyk. I would also like to thank Mrs. Urszula Grzegorzcyk for her efforts. I send you my warmest regards.

Waldemar



Medjugorje, church Saint James

*"It is one of the most lively places of worships
and conversions in Europe with healthy spirituality"*

abp Henryk Hoser, SAC.

