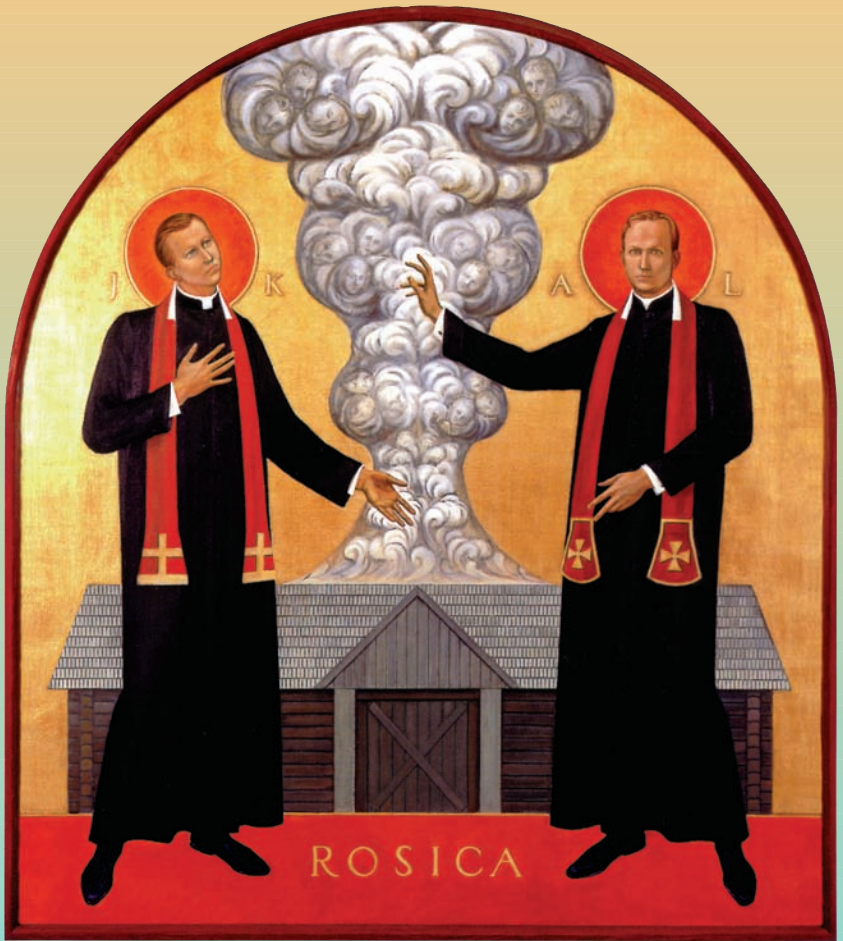


Rev. Jan Bukowicz, MIC



*The Marian Martyrs
of Rosica*

THE MARIAN MARTYRS OF ROSICA

The Marian Martyrs of Rosica

*Accounts of the heroic witness of
Blessed George Kaszyra and
Blessed Anthony Leszczewicz*

Edited by Rev. Jan Bukowicz, MIC

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INTRODUCTION

During the Second World War, more than six million Polish citizens died, among them approximately 3,000 members of the clergy: bishops, priests, seminarians, brothers, Sisters, and members of religious orders. Many among the clergy as well as the laity gave their lives for the cause of God.

In 1971, Pope Paul VI elevated Father Maximilian Kolbe to the altar; and in 1987 Pope John Paul II did the same for Bishop Michael Kozal; but these are only two among very many deserving this glory. Then, on June 13, 1999, Pope John Paul II elevated two Marians, Fr. George Kaszyra and Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz, to the honors of the altar. They are now known as the Marian Martyrs of Rosica and are part of a group of 108 World War II martyrs who were beatified by the pope.

HISTORY OF CAUSE

Here is a brief account of how the cause of the Marian Martyrs was advanced as part of a larger group of martyrs. During the canonization process of Bishop Michael Kozal, one of the consultants to the Sacred Congregation suggested that from among a very large number of people martyred for their faith by the Nazis in Poland, a smaller group should be selected, their martyrdom for the Faith should be proven during the ongoing process, and they should be linked to Bishop Kozal at his canonization as his associates in martyrdom. In response to a question from Wloclawek regarding this cause, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints gave its consent for this action in May 1988.

The Conference of Polish Bishops acted upon this initiative in its session on February 8, 1991, and authorized the bishop of Wloclawek to promote the cause of the martyrs on its behalf. At the appeal of the bishop, 92 candidates for beatification were nominated, from among both the clergy and laity. The process was solemnly initiated in the Cathedral of Wloclawek on Sunday, January 26, 1992. However, it was impossible for a

single tribunal to consider so many cases because a separate process must be carried out for each candidate. The tribunal of Wloclawek asked the bishops of other dioceses for assistance.

An auxiliary process for 20 candidates (including the Marians) was initiated by Cardinal J. Glemp on March 27, 1992 in the Archbishop's Chapel in Warsaw.

The Marians of the Immaculate Conception nominated two candidates for the process: Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. George Kaszyra. They both died on February 17-18, 1943, in Rosica, in Byelorussia (Belarus). Both priests were associated with the religious center in Druja on the Dvina River.

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE MARIANS

After World War I, Druja was one of the northernmost small towns within the Republic of Poland. In Druja there was a Marian monastery established in 1923 by the Bishop of Vilnius, Blessed George Matulaitis-Matulewicz; the Marians operated a high school there. There was also a general house of the Congregation of Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist which was created in the same year, also by Bishop Matulaitis-Matulewicz.

After the German attack on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the eastern front moved quickly eastward and new opportunities arose for the Druja center to do missionary work in the territory of Soviet Byelorussia (Belarus) where religion had been persecuted since 1917. At the request of the local population and with the consent of the Archbishop of Vilnius, Bishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski, a total of 16 Sisters and five Marians set forth beyond the Dvina River: Fathers Felix Czczcott, George Kaszyra and Wladyslaw Laszewski, seminarian Henry Tomaszewski and, heading the mission, Father Anthony Leszczewicz. They reopened closed churches and chapels, taught the catechism, and administered the Sacraments. The main center of the missionary work was set up in Rosica on the Dvina River, 30 kilometers northeast of Druja. The large local church was restored for services. The work of the priests and Sisters was bearing ample fruit.

In the summer of 1942, the activities of Soviet partisans intensified in the region. They enjoyed the support of the local population, on whom the Germans took vengeance. Before Christmas, Fr. Leszczewicz received a warning that there would soon be punitive action against the local population. Friends suggested to him that the priests and Sisters should leave the area.

Still remembering the recent death of Fr. Eugeniusz Kulesza, the Marian's Superior in Druja who had been murdered by the Communists, everyone took this warning very seriously. They held a meeting in Druja. The priests were determined not to abandon the faithful, even at the price of sacrificing their own lives. It was finally decided that each priest and each Sister would decide individually whether to go back or to stay on and continue the work. Both the priests and the Sisters believed that they should share the fate of the people. At that time, three priests and nine Sisters were working there.

In the middle of February of 1943, the German command post was moved into Druja and troops of the punitive expedition appeared beyond the Dvina. The priests and Sisters were warned once again, but again this time they firmly rejected the possibility of saving themselves by fleeing. On February 16, 1943, the pacification started in a belt 60 kilometers wide along the Dvina River. Father W. Laszewski, the pastor in Zaszczyryn, along with two Sisters and some civilians, crossed the Latvian border at the last possible moment. They were imprisoned but avoided death.

However, Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. George Kaszyna, and seven Sisters remained in Rosica in the very eye of the horrific hurricane. The military was burning buildings in nearby villages, rounding up people, and locking them up in the church at Rosica. Those who tried to run away were shot. All those imprisoned in the church were aware of their doom, and therefore they were resigned to die. The priests were listening to confessions, baptizing, giving Holy Communion, celebrating Holy Masses, taking Professions of Faith from the

Orthodox, comforting the distressed, and inspiring trust in God despite the tragic circumstances.

The Sisters, at the request of Fr. Leszczewicz, were released. People rounded up in the church were divided into two groups. The able-bodied were sent to a transit camp near Riga. Beginning on February 17, the remaining prisoners were driven on sledges to nearby buildings which were doused with gasoline and set on fire. Rifle shots and grenade explosions could also be heard.

On February 17 in the afternoon, Fr. Leszczewicz was taken away with a group of people, while Fr. Kaszyra's turn came the next day. They both went to their deaths with great serenity. They probably felt that they had fulfilled their mission till the end. They perished together with 1,526 lay people. Their ashes have fertilized the soil of Belarus on which faith in Christ is awakening and growing again.

CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

In this book, we have first included Pope John Paul II's homily at the Holy Mass of Beatification for the Marian Martyrs and then a more detailed account of the history of the process for the beatification of the Martyrs as part of the group of 108 World War II martyrs.

After these two chapters, we have provided short biographies of the Marian Martyrs. The biographies are based on documents and on accounts by persons who knew those heroic priests personally.

Following the biographies, we have included a unique document from our Archives in Rome that chronicles the tragic end of the Marian Martyrs' mission in Rosica. This account, although unsigned, has exceptional importance because it was written less than a month after the events it describes.

After this unique Marian document, we have also provided accounts of the Marian Martyrs that illustrate periods in their lives — especially the difficulties they faced toward the end of

their lives and the nature of their heroic sufferings and deaths. The authors of these testimonials were eyewitnesses to the events described — which makes their testimony uniquely important.

Finally, the last chapter of the book is different in character from the preceding eyewitness accounts. It is a memoir. It describes true historical facts but in a literary rendering, written 20 years later. Therefore, it cannot be regarded as a strict chronicle of the facts, and some of its dialogue is obviously a literary creation.

Tadeusz Gorski, MIC

CHAPTER ONE

HOMILY AT THE HOLY MASS OF BEATIFICATION BY HIS HOLINESS, POPE JOHN PAUL II WARSAW SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 1999

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”
(Mt. 5:7)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. I stop to reflect on the words of this beatitude of Christ as I continue my pilgrim journey among you, faithful people of Warsaw. I warmly greet all gathered here, the priests, men and women religious, and lay faithful. I extend fraternal greetings to the Bishops, especially to the Cardinal Primate and the auxiliary Bishops of the Archdiocese of Warsaw. I greet the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, the President of the Senate and the President of the Diet, the representatives of State and local Authorities and invited guests.

I give thanks to Divine Providence that I am able to be present here again, where twenty years ago, at the memorable Pentecost Vigil, we experienced in a special way the mystery of the Upper Room. Together with the Primate of the Millennium, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, with the Bishops and the People of God of the capital present in great numbers, we made an ardent invocation on that occasion for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In those difficult times, we asked that His power might be poured into the hearts of men and women, and that hope might be stirred in them. It was a cry which arose from the faith that God is active and that, with the power of the Holy Spirit, He renews and sanctifies all things. It was a supplication for a renewal of

the face of the earth, of this land. How can we fail to thank the Triune God today for all that in the course of the last twenty years we see as His response to that cry! Is not all that happened at that time in Europe and the world, beginning with our own homeland, God's response? Before our eyes, changes of political, social, and economic systems have taken place, enabling individuals and nations to see anew the splendor of their own dignity. Truth and justice are recovering their proper value, becoming a challenge for all those who are able to appreciate the gift of freedom. For this we give thanks to God, looking towards the future with confidence.

We especially give glory to Him for what has happened in the life of the Church during these twenty years. In thanksgiving, therefore, we join with the Churches of the Western and Eastern traditions, with our neighbouring peoples we have emerged from the catacombs and are openly carrying out their mission. Their vitality is a magnificent witness to the power of Christ's grace which enables weak men to become capable of heroism, frequently to the point of martyrdom. Is this not the fruit of the activity of the Holy Spirit? Is it not thanks to this breath of the Spirit in our most recent history that today we have the unique opportunity to experience the universality of the Church and our responsibility to bear witness to Christ and to proclaim His Gospel "to the ends of the earth"?

In the light of the Holy Spirit, the Church in Poland rereads the signs of the times and takes up her duties free from the external limitations and pressures which were experienced up to a short time ago. How can we not give thanks to God today for the fact that the Church is now able to engage in a creative dialogue with the world of culture and knowledge in a spirit of mutual respect and love! How can we not give thanks for the fact that the faithful can approach the Sacraments unhindered and can listen to the word of God in order to be able to bear witness openly to their faith! How can we not give glory to God for that many churches recently built in our country! How can we not give thanks that children and young people can come to know Christ in the tranquility of school, where the presence of a priest, a nun, or a catechist is seen as a precious help in the

work of educating the younger generation! How can we not give praise to God, who with His Spirit enlivens Church communities, associations, and movements, inspiring ever wider groups of laity to embark on the mission of evangelization!

During my first pilgrimage to our homeland, when I was in this place, I became intensely mindful of the prayer of the Psalmist:

*O Lord, remember me out of the love You have for Your people.
Come to me, Lord, with Your help
that I may see the joy of Your chosen ones
and may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation
and share the glory of Your people” (106:4-5).*

Today, as I look back over the last twenty years of this century, I am reminded of the exhortation of the same Psalm:

*O give thanks to the Lord for He is good;
for His love endures for ever.
Who can tell the Lord’s mighty deeds?
Who can recount all His praises?
Blessed be the Lord...
For ever, from age to age (106:1-2, 48).*

2. “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7). This Sunday’s liturgy gives our thanksgiving a particular aspect. It enables us to see all that is going on in the history of this generation from the perspective of God’s eternal mercy, which was revealed more fully in the saving work of Christ. Christ “was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). The Paschal mystery of the Death and Resurrection of the Son of God has given a new direction to human history. Though we see in this history the painful signs of the action of evil, we are certain that in the end evil will not prevail over the fate of man and the world. This certainly arises from faith in the mercy of the Father “who has so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (Jn

3:16). Hence today, as Saint Paul points to the faith of Abraham: “No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God” (Rom 4:20), we are able to discern the source of this strength, thanks to which not even the most difficult trials were able to separate us from the love of God.

Faith in Divine Mercy made it possible for hope to endure in us. This hope did not concern social rebirth alone, or merely the restoration of dignity to man in the different world contexts. Our hope penetrates far deeper: it is directed in fact to the divine promises which go far beyond temporal realities. Its definitive object is the sharing in the fruits of the saving work of Christ. This can be reckoned to us as justice, if we “believe in Him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord” (Rom 4:24). Only the hope which comes from faith in the Resurrection can inspire us to give a worthy response in our daily lives to God’s infinite love. Only with such hope can we go out to the “sick” (Mt 9:12) and be apostles of God’s healing love. Twenty years ago I said that “Poland has become in our time a land of particularly responsible witness” (*Homily in Victory Square*, June 2, 1979). Today, it must be added that this should be a witness of active mercy built on faith in the Resurrection. Only this kind of witness is a sign of hope for contemporary man, especially for the younger generations; and if for some it is also a “sign of contradiction,” this contradiction never distracts us from fidelity to the Crucified and Risen Christ.

3. *Omnipotens aeternae Deus, qui per glorificationem Sanctorum novissima dilectionis tuae nobis argumenta largiris, concede propitius, ut, ad Unigenitum tuum fideliter imitandum, et ipsorum intercessione commendemur, et incitemur exemplo.* This is the Church’s prayer as she remembers the Saints in the Eucharist: “Ever-living God, the signs of Your love are manifest in the honour You give Your Saints. May their prayers and their example encourage us to follow Your Son more faithfully” (*Common of Holy Men and Women*, “Opening Prayer”). We raise this invocation also today, as we admire the testimony given by the Blesseds who have just been raised to the glory of the altars. The living faith, unshakable hope, and generous love

are reckoned to them as justice, because they were profoundly rooted in the Paschal mystery of Christ. Rightly, then, we ask to follow Christ faithfully, according to their example. (*NOTE TO READER: The two Blessed that follow are not among the 108 martyrs.*)

Blessed Regina Protmann, Foundress of the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Catherine, a native of Braniewo, dedicated herself with all her heart to the work of renewal of the Church at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. She engaged in this activity, which arose from her love for Christ above all things, after the Council of Trent. She took an active part in the post-conciliar reform of the Church, carrying out a humble work of mercy with great generosity. She founded a Congregation, which united contemplation of the mysteries of God with the care of the sick in their homes and the instruction of young children and older girls. She gave particular attention to the pastoral care of women. With no thought of herself, Blessed Regina looked to the needs of the people and the Church, meeting them with foresight. The words “As God wills” became the motto of her life. Ardent love urged her to fulfill the Heavenly Father’s will, following the example of the Son of God. She did not shrink from the cross of daily service in giving witness to the Risen Christ.

The apostolate of mercy also filled the life of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski. Despite delicate health, this landowner from Wielkopolska, endowed with many talents and a particular depth of religious life by God, undertook and inspired a vast activity on behalf of the rural population, with perseverance, prudence, and generosity of heart. Guided by a discernment that was very sensitive to people’s needs, he launched numerous educational, charitable, cultural, and religious works aimed at the material and moral support of the rural family. He remained in the lay state and founded the Congregation of the Handmaids of the Holy and Immaculate Virgin, which is well-known in Poland. He was inspired in every initiative by the desire that everyone should have a share in the Redemption. He is remembered as a good man with a big heart, who for love of God and neighbour was able to bring different sectors together, effectively rallying them around a common good. In his many-

faceted activity, he anticipated much of what the Second Vatican Council said about the apostolate of the laity. His was an exceptional example of generous and industrious work for man, the homeland, and the Church. The work of Blessed Edmund Bojanowski is continued by the Handmaids, whom I warmly greet and thank for their silent service, filled with the spirit of sacrifice on behalf of their neighbour and the Church.

4. *Munire digneris me, Domine Iesu Christe ..., signo sacratissimae Crucis tuae: ac concedere digneris mihi ... ut, sicut hanc Crucem, Sanctorum tuorum reliquiis refertam, ante pectus meum teneo, sic semper mente retineam et memoriam passionis, et sanctorum victorias Martyrum:* this is the prayer recited by the Bishop as he puts on the pectoral cross. Today I make of this invocation the prayer of the entire Church in Poland which, bearing for a thousand years the marks of the Passion of Christ, is constantly regenerated by the seed of the blood of the martyrs and draws life from the memory of their victory on earth.

Today we are celebrating the victory of those who, in our time, gave their lives for Christ, in order to possess life forever in His glory. This victory has a special character, since it was shared by clergy and laity alike, by young people and old, by people from different classes and states. Among them are Archbishop Anthony Julian Nowowiejski, Pastor of the Diocese of Plock, tortured to death at Dzialdowo; Bishop Wladyslaw Goral of Lublin, tortured with particular hatred simply because he was a Catholic Bishop. There are diocesan and religious priests who died because they chose not to abandon their ministry and because they continued to serve their fellow prisoners who were sick with typhus; some were tortured to death because they defended Jews. In the group of Blesseds there are religious brothers and sisters who persevered in the service of charity and in offering their torments for their neighbour. Among the blessed martyrs there are also laypeople. There are five young people formed in the Salesian oratory; a zealous activist of Catholic Action, a lay catechist tortured to death for his service, and an heroic woman, who gave up her own life in exchange for that of her daughter-in-law who was

with child. These blessed martyrs are today inscribed in the history of holiness of the People of God on pilgrimage for over a thousand years in the land of Poland.

If we rejoice today for the beatification of one hundred and eight martyrs, clergy and laypeople, we do so above all because they bear witness to the victory of Christ, the gift which restores hope. As we carry out this solemn act, there is in a way rekindled in us the certainty that, independently of the circumstances, we can achieve complete victory in all things through the One who has loved us (See Rom 8:37). The blessed martyrs cry to our hearts: Believe in God who is love! Believe in Him in good times and bad! Awaken hope! May it produce in you the fruit of fidelity to God in every trial!

5. Rejoice, Poland, for the new Blesseds: Regina Protmann, Edmund Bojanowski, and the 108 Martyrs. It pleased God “to show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness” towards your sons and daughters in Jesus Christ (See Eph 2:7). This is “the richness of His grace,” this is the foundation of our unshakable confidence in the saving presence of God along the paths of man in the Third Millennium! To Him be the glory for ever and ever.

Amen!

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORY OF THE PROCESS: BEATIFICATION OF 108 MARTYRS OF THE CHURCH IN POLAND DURING WORLD WAR II

The cause of beatification of 108 of God's Servant Martyrs for the Faith — victims of persecution of the Church in Poland in the years 1939-1945 by the Nazi regime — only began as a formal process of beatification procedure in 1992. However, the witness of the martyrs began in earnest just after the end of World War II. The fame of the sanctity and martyrdom of multiple persons from the group of 108 Servants of God, as well as the graces ascribed to their intervention, focused the attention of dioceses and religious families on the need to open the beatification process. Those martyred included Archbishop Julian Anthony Nowowiejski, Bishop Leon Wetmanski, Rev. Henry Hlebowicz, Rev. Henry Kaczorowski with a group of priests from Wloclawek, Rev. Joseph Kowalski, a Salesian, Brother Joseph Zaplata, and many others. However, for various reasons the process of beatification for them failed to be undertaken.

The issue was brought up again by the beatification of Bishop Michael Kozal (Warsaw 1987). He was called "the true master of the martyrs" for priests imprisoned in concentration camps, especially in Dachau. During the discussion of Bishop Kozal's martyrdom in the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, a proposal was made to start a separate beatification process for those to whom the bishop martyr was the leader in giving the highest testimony of faith.

The idea was taken up by the Bishop of the Wloclawek diocese at that time, Henry Muszynski. After consultation with the Congregation, the final format of the process gradually

emerged, including not only the martyred clergy from Dachau but also other people, among them many laypeople who suffered death in *odium fidei* in various places and circumstances, killed by the same persecutor.

On behalf of the Conference of Polish Bishops, the process of beatification has been managed by the Bishop of the Wloclawek diocese. The logic here is that during the period of persecution it was in this diocese that the greatest percentage of the clergy was lost; More than one out of every two priests gave his life there, together with the Blessed Michael Kozal. The deposition phase of the diocesan process of the martyrs for faith was opened in Wloclawek on January 26, 1992, on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Blessed Michal. Initially 92 persons from various dioceses and religious congregations were included. The number of subjects was changed five times during the procedure: It was increased by including new candidates, but also decreased when it was discovered that in some cases there was not enough evidence of martyrdom in the theological sense. Finally, 108 of God's Servants Martyrs were presented for beatification.

After the diocese was reorganized in 1992, the process was managed by the new Bishop of Wloclawek, Bronislaus Dembowski.

The documentation from the process collected in Poland, consisting of 96,000 pages, was forwarded to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in 1994. Due to the intensive effort of the Congregation, the Theological Discussion Concerning the Martyrdom of 108 of God's Servants could be summed up as early as November 20, 1998.

The positive result of this critical discussion gave hope that the next phase of the process would yield a similar result. This next phase took place in the College of Cardinals belonging to that Congregation. The College came to a positive finding, which opened the way to beatification of the Martyrs.

BLESSED MARTYRS FOR THE FAITH

The Servants of God raised to the altars by John Paul II on June 13 in Warsaw were presented by 18 dioceses, the military ordinariate, and 22 religious congregations. They were members of the clergy and laypeople whose commitment to the cause of God, as well as their lives and deaths, were marked by heroism. Among them there were three bishops, 52 diocesan priests, 26 religious priests, three seminarians, seven brothers, eight sisters and nine lay persons. These proportions reflect fairly the hatred of the Nazis toward the Faith. The voice of the Church was for them a major impediment in building a system based on a vision of humanity deprived of the transcendent dimension and permeated by hatred. In this contemporary "Acts of the Martyrs," we find the image of the Church in Poland during the war and occupation — the Church which was constantly giving difficult testimony to "the truth about God and man."

Among the 108 Blessed Martyrs we find bishops, diocesan priests, religious brothers and sisters, as well as lay faithful.

They are:

ARCHBISHOP ANTHONY JULIAN NOWOWIEJSKI (1858-1941). The Bishop of Plock, an eminent student of the Liturgy, professor of history, a driving force behind Church studies in reunified Poland, and a zealous shepherd. He died in the concentration camp in Dzialdowo on May 28, 1941, as a result of continuous cruel torment.

REV. HENRY KACZOROWSKI (1888-1942). The Rector of the seminary in Wloclawek, a scholarly and kind man, as well as an ardent educator of priests. He was arrested in 1939 and he remained heroically faithful to his mission until the end. He died in a gas chamber as he was transported from the camp in Dachau in the so-called "handicapped transport" on May 6, 1942.

REV. ANICET KOPLINSKI (1875-1941). A Capuchin, the apostle of charity in Warsaw who even during his lifetime was

regarded as a saint there. He was sometimes referred to as the St. Francis of Warsaw. He was of German heritage, but he did not use this fact to save his life and he didn't leave the Monastery. He died in a gas chamber in Auschwitz.

MARIANNA BIERNACKA (1888-1943). A lay woman, she offered her life spontaneously to save her daughter-in-law, who was singled out to be shot while she was pregnant. She was shot and killed on July 13, 1943, in Naumowicz near Grodno, saving the life of her daughter-in-law and unborn grandchild.

Those four figures are the most prominent among the large group of heroic witnesses to the faith who were killed in *odium fidei* (out of hatred toward the faith) in various circumstances and sites, either violently or as a result of prison torment.

GROUPS OF MARTYRS

Those martyrs who gave eloquent witness of faith were:

- Diocesan and religious priests, who died because they refused to give up performing their pastoral mission;
- Those who suffered defending Jews or Communists;
- Those shot or tortured on a Good Friday as if to show the relationship of their sacrifice with Christ's sacrifice on the cross;
- Convent sisters persistent in their sacrificial and meek service of love, accepting the torments and death in the spirit of faith.

Among those heroic testimonies of love for God, several special groups can be identified.

The first group includes those who gave their lives in full consciousness in order to save others or to bring love to those who suffered or were meant to die, for example:

- **FATHER HILARY JANUSZEWSKI (1909-1945)**. A Carmelite who voluntarily sacrificed himself in the camp at Dachau to take care of those dying from typhoid fever in an isolated barracks. He died among them from the disease.

- **BROTHER JOSEPH ZAPLATA (1904-1945).** From the Congregation of Brothers of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus who, like Father Hilary, was determined to care for those dying of typhoid, wholly intent on giving his life to God in order to obtain the grace of the return to the Fatherland for Cardinal Hlond.
- **SISTER MARIA TERESA KOWALSKA (1902-1941).** A Clare and Capuchin Sister, who offered her life to God to obtain the grace of freedom for Clare Sisters detained with her in the camp at Dzialdowo.
- **SISTER CELESTE FARON (1913-1944).** A Sister from Starawies, who offered her life for the conversion of an erring priest; her sacrifice was accomplished in the death camp at Auschwitz.
- **BROTHER GREGORY FRACKOWIAK (1911-1943).** A Verbist religious, who undertook to save the lives of a group of laypeople arrested for distribution of patriotic leaflets. He took responsibility for their actions and was executed after long torture in Dresden.
- **REV. HENRY HLEBOWICZ (1904-1941).** A professor at Vilnius University and a charismatic shepherd of the academic community, who offered his life to obtain from God the protection of faith for his students. He was shot and killed in Borysowo.
- **MARIANNA BIERNACKA,** who was described above.

The next group were those who, while they could have saved their own lives, accepted the peril of death in the spirit of heroic love in order to remain faithful to their vocation. This applies to:

- **FATHER MICHAEL CZARTORYSKI (1897-1944).** A Dominican, who died because he refused to abandon the

dying and seriously wounded fighters in the Warsaw uprising.

- REV. WALTER MIEGON (1892-1842). A military chaplain, who, after his release, returned to the arrested seamen so as not to leave them without spiritual support. He died in the camp at Dachau.
- NATALIE TULASIEWICZ (1906-1945). A teacher, a promoter of the lay apostolate, who joined the transport of young women deported for labor to Germany in order to give them spiritual help. She died in a gas chamber in the Ravensbrueck camp.
- REV. GEORGE KASZYRA (1904-1943), and REV. ANTHONY LESZCZEWICZ (1890-1943). Marian priests in Rosica, Belarus, who voluntarily remained with their parishioners condemned to death. They died with them.
- REV. ACHILLES PUCHALA (1911-1943) and REV. HEMAN STEPIEN (1908-1943). Cloistered Franciscans from Iwieniec, who were arrested with a large group of people destined to die in order to serve them as priests.
- REV. SIGMUND PISARSKI (1902-1943). A priest from Lublin, who was shot and killed because he refused to turn in some communists who, a little earlier, had tormented him severely and robbed him.

The next group were those who were imprisoned and, knowing that they exposed themselves to death, rejected the offer of freedom in exchange for renouncing their priestly vocation. For example:

- SEMINARIAN BRONISLAUS KOSYTKOWSKI (1886-1942). Refused release in exchange for renouncing his path to the priesthood.

- REV. DOMINIC JEDRZEJEWSKI (1886-1942) and REV. JOSEPH KUT (1905-1942). Rejected the opportunity to be released from Dachau in exchange for renouncing their service as priests.
- REV. ANICET KOPLIONSKI, Capuchin who was described above.

Still others left examples of heroic priestly service. Among them are:

- REV. STANISLAUS PYRTEK (1913-1942). A priest from Vilnius, a vicar condemned to death for an attempt to save his pastor.
- REV. JOSEPH KURZAWA (1910-1940). Died because he did not want to leave his pastor alone in danger of death.
- REV. ADAM BARGIELSKI (1903-1942). A priest in Lomza, a vicar who went to prison as a substitute for his parish priest who was very old.
- SEMINARIAN THADDEUS DOLNY (1914-1942). In the Dachau camp, while starving himself, he shared his food with other clergy to save their lives.
- Five Seminarians from a Salesian establishment in Poznan. Reinforced each other in faith during torture until they accepted death as a transition to their meeting with Jesus and Mary: CZSLAUS JOZWIAK (1919-1942), EDWARD KAZMIERSKI (1919-1942), FRANCIS KESY (1920-1942), EDWARD KLINIK (1919-1942), JAROGNIEW WOJCIECHOWSKI (1922-1942).

Special examples of Christian attitudes toward the Jews are given by:

- SISTER JULIA RODZINSKA (1885-1942). A Dominican,

who gave her life in the death camp at Stutthof, voluntarily serving Jewish women dying of typhoid fever.

- SISTER EWA NOIDZEWSKA (1885-1942) and SISTER MARTA WOLOWSKA (1879-1942). Sisters of the Immaculate Conception from Slonin, shot and killed for saving Jewish children.
- REV. JOSEPH PAWLOWSKI (1890-1942). The Rector of the seminary in Kielce who endangered his life to save Jews and was killed for this in Dachau.
- SISTER KLEMENSA STASZEWSKA (1890-1943). Ursuline Sister from Rokiciny Podhalanskie, arrested for aiding young Jewish women. She died in the camp at Auschwitz.
- REV. MICHAEL PIASZCZYNSKI (1885-1940) The Rector of the seminary in Lomza, supporter of religious dialogue with Judaism. He referred to Jews as “our elder brothers in faith.” In the camp, when the Jews were refused a meal, he gave them his own meager ration of bread.

THE MESSAGE OF THE MARTYRS

Through this process of beatification, the Church is announcing the glory of the Savior who suffered and became victorious in the battle for faith through all the martyrs of the world at the end of our century. This is a century which will go down in history as a period of unprecedented degradation of humanity, as a time of barbaric wars of genocide perpetrated on entire nations, and of systemic hatred toward virtue, as well as of other crimes. This beatification is a great testimony to the work of the Church in Poland. These Martyrs are a prophetic “sign of defiance” and sign of hope that the love and power of our Savior is able to triumph even in a sea of hatred.

The Church in Poland is celebrating the millenium of martyrdom of St. Adalbert and is preparing itself for the celebration of 1,000th anniversary of his canonization (1999). Worshiping God for the tremendous labors of grace demonstrated in Him, the Church then perceives in the martyrdom of 108 of God's Servants, in the perspective of faith, the multiplied fruit of the seed sown by this holy patron.

Showing these fruits to God's people during St. Adalbert's Jubilee and on the eve of the Grand Jubilee of the Year 2000 will certainly be the source of new blessings. We may surmise that God's Providence has preserved this grand testimony of martyrdom by lay and clerical sons and daughters of the Church, especially for our time, to make us powerfully aware again of the truths about the general vocation to sainthood; to remind us that genuine and fruitful pastoral programs can be created and managed only by holy people. All our Martyrs, before they gave their blood in testimony during persecution, lived saintly lives committed to the cause of the HEAVENLY Kingdom. How much poorer would have been the dioceses and the religious families, and therefore the whole Church, without their service.

Our Martyrs confirm to the world the message that imitation of Christ in the spirit of generosity and perseverance to the end enables the human heart to break the barriers of egoism and personal weakness, rendering the highest sacrifice and fostering genuine love. That supreme sacrifice includes a love for our earthly Motherland and a great sense of social responsibility for building a true moral order in the world.

Rev. Dr. Tomasz Kaczmarek
Postulator of Cause of Beatification

CHAPTER THREE

BIOGRAPHY OF BLESSED GEORGE KASZYRA (1904-1943)

George Kaszyra was born on April 4, 1904, in the village of Aleksandrovo on the Zablocie estate. His parents, Taddeus and Maria, belonged to the Orthodox Church. He was baptized on the same day in the Orthodox Church in the village of Czeressy. His parents were farmers. In 1907 George's mother converted to Catholicism. She probably came from a family of Uniates, forcibly impressed by Czarist authorities into Orthodoxy. After the Ukase of Tolerance was promulgated by Czar Nicolas II in 1905, she could return to Catholicism, as many did at that time.

HIS CONVERSION AND VOCATION

At the age of 18, George converted to Catholicism. According to a document, he was accepted "into the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church on October 22, 1922" by Fr. Francis Hladki of the Congregation of St. Vincent de Paul in Vilnius, in the parish church in Miory where Fr. Hladki was probably preaching to the parishioners as a missionary.

According to one account, Fr. Witalis Chamionek, who had just come to Druja to become a vicar following his ordination, met the abandoned adolescent farmhand by chance and took him under his care. Father Chamionek, who used to be a farmhand, probably did this because he had pursued priesthood himself due to the personal interest of the local pastor and the mistress of an estate. Probably by meeting Fr. Chamionek, George became inspired to join the Marians in their monastery that had been established in Druja in 1923. In the fall of that year, George procured copies of his certificates of baptism and of conversion to Catholicism and,

according to his teacher, he presented himself at the monastery in the spring of 1924.

After a brief trial period, it was discovered that he was sufficiently capable of learning, and he was accepted to the newly opened high school in Druja where, in June of 1925, he graduated from the fourth grade.

Even before the end of the school year, student Kaszyra asked for admission to the Congregation of Marians of the Immaculate Conception. The novitiate had just opened in Druja on June 13, 1925. The temporary superior and pastor of Druja, Fr. Andrzej Cikoto, became the Master of Novices. Eight candidates began their novitiate, among them two priests. After finishing his novitiate on August 2, 1926, Kaszyra professed his first religious vows while continuing his studies. According to his high-school classmate from Druja, Wladyslawa Krzyzewska, George Kaszyra was a good classmate, helpful and respectful to all. He never did anything unpleasant to anyone. He was repeatedly elected to be a judge in the school's self-government, testifying to his righteous character and fairmindedness. He was a good mathematician.

Life in the Druja monastery was described by Ceslaus Sipowicz, a student at that time and later a Marian priest and a bishop: "Rising at 4 in the morning, especially in winter, was a great mortification and so were prayers and self-examinations on one's knees in a cold church or unheated chapel. The meals were modest and the various chores done by fathers, seminarians, and brothers were onerous. Youths could play ball or go for a walk only on Sundays and holidays because on work days, after lunch, everybody was working on the sawing, chopping, and stacking of firewood. There was nothing unusual about eight-day or one-day retreats every month. The vulnerable souls of the religious were also hardened by lectures and spiritual readings" (*Marians 1673-1973*, Rome, 1975, p. 235).

The year 1929 was of exceptional importance for George Kaszyra. In May he graduated from the high school and received his diploma. On August 2 he professed his permanent religious vows, committing himself forever to the Congre-

gation. After the summer holidays, he went to Rome. On October 31, he arrived at the Marian College at Piazza de San Nicolo da Tolentino. He took the basic course in philosophy at the papal university known as the Angelicum, run by the Dominican friars. During his first year, he had difficulty studying because he didn't know the language. Nevertheless, he finished the two-year curriculum in philosophy with "good" and "very good" grades.

In his religious life, he was above reproach. The superior wrote of him in his report: "His vocation is sure. He is committed to the Congregation. His piety is deep and sincere. He is very hardworking. He doesn't waste time. He is quiet, well-balanced, outgoing, serious, and humble. Everybody likes him, although people sometimes poke some fun at him because of his slow pace."

During a two-year stay in Rome, George Kaszyra became better acquainted with the Congregation. He met Marian seminarians from Poland, Lithuania, and the United States. He also grew intellectually. He had a special facility for strictly philosophical subjects. As soon as George finished studying philosophy, his superior from Druja, Fr. Cikoto, wrote to him to return from Rome, because the house in Druja could barely afford the fee for his maintenance there. Therefore, he returned to his homeland.

In the fall of 1931, he went to Vilnius to study theology. There he took lodging in the seminary. He was supposed to receive tonsure and minor orders on March 10, 1932, but somehow nobody had realized that he needed a dispensation because of his earlier affiliation with the Orthodox Church. So he had to wait until a later date. During Lent in 1934, he received subdiaconate and diaconate orders.

SERVING AS A PRIEST

Finally, on the day of Corpus Christi, June 20, 1935, he was ordained a priest in the Church of St. John by Bishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski. The next Sunday, June 23, he celebrated his

First Mass in the church in Druja. He was the first priest wholly educated in the Druja house. He wrote these words from the Imitation of Christ on the holy picture he was given as the souvenir of his First Mass: "You bestowed mercy on Your servant beyond all expectation and You bestowed on me grace and friendship beyond all my merits." These words are testimony to his spiritual maturity and his humility as a newly ordained priest.

After ordination, however, he did not stay in Druja as he had probably hoped to do. At that time, Fr. Cikoto bought three buildings with a garden on Zygmuntowska Street in Vilnius for seminarians from Druja and also as a rental property, which was meant to provide the basis for sustaining those seminarians. Initially, there were five of them, plus another brother who was studying music. Father Kaszyra was nominated superior of this house. Having not much work in this position, Fr. George joined the pastoral work in Vilnian parishes. The pastor praised him in a letter to Rome, saying that "he beautifully organized pastoral visits during Christmas time in the Dominican parish."

After a year in Vilnius, in 1936 Fr. Kaszyra returned to Druja where he became the Master of the Juvenat, educating future candidates to the Congregation. He also served as the prefect or teacher of religion in the high school. He had to devote considerable time to the latter job. However, his special task was to take care of the juvenistes and scholastics, that is, young religious who were still high-school students after their vows.

One of his former charges, Fr. Anthony Los, described him as follows: "As the Master of the Juvenat, he emphasized spiritual formation and communal life through prayer as well as through work and leisure. He approached us, his charges, in a direct manner, and he trusted us. He educated us by the example of his own life as a priest and religious. He was always present during spiritual exercises in the chapel, during meals, recreation, and work. He was quiet, calm, and kind. He did good deeds. He was not loath to do any work."

Father Kaszyra spent two years working in the high school, the Juvenat, the monastery, and also as a parish priest. Sudden-

ly, he was torn away from all these occupations by the governor of the Vilnius District, Louis Bocianski, who on May 30, 1938 decreed it was “forbidden to Fr. George Kaszyra, son of Thaddeus and Maria, to reside permanently within the state border zone.” Identical decrees were also served to other priests in Druja: W. Chamionek, J. Daszuta, and K. Smulko. They did not obey the governor, considering his decrees unlawful and in violation of the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical authority. After the deadline passed, on June 23 at 8:30 a.m., the priests were forcibly taken away from the monastery and driven by car outside of the border zone and prohibited from coming back. They went to Vilnius and then to their religious superiors in Warsaw. On August 9, Fr. Kaszyra was appointed superior of the monastery in Rasna, about 40 kilometers east of Siemiatycze, and the Rector of the Church of St. Ann. He assumed his duties in early September, 1938.

Between April 17-23, 1939, as a superior, Fr. Kaszyra participated in the Provincial Chapter meeting in Bielany near Warsaw. On August 16 of that year, he was again elected as superior in Rasna for a three-year period. On September 1, 1939 the war began. Soon a wave of Marian and other refugees had reached Rasna. On Sunday, September 10, Fr. Joseph Jarzebowski delivered a patriotic sermon in St. Ann Church. However, when the Soviet Army crossed the Polish border on September 17, the refugees from Rasna fell into disarray, fleeing either north or back west.

At that time, in addition to the superior there were two older priests and two brothers in Rasna. As usual, a few seminarians came for the summer holidays. The Bolsheviks, as soon as they arrived, began to introduce their own ways. They confiscated a large estate from the Marians and transformed it into a *kolkhoz* — a collective farm run by the state. The religious were chased away from the monastery as well. The younger ones left the monastery secretly, going west through Skorzec, as did the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist, who had come there from Druja.

Father Kaszyra also left Rasna and arrived in Skorzec in civilian clothes, in the afternoon of October 11, 1939. There he

spent more than two weeks, voluntarily doing physical work for his sustenance. However, he was not given much hope that he might be able to stay. In the chronicle of the Skorzec monastery, we read that on October 27, "Father Kaszyra with three Sisters and Br. Misiunas set out toward Lithuania, in an attempt to get closer to Druja." He never made it that far and had to stop in Lithuania.

Father Kaszyra, after arriving in Lithuania, managed to reach the Marians and, in 1940, after the Bolsheviks had taken over, he stayed in the Marian monastery at Kalwaria, in Samogitia. Expecting imprisonment or deportation to Siberia, he copied the text of the "Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary" from the Missal, and learned it by heart so as to be able to say Holy Mass in prison or in exile. Fortunately, he was saved from the Bolsheviks, even though, like other Marians, he had to be hidden by good and benevolent people.

After a year of German rule in Lithuania and Byelorussia (Belarus), Fr. Kaszyra appeared in Druja in June of 1942. Father Anthony Leszczewicz was also there at that time. He was spreading the Gospel among the Catholic population which for years had had no priests in the region north of the Dvina River, in Rosica, or the surrounding area, because it had all been Soviet territory before the war.

Father Leszczewicz took Fr. Kaszyra with him to Rosica. They were both natives of this area. They spoke Polish, Belarussian, and Russian, so they could communicate with everyone. Father Leszczewicz was traveling around, establishing new mission sites, and reopening closed chapels. Father Kaszyra continued to work in Rosica.

HIS MARTYRDOM

On Tuesday, February 16, 1943, the pacification began. People were rounded up in the church. The priests went with them voluntarily. They heard confessions, gave Communion, baptized, took the Profession of the Catholic Faith from the Orthodox, counseled the distressed, calmed and prepared peo-

ple for death. They were allowed to go in and out of the church freely.

Soldiers were separating younger and healthy persons for labor and driving them away to the train station, while the children and the older and frailer people were taken by sledges to nearby wooden buildings. There, they were locked in and shot or killed with grenades. The bodies of the dead were doused with gasoline and burned. Many people were burned alive. Those who tried to run away were shot. Children were thrown into the fire on bayonets.

It was in such circumstances that Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz died in the afternoon on Wednesday, February 17. As he was taken away, he bid goodbye to the Sisters, telling them to be brave and to pray. Later in the evening, Fr. George Kaszyra, who had been removed a few hours earlier, came back and said: "Father Leszczewicz is already dead and tomorrow I won't be alive either."

All night he stayed awake in a prayer vigil. He was prostrating himself, kneeling, and praying, according to Sr. Wirszuto who was present. She testified: "On Thursday, February 18, Fr. Kaszyra brought the Blessed Sacrament to the church and distributed it among us. At 10 o'clock he was taken away. He was ordered to get up on a sledge and that is how he was driven away, among other horse carts. He said farewell to us, then turned toward Druja and said: 'Pray and beg God's pardon for my sins, because I will be standing before God in judgment in a few minutes.' Father Kaszyra was in the first cart. They went uphill and turned right. A brief moment later fire erupted, and one of the shacks stood in flames."

Father Kaszyra, along with a group of approximately 30 people, was locked in a wooden house belonging to the Hadzuk family, on the right side of a side street, close to the main road. Some people were shot and killed by soldiers or died when a grenade was thrown inside. The building, doused with gasoline and then ignited, burned completely. The charred bodies were stacked in the backyard of the burned house. Lidia, whose mother owned the house and perished there, saw them as she

was driven to the railway station in Bigosovo. Some of the bodies had no heads.

According to testimony known today, soon after the pacification, inhabitants of Rosica, who had earlier managed to run away to the partisans in the forest, dragged the bodies that were not completely burned to a cellar in the middle of the yard. The entrance to the cellar was then covered with dirt and stones that had been salvaged from the foundation of the burned house.

PLACE OF MARTYRDOM VENERATED

After the war ended in 1945, this mass grave-cellar was given a somewhat more regular shape, and women used to go there to pray. They also lit candles and planted flowers, but they were soon forced to stop. Not until 1987 was a memorial established to the victims of the tragedy, including symbolic ashes from many execution sites. It was erected near the main road; some earth from this mass grave was also carried there. However, it is certain that in the mounded cellar on the Hadziuk property, the bones of Fr. George Kaszyra and the people who were burned with him are still resting. It is their collective grave.

In September of 1992, the canonization tribunal from Warsaw arrived in Rosica. They discussed the necessity of arranging this site with the pastor, Fr. A. Los, delegate of the Archbishop for the promotion of the cult of the Martyrs of Rosica, and with several laypeople. This work was accomplished in the second half of October. Earth was brought in; the small area adjacent to the mass grave was levelled and neatened. A tall wooden cross was also erected and, on All Saints Day in 1992, it was blessed by Fr. Los in the presence of a multitude of inhabitants not only from Rosica but also from more remote villages. As a result, this place is a holy site again.

Rev. Jan Bukowicz, MIC

CHAPTER FOUR

BIOGRAPHY OF BLESSED ANTHONY LESZCZEWICZ (1890-1943)

The Leszczewicz family lived in the Vilnius region in the parish of Wojstom, northwest of Wilejki. They were one of the few Polish Catholic families among a Belarussian population. Therefore, they usually spoke Belarussian.

Anthony was born on September 30, 1890 in Abramowiczyszczyna. He went to the three-grade school in Wojstom. He boarded next to the school together with his brother Vincent, and their father would bring them food from the family farm. Probably in 1906, Anthony was transferred to the St. Catherine High School next to the church of the same name in St. Petersburg, where he lived with his paternal uncle, George. Vincent joined him there later.

In 1909, Anthony applied to the theological seminary of the Mogilev archdiocese in St. Petersburg. He was accepted into the preparatory course because he didn't have his high-school graduation certificate. During the next four years of study, he went through the seminary curriculum of philosophy and theology. Both in the seminary and in high school, he was a diligent student, devoting all his time to his studies.

At that time, among the professors at the seminary were priests George Matulewicz, Francis Buczys, Fabian Abrantowicz, Sigmund Lozinski, Edward O'Rourke, and Francis Karewicz—future high dignitaries of the Church. The first two were already Marians and the third and last ones joined the Congregation later.

Graduate Leszczewicz received his tonsure and minor orders on October 14, 1912. He received his subdiaconate and diaconate in early 1914 and was ordained a priest on Easter Tuesday, April 14, 1914.

SERVICE IN THE FAR EAST

After the celebration of his First Mass, the young priest went off to his pastoral duties which he performed for almost 25 years in the Far East, never visiting his family or country. First he worked for a year as vicar in Irkutsk, where the memory of Marian Father Krzysztof Szewernicki, the apostle of Siberia, was still alive. In 1915-17, Fr. Anthony was the vicar in the city of Chita, where he also worked as the teacher of religion in one Polish and two Russian schools. In 1917, he was transferred to the Polish parish of St. Stanislaus in Harbin, China, but initially he was ordered to take care of the large Polish colony in a branch of that parish in a hamlet called Mandzuria, 866 kilometers from Harbin. There, too, he taught religion in Russian schools and in one Polish school. He also taught Latin in the Polish Henry Sienkiewicz High School.

Robert Wierzejski, a Marian who came to Harbin at the beginning of 1927 following a naturalist expedition to South America, also taught in the same high school for some time.

In 1924, the bishop of Vladivostok, Charles Sliwowski, created a second parish for the Poles at the Harbin harbor. It was dedicated to St. Josephat and assigned to Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz. Everything needed to be set up from scratch. Even though the cornerstone had been laid for the new church as early as 1922, work came to a standstill because of subsequent serious obstacles. The new pastor shifted the site of the church a little, and on September 5, 1924, he laid new foundations. The new church was consecrated on June 15, 1925. Designed by architect W. Jankiewicz, it was constructed of cedar in the neo-Gothic style. A rectory was also built in which the pastor immediately opened a kindergarten and an elementary school for poor children. The total construction cost was US \$7,000.

At the end of 1928, Fr. Fabian Abrantowicz arrived in Harbin, named by Pope Pius XI as Apostolic Administrator for Russian Catholics of the Eastern Rite. Soon after, a Marian religious house and a school for boys opened at the Eastern

Mission. Father Leszczewicz was in communication with Fr. Abrantowicz on many subjects, even more so because in the early 1930s Fr. Abrantowicz was also the Administrator for the faithful of the Latin Rite in Harbin. Above all, they renewed their personal relationship based on their old friendship in St. Petersburg.

After two decades of zealous and fruitful work, Fr. Leszczewicz had earned widespread love, respect, and recognition. His sensitivity to the needs of the poor, to whom he gave almost all that he owned, was also appreciated. He always covered the expenses related to high-school studies for a group of able but poor boys and girls.

BECOMING A MARIAN

The silver jubilee of Fr. Leszczewicz's priesthood was approaching when, in early 1937, he made a surprising decision to join the Marians of the Immaculate Conception. On April 20, 1937, he applied for permission to do so to Primate August Hlond in Poznan who, in a letter dated May 24 of that same year, made it known to him that he "puts no obstacle in the way of his intention to enter a congregation."

Before this request was sent, Father Andrzej Cikoto, Superior General of the Marians and a former classmate of Fr. Leszczewicz, came to Harbin for a visitation. They certainly discussed the matter. A Marian novitiate had been opened in Harbin at the end of 1937, and on December 4 two graduates of the Marian high school had been enrolled. However, Fr. Leszczewicz did not remain in the Harbin novitiate. On December 23, 1937, he left town discreetly, avoiding thanks and farewells. He first went to Japan and saw Tokyo. By January 23, 1938, he was already on his way to Rome where, on February 27, he received the papal blessing.

On March 3, 1938, he submitted a letter to the Superior General in which he "humbly requested admission to the Marian Congregation," indicating that he would like to go through the novitiate in Druja. After spending some time in

Rome, he went to Poland, where he spent about two weeks at his brother's house in Radom. He then visited his parents and brothers in Wilejka and in his native Abramowszczyzna. Finally, he went to the monastery in Druja on the western Dvina, at that time on the northeastern border of the Polish state. This outpost already had dark clouds gathering over it, and political repressions were imminent. In this situation, the Superior General of the Congregation, who was at Vilnius at that time, ordered the candidate to go through the novitiate in Skorzec near Siedlce, giving appropriate authorization to the superior there in a letter dated May 26, 1938, from Vilnius.

The next day, Fr. Leszczewicz appeared in Skorzec with this letter. On May 30, he started his retreat, and on the evening of June 7 he was admitted to the novitiate. The Master of Novices did not show any favoritism to the already mature priest, but assigned him chores like everybody else. In the *Chronicle of Novitiate*, we find the following note dated January 10, 1939: "The Rev. Master assigned novice brothers to early spring gardening chores under Br. Kazimierz Ogledzki: Fr. Leszczewicz and Br. Terlikowski are to make plant covers and Br. Turek with Br. Los will prepare the greenhouse windows." Of course, the novice also heard confessions in the church whenever necessary.

On April 13, 1939, the monastery in Skorzec solemnly celebrated the silver jubilee of Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz's ordination as a priest. The chronicler noted: "At the end, Fr. Leszczewicz thanked everyone for their congratulations and prayers, expressing his special affection for the novice brothers among whom God had allowed him, even though so late, to prepare himself for work in the Congregation."

Two months later, on June 13, his name's day, after concluding eight days of retreat, Fr. Leszczewicz professed his first religious vows before the Very Rev. Provincial. He remained in Skorzec for another two months, leaving Skorzec on August 24 and going to Druja to become the house manager.

THE WAR BEGINS

A week after Fr. Leszczewicz arrived in Druja, the Second World War began. Druja was captured by the Soviet Army. Father Leszczewicz did pastoral work and taught Russian in the Druja high school until it was closed by the authorities at the end of December of 1939. The Bolsheviks had confiscated the monastery's cattle, harvested grain and fodder right after they arrived, and in the spring of 1940 they took away arable land, meadows and orchards. Still, neither the priests nor the Sisters were chased out of the convent, although they were persecuted in various ways and were harassed by taxes. Their ability to do pastoral work and communicate with the population was restricted.

The Soviet Union was attacked on June 22, 1941, and the German Army advanced quickly, soon capturing the territory north and east of the Dvina River. When the front moved further east, mutual contacts increased between the populations of neighboring villages which had been separated by the border up until that time. The Catholics from beyond the Dvina requested that the Marians in Druja, where there were five priests, send them pastors, because they hadn't had any priests for the past eight years.

Father Anthony Leszczewicz was named superior of the mission. He set out beyond the Dvina to gain better insight into the situation and the possibilities of conducting missionary work. It was decided to undertake this work. The parish church in Rosica, about 30 kilometers north of Druja, was selected as the mission center. The Most Rev. Romuald Jalbrzykowski, Archbishop of Vilnius, sent priests there and encouraged the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist to set up religious education facilities. In September of 1941, the first Eucharistic Sisters arrived and began to teach religion.

On the Feast of Christ the King, the last Sunday of October 1941, Fr. Leszczewicz arranged a huge celebration in Rosica to which he invited priests from the Polish territories. Five of them came, as well as large crowds of people. In November, Fr. Leszczewicz settled in Rosica permanently. By the middle of

December, Fr. Felix Czczott, Fr. Walter Laszewski, and Seminarian Henry Tomaszewski had also arrived. Father Leszczewicz traveled around and established new locations where he set up chapels and the Sisters taught religion. Each Sunday a priest would arrive, perform the service and administer the Sacraments. After the parish priest in Dryssa was arrested, Fr. Leszczewicz went there every Sunday as well. Father Laszewski settled down in Zaszczyryn. Father Czczott worked as the pastor in Rosica and was rebuilding the church.

In June of 1942, Fr. Leszczewicz sent Seminarian Tomaszewski back to Druja and on July 22, returning from Druja after a few days stay, he brought back Fr. George Kaszyra, who had just arrived from Lithuania. He was born in that neighborhood and was fluent in Belarussian and Russian, so it would be easier for the two of them to do their pastoral work among the local population, most of whom used those two languages. Father Czczott was ordered back to Druja the same day.

In the summer of 1942, the activities of Soviet partisans beyond the Dvina intensified. Father Leszczewicz was discreetly warned before Christmas that shortly there would be punitive action against the partisans and the population who supported them, so it would be safer if the priests and Sisters left the territory. The priests went to Druja where it was decided that each of them, as well as each Sister, could make their own decision whether or not to stay, although the superiors encouraged everyone to go back. However, the priests decided that they could not leave the people during such difficult times, so they went back beyond the Dvina. Likewise, all the Sisters decided to stay with the priests and with the faithful.

HIS MARTYRDOM

In mid-February of 1943, the German command post set up quarters in Druja and the troops participating in the punitive expedition appeared in Rosica and the surrounding neighborhood. Father Leszczewicz was warned again, but he firmly refused to flee; so did Fr. Kaszyra and the Sisters.

On February 16, 1943, the pacification began. The military began burning buildings. The people were rounded up at gunpoint and taken to the church at Rosica. The priests were listening to confessions, giving Communion, baptizing, giving Last Rites, taking Professions of Faith, counseling the distressed, and preparing people for death. At the request of Fr. Leszczewicz, the Sisters were set free and let out of the church. The priests themselves did not want to abandon the people. Younger and stronger persons were transported to the camp near Riga, while children, the weak, and the old were taken in groups to the nearby wooden buildings. There they were locked inside and then burned. Some were shot or killed with grenades. Many perished in flames, burned alive. Together with the faithful, the priests also died. Father Leszczewicz was taken first, on February 17 in the afternoon. He bade farewell to the Sisters. He was joyous. He smiled and said: "Be brave and pray." Later that evening, Fr. Kaszyra told the Sisters: "Father Leszczewicz is already dead, and tomorrow I will die too."

Father Leszczewicz (like Fr. Kaszyra) fulfilled literally what Jesus Christ said about the Good Shepherd who does not save Himself by fleeing from the enemy leaving the sheep at his mercy, but instead gives His life in their defense. He did not leave the people who were locked up in the church, but rather he made the decision to remain with them till the end.

On the second day of the pacification, February 17, 1943, he was taken with a group of people on a sledge at the head of a long caravan. They went along the main road south toward the Dvina. After they passed the lake on the left side of the road and reached the top of the hill, all the sledges turned left and entered the manor complex, which was being guarded by a line of soldiers with rifles. People were pushed into the large wooden stable, a building about 30 meters long. When the stable was full of people, the door was barricaded. Soon after, grenades were thrown inside, the building was doused with gasoline, and then set afire. Whoever tried to run away was shot.

According to later accounts, one night soon after the murderous pacification, some men, who had managed to hide

themselves in the forest before this tragic action and then had joined up with the partisans, reached the place of execution. They dug holes in various places around the burned stable and buried the charred bodies of their relatives.

After the war ended in 1945, the inhabitants who had survived came back to Rosica. They straightened up the site of the stable, dug proper graves, and sometimes went there to pray for the dead, as well as to light candles and place flowers. After some time, the site of the old stable, now outside of the yard, was cleaned up and fenced with metal posts and a chain by permission of some “humane” manager. A concrete tablet was put in place with an inscription in Russian: “Here are buried 380 inhabitants of Rosica burned by German soldiers 16.2.1943.”

But religious observances at this site were not welcomed by the authorities. People became too afraid to go to the execution site any more. Someone toppled the memorial tablet and grass eventually grew over it. The crosses disappeared. The site was slowly returning to wilderness. Only in 1987 was a conspicuous tablet erected nearby on the main road, and symbolic ashes that had been collected from various execution sites were placed there.

SOME TESTIMONIES

Let us finish this exceptional biography with two testimonials concerning Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz.

Sister Teresa Krupka, a Sister of the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist, remembers that, during one of his lectures to the Sisters in Druja, Fr. Leszczewicz confessed that, during his studies in St. Petersburg, one of his priest-teachers had made an exceptional impression on him by his poverty — his threadbare robe and worn shoes. This priest had strengthened him in his vocation and inspired in him the desire to follow in his footsteps. He remembered him and spoke of him as a model to the Sisters almost 30 years later. We don’t know for sure who it was, but it probably was Fr. Sigmund Lozinski, future bishop of Minsk and now a candidate to the altars.

The second testimonial comes from Fr. Joseph Pietuszko. He remembers that when his family was living in Rosica for a brief time, Fr. Leszczewicz sometimes visited them in the evening and had long discussions with the father of the future Fr. Joseph. The boy was ten at the time, and he would listen to these conversations from his bed. Watching the priest and listening to what he was saying, little Joseph desired to become a priest like him. These are the three generations of priests who emulated each other in turn: Sigmund Lozinski, Anthony Leszczewicz, Joseph Pietuszko.

In connection with the canonization process begun on January 26, 1992 to recognize Fr. George Kaszyra and Anthony Leszczewicz as martyrs, in September of 1992 the canonization tribunal came to Rosica in order to visit the execution sites and the graves of the incinerated priests. Discussions were held then about restoring to worship the appropriate sites of martyrdom and the resting places of the cremated victims.

In the middle of October, a meeting was organized by the pastor of Rosica, Fr. Anthony Los, a Marian, in collaboration with school representatives and other officials and community leaders. As a result, the execution sites were cared for.

The site of the former stable was straightened up, as well as the grounds around it. The former memorial tablet was raised and a tall wooden cross was erected.

On All Saints Day in 1992, Fr. Anthony Los, the delegate of the Archbishop for propagating the cult of martyrs in the archdiocese, celebrated Holy Mass at the memorial site and delivered an appropriate homily in which he mentioned the fiftieth anniversary of the martyrdom of many inhabitants of Rosica and the surrounding neighborhood, and especially the two priests, Anthony Leszczewicz and George Kaszyra; and he consecrated the new cross. Several speeches were delivered. Sister Hedwig Wirszuto remembered the martyred priests. Choirs from Druja and Idolta performed sacred music. Then everyone went to the place where Fr. Kaszyra and those burned together with him had died. There, too, a new large cross was consecrated. It had been erected on the already arranged site

next to the communal grave. This event had been announced in advance and many inhabitants of the village, as well as people from the area, were in attendance.

Rev. Jan Bukowicz, MIC

CHAPTER FIVE

UNIQUE DOCUMENT: TRAGIC END OF THE MISSION IN ROSICA

The only surviving firsthand document concerning the tragic events which we are presenting in this book is preserved in the General Archives of the Marians in Rome. It was written in German on March 12, 1943, less than a month after the tragic events it describes. It consists of eight typewritten pages. The name of the place where it was written and the author's name are missing.

We don't know how the document found its way to the General Curia of the Congregation of Marians in Rome. Probably it is a copy. A stamp in Italian is affixed to it: "Received on July 26, 1943." The Superior General, Rev. Peter Buczys, annotated it as follows: *In tabularium secretum + P.B.* (for the secret archive). On the next page, under the text of the document, in German: "Caution: The name and title of the eyewitness temporarily cannot be disclosed." In the same handwriting, the names of priests which were spelled phonetically in the text, are spelled correctly as follows:

In the text: Cecot	In the note: Rev. Felix Czczcott, MIC
Kasira	Rev. George Kaszyra, MIC
Lascevski	Rev. Walter Laszewski, MIC
Liscevic	Rev. Anthony Leszczewicz, MIC

For the most part, the information contained in the document may have come from the Sisters, but there are also military details that the Sisters didn't know. The author of the document knew about the activities of the people, the lay of the land, and the situation at the front. But he did not know any details con-

cerning the deaths of the priests, or else he didn't want to reveal them.

According to the recollections of the Sisters, (Superior General Josepha Zuk and Paulina Latyszkiewicz), a few weeks after the Sisters returned from Rosica the same officer who drove the Sisters back brought a secretary with a typewriter to Druja. The Sisters were summoned individually and questioned about details of the events in Rosica. They were told to keep the hearing secret.

It can be surmised that the account of the hearing, later complemented and edited, found its way from a military office through the Office of the Nuncio (or else directly) to the Secretariat of State from which, after retyping and adding an Italian title, the copy was sent to the General Curia of the Marians.

TEXT OF DOCUMENT

March 12, 1943

By the end of 1942, the work in Rosica was getting more and more difficult, especially because people were afraid of the partisans and didn't dare to gather in large numbers for religion classes.

During the Christmas holidays, the superior of the Marians in Druja advised the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist, who were working in Rosica, to leave Byelorussia (Belarus). He met with the Mother Superior to discuss the matter and tried to persuade her to take the Sisters away. In Rosica, Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz said that he was determined to stay with the people no matter what might happen. So, the Sisters, who did not want to leave him alone, obtained the consent of their superior and also did not leave.

Seven Sisters stayed in Rosica with Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. George Kaszyra. They had come in the fall to replace Fr. Felix Czczott, who was having problems with both the partisans and the Germans because he only spoke Polish. For the same reason, a seminarian from Warsaw, who also

worked in Rosica for some time, was sent back to Druja. In addition, Fr. Laszewski remained in Zaszczyryn. He didn't speak Belarussian, so it was easier for him to live in this small out-of-the-way village.

Father Leszczewicz was constantly travelling, working in the territory where the partisans were active (Oswieja, Zamosze) as well as in the German areas (Dryssa, Bigosovo). Neither the partisans nor the Germans made his work difficult for him. He was the only priest there since the Russian clergy had all fled to the German occupied territory in Dryssa immediately after the partisans arrived. He was also known and well-regarded by the people.

In the middle of February in 1943, a military detachment came across the Latvian border, consisting of Latvian, Estonian, and Ukrainian "volunteers" wearing German uniforms and under the command of German officers. Ukrainians were expected to enter the territory under partisan control from the opposite direction.

At the beginning, some villages were bombarded with firebombs and burned. Latvian as well as Polish peasants were mobilized from the entire neighborhood to transport the soldiers. When the soldiers arrived at Rosica, part of the village was already in flames. One of the soldiers immediately started to ring the church bell. Nobody knew what it was supposed to mean. Father Leszczewicz explained later that he was warning the partisans in this manner. Even earlier, information had spread that wherever leaflets were distributed, the civilian population should leave the area of partisan activity until February 15. Whoever remained would be shot and killed. Of course, people preferred not to leave their homes and, in Rosica itself, leaflets had not been distributed at all.

Armed soldiers rounded people up and herded them into the church. Many people, fleeing burning houses, ran into the freezing cold with no clothing at all. New people from more remote places kept arriving. Panic reigned in the church, filled with women and children who were freezing and distraught. The staff set up its headquarters in the rectory and, with the exception of

the Germans, they behaved rudely. The priests were chased out of their rooms and had to stay in the office. All the Sisters were driven into the church. Later, Fr. Leszczewicz managed to obtain at least the release of one Sister as a housekeeper.

Then a German officer of higher rank allowed all seven Sisters to come from the church to the rectory; but when one of the soldiers tried to lead them out of the church, Latvian soldiers forced them back in. Finally, the German officer went himself and let the Sisters out. Fr. Leszczewicz told them to work as hard as they could. They cooked for the officers and for the people in the church. They baked one batch of bread after the other, carrying it to the people in the church and supplying it to the staff. The staff officers began to drink so heavily that the priests refused to let the Sisters go in to serve them. Instead, they did it themselves. The priests came and went freely to the church. There they calmed the people, brought them food and water, delivered sermons, baptized, and continuously listened to confessions. Many Orthodox accepted the Catholic Faith.

The soldiers told the people that they would be sent to a camp later. In the meantime, however, they were being held because everything had to be burned to make it impossible for the partisans to dig in again. Thus, the priests passed the entire night ministering to the people.

The next day, the soldiers selected the young and stronger persons, mainly women, since the men were all taken away by the partisans, and drove away with them, allegedly to a camp. In reality, they were sent to work. At that time, it became obvious to everyone that those who remained were going to die. People even more eagerly crowded around the priests for confession and baptism up until, finally, the punitive expedition arrived. The soldiers were sent further into the dense forests beyond Rosica to fight against the partisans. The Latvian cart drivers, meanwhile, were occupied only with robbery. They stole everything in the Sisters' quarters. They took all the bedding and other things. They loaded their carts full of stolen goods. In the church, the people, awaiting certain death, sang and prayed continuously. The mood of the people, though fearful, was solemn-

ly calm and composed. The singing of the children was heart-breaking.

At noon on the second day, they started to take groups of people on the Latvian sledges, allegedly to a camp. However, they did not drive toward the railway station but in the opposite direction. The sledges came back quickly — empty. Soon, numerous houses started to burn. Single shots rang out. According to the accounts of the horsedriers, as soon as people were herded into a building, it was set on fire. They shot or threw back into the fire whoever tried to run away. They bayoneted the children. Only a very few individuals were able to save themselves from the burning buildings. They brought in more groups, filled up buildings with them, and set them on fire. The drivers were ordered to confuse their passengers by changing direction at random. The fires that night and in the days that followed turned the entire sky blood red.

The officers, especially those who were not German, behaved less and less politely toward Fr. Leszczewicz, because they could see that he had the greatest influence on the people. They believed he was a provocateur, covertly sympathetic to the partisans, because he had been able to work here unobstructed the whole time. While the officers ate their lunch, Fr. Leszczewicz told the Sisters to serve lunch to the priests. Then he said he was going to change into dry socks because his feet were wet, though he quipped that it didn't matter if one dies with wet or dry feet. He also asked if one should eat or stay hungry before dying. Then he wound a scarf around his neck, ate a piece of smoked meat, and went out, bare-headed.

When he sat down in the sledge, one of the officers said to him: "Now you will show us the hidden warehouse." In fact, there was no warehouse. And so he went with the first group. Then, according to one of the horsedriers, he saw the priest standing next to the building and talking with an officer while people were going inside. When the sledges came back, a tremendous fire started where they had been. Without doubt, the building was in flames. Nobody knew if the priest was in it, but probably he was.

The second priest, Fr. George Kaszyra, was still in the church where he had also been detained. The Sisters asked the officers who were looking for him where the first priest had been taken. The officers responded by saying that they were the same as the priests, and that if the priests deserved to die, so did they and therefore they should be allowed into the church.

The chief officer had driven away with Fr. Leszczewicz. The interpreter answered the Sisters: "We only shoot the bandits, not the good people." To their question about where the priests were, he answered that Fr. Leszczewicz had gone to Bigusovo because he had asked to go there. But it was unlikely that he had left the Sisters and the people alone and had gone without saying a word. They were told that the other priest, Fr. Kaszyra, would come back at 6 o'clock. In fact, he did. His overcoat was full of dirt. Probably he had been interrogated in some basement. The Sisters calmed down a little when he came back. They wanted to know what the soldiers had asked him. He answered that he would prefer not to say anything because the Sisters too might be interrogated, and if they knew what he had said, it would be even worse for them. His first words after he came back were: "This is all a lie. Nobody is going to the camp. Everybody must die." He asked the Sisters three times if they were ready to die.

The next morning, he wanted to say Holy Mass once more, but he could not get into the sacristy because Fr. Leszczewicz had had the key in his pocket. Then he said that he would go at 10 o'clock and then the Sisters would go at 11. However, he went in the afternoon. On that day, many more soldiers arrived and there were the biggest fires.

The officers advised the priest to take something to eat with him, just in case, because he would go with the others to the camp. The Sisters also wanted to give him some underwear and food for Fr. Leszczewicz, but the officers repeated several times that he didn't need anything and he would receive everything from the government. The Sisters concluded from this that Fr. Leszczewicz was no longer alive, but that Fr. Kaszyra would be saved and sent somewhere. As the Sisters prepared a small suit-

case for Fr. Kaszyra, he told them slowly: “Why do I need this if in a few moments I won’t need anything at all? Watch where they take us, toward the railway station or elsewhere, and you will know what will happen to me.” Finally, he took some food and his breviary.

From among the people who kept coming, the young and strong continued to be selected and sent to the station. But Fr. Kaszyra was driven, together with the elderly and the children, in the opposite direction toward buildings that were filled with people and then set on fire.

Finally, the Sisters too were ordered to leave, but the officers were polite to them and helped them to get on the sledges. They were given three sledges just for themselves, not together with other people. No officer or soldier accompanied them. That evening they arrived in some small town. However, they didn’t know which one. They spent the night there in the German command post. They were given supper and some straw to make beds for themselves.

When they left Rosica, the Sisters were first told to take food for three hours, then for five hours, then for 24 hours, and finally for three days. Ultimately, they were told not to take anything because they would probably have to walk part of the way. They just didn’t know what to do. One of the Sisters took a jar of rendered pork fat, another some dried sausage. The next day, in the morning, the Sisters were given breakfast. Of course, they hadn’t slept all night. Then a car arrived and took the Sisters further on to some river. On the other side of the river, disbelieving their own eyes, the Sisters saw the church in Druja, so they were at the bank of the Dvina on the Latvian side of the border.

There horse cabs, summoned by telephone, were already waiting, and they took the Sisters across the ice to Druja, all the way to the convent. The Sisters in the Druja convent could see the fires in the neighborhood of Rosica, so they were all gathered in the chapel in ardent prayer for their own Sisters and for the Fathers in Rosica. Suddenly, they heard the sound of the horses’ hooves in the courtyard and they saw the seven Sisters

coming in. Mother Superior had to sign a document for the German officer that she had received the Sisters back whole and healthy.

Some time later, two Sisters went to the village of Bigusovo to get information about the priests and the two missing Sisters. They were told that a cart driver saw a priest from Rosica standing among the young people taken for labor. In Indra, another cart driver allegedly saw two priests from Rosica being driven to the command post or else to the police. Later, the pastor from Indra also came to the command post to find out any news. He was told harshly: "Don't you know that everybody was sent to Druja and that's where they are." And the railway station manager in Indra said that very few people were crossing the Russian border. One "priest" was probably shot and killed by the Estonians because he was not really a priest but a provocateur. Another one was taken away to Germany, and nothing is known about the third one.

At the Latvian police post in Indra, they knew nothing about the priests. Later a policeman said that two of them were Poles and they had been shot and killed, but one was a Latvian. He was alive and now in Latvia. Still others were arguing that two priests with briefcases went to the German command post — or that just one priest was carrying a briefcase.

A week later, the news arrived that the two other Sisters who had stayed in a remote outpost, as well as the priest of that parish, Fr. Laszewski, had been saved. When they understood what was going on around them, Father Laszewski gathered the people together and they headed toward the Latvian border in a procession, praying under a white banner. In this way, they managed to avoid the punitive expedition and to save their own lives. However, they were imprisoned in the jail in Dzwinsk. There the Dean from Aglona vouched for the priest and both Sisters. Therefore, their release may be assumed.

CHAPTER SIX

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE PASTORAL WORK OF THE SISTERS IN ROSICA SISTER JOSEPHA ZUK, SJE

In 1941, when the Germans occupied our Polish territories and also some Russian areas during World War II, the house of the Handmaids of Jesus in The Eucharist in Druja on the Dvina River survived the tempest of the war untouched, like Noah's Ark during the Flood. Approximately 40 Sisters lived in the house, together with the postulants and novices, and for a while some young boarders as well.

After the Germans occupied a significant part of Russia, people from the Russian territories came to the Polish areas to seek God and the Church. They asked to be taught about God and to be prepared for the Holy Sacraments. The Marians and Eucharistic Sisters in Druja were glad to fulfill their requests. Those people, though, wanted even more; they wanted the priests and Sisters to go to the Russian territories occupied by the Germans to teach religion there to all people of good will and to prepare them for the Holy Sacraments. The German authorities did not forbid them to do so. A few of our Eucharistic Sisters — Sister Apolonia Pietkun, Sister Hedwig Wirszuto, Sister Elizabeth Woronko, Sister Maria Jasinska — went there to find out about the working conditions and then came back to report to their superiors.

Mother General Josepha Zuk went to Vilnius to discuss this work with Archbishop Romuald Jalbrzykowski. After obtaining his approval, she called a meeting of the General Council of the Congregation. At that time, Sister Apolonia Pietkun was the First Counselor. The authorities of the Congregation decid-

ed to send several Sisters to begin teaching religion to the people in the Russian and Latvian territories near the Polish border.

From August to October of 1941, Sister Wirszuto and Sister Jasinska worked in nearby villages, and they reported to Bishop Sloskan in Riga. Sister Pietkun and Sister Woronko worked in the Soviet territory in the villages of Baliny, Nawiczki, and others. Working conditions were very difficult. The Sisters suffered poverty and misery along with the people. Despite this, each of them was eager to carry on this work.

After two or three weeks, the Sisters were taking organized groups of people by boat across the Dvina to the nearby parish in the Polish territory where priests were hearing their confessions and giving them other sacraments. Fr. Leon Lawcewicz and the Marian priest, Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz, were in Leonpol.

That winter, the Marians came to work, at first in Rosica in the Soviet territory. Later they took over Zaszczyryn, Zamosze, Oswieje, Baliny, and Dryssa. For the most part these were outposts where there were churches or chapels and rectories for the priests. There were houses, too, for our missionary Eucharistic Sisters from which they traveled around. They would go to other areas to work for two or three weeks preparing children and adults to receive the Holy Sacraments.

After each group took its examinations, the priests came out from the larger posts. The people would prepare a temporary chapel in a fire station or watch station, and the priests would baptize, hear confessions, say Masses, bless marriages, and in general minister to the people who had been prepared for the rites. As soon as the work was finished in one village, the horse carts from another village were already waiting for our missionaries to continue on and prepare the next group. Working with the priests made things a little easier because it was not necessary to transport the prepared people to the Polish territory.

The missionary sisters were the following: Apolonia Pietkun, Elizabeth Woronko, Hedwig Wirszuto, Maria Jasinska, Josepha Lowkis, Albina Prytycka, Adela Moroz,

Katarzyna Ugarenko, Hedwig Trubilo, and others. Sisters usually went to the outposts in pairs; sometimes three would go together. The Sisters who stayed at home in the main facilities taught religion to individuals by preparing people for marriage, the sick for the Last Rites, and by ministering in other ways.

Of the Marians, the first to come were Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. Walter Laszewski, and, after some time, Fr. Felix Czeczott and Seminarian Henry Tomaszewski, and finally Fr. George Kaszyra.

The Marians performed their priestly functions in all the outposts. They directed the repair of ruined churches or chapels in Rosica, Dryssa, Oswieja, and Baliny. Elsewhere they arranged sometimes large, sometimes small chapels in appropriate buildings, such as firehouses or watch stations. They organized temporary parishes and also created parish committees. Every day and especially on Sundays and holy days, they said Masses in those churches and chapels; in a word, they carried out pastoral work for the local inhabitants.

For the most part, the Eucharistic Sisters were busy teaching religion in parishes adjacent to the churches, but they also traveled around organizing something like catechism classes in the private homes of the parishioners. During the day, they taught schoolchildren, and in the evening they taught adults; teenagers were taught catechism separately. The curriculum for each group usually took from two to three weeks. The objective was to prepare the faithful as quickly as possible to receive the Holy Sacraments and to enable them to get the benefit of confession and Holy Communion and to participate in Holy Mass.

In addition to teaching religion, the Sisters took care of the churches and chapels by keeping them in good order. Working with the young girls, they provided altar decorations. They sewed chasubles and other church vestments, banners, standards, and altar canopies. Because it was impossible to obtain appropriate materials, the girls brought white sheep's wool from their homes and, under the direction of the Sisters, they wove cloth on old, rustic looms to use in their projects. They also made linen thread which they then colored with paint or

pencils. They made tassels from yellow or orange thread. The girls even donated their own little silk shawls, hats, and blouses. They unravelled them, and then they dyed the thread an appropriate color and embroidered delicate items with it, such as tabernacle covers or humeral veils.

Moreover, the Sisters organized groups of little girls to strew flowers during processions, and adolescent girls were encouraged to participate in adoration and processions and to carry flags and banners. They also organized choirs to sing during services, especially for annual holidays and celebrations.

The Sisters who taught religion in makeshift catechism classes benefited from Holy Mass and Holy Communion once or twice a week — on Sunday and sometimes also on Saturday. They went to confession in central locations, made one-day retreats, participated at Holy Mass and received Holy Communion, as well as took part in communal prayers once a month. Only the Sisters who worked in the main facilities where the priests said Holy Mass had the benefit of daily Mass. Sisters who worked in the outposts did not have such an opportunity.

Therefore, during the week, they conducted their exercises in the following manner: They arose early each morning and performed their spiritual exercises and prayers together. Instead of Holy Mass, they celebrated the Way of the Cross, thus participating spiritually in the Most Holy Sacrifice and joining the Eucharistic Christ through spiritual communion. They recited the rosary, prayed to the Holy Spirit, and performed other devotions. Then the people who were so poor due to the wartime conditions would prepare the Sisters a modest breakfast. In the meantime, the school-age children gathered in someone's house. The Sisters took care of the children for the entire day with short breaks and one longer lunch break. They only finished their work late in the evening, and they kept doing this every day for several weeks.

Adults came for classes in the early evening and would attend two or three sessions. At the same time, another Sister taught the young people in another house or another room.

After the training period, the priests arrived and administered the final examinations to the students. The next day they heard confessions, baptized, blessed marriages, and celebrated Holy Mass in which all the inhabitants participated and received Holy Communion together with the Sisters. After Mass, the priests, teaching Sisters, the church committee, and others would have a communal breakfast.

After breakfast, the assembled local population bade farewell to the missionary priests and Sisters, often with tears in their eyes, crying and singing hymns such as: "Jesus, don't leave us" or "Beloved Mother" and the like. The missionary Fathers usually went back to their main posts, returning to pastoral duties. The missionary Sisters went on to their next teaching post to start their work all over again, to teach the next group and prepare them for examination. There, again, the people greeted them with joy, welcomed them to their huts, and shared their modest food, literally just black bread.

The study groups consisted of 20 to 60 people, depending on the site and local conditions. The mission posts, serving as temporary parishes, were looking better and better in every respect and were becoming more and more prosperous owing to the efforts of the priests and Sisters and the generosity of the parishioners.

Plans were made to extend the mission's territory and gain access to Vitebsk and Smolensk and wherever else it would become possible. However, in the middle of 1942 and early 1943, our work met with more and more obstacles. During that time these territories were increasingly under the control of Soviet partisans, so that in the end the missionary Sisters could not go to their outposts any longer, but had to work in the main quarters. Even there, there were obstacles.

It was decided to withdraw some of the teaching Sisters for a while. Some priests left too. The following stayed until the end: Fr. Walter Laszewski, Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz, and Fr. George Kaszyra. The Sisters who also stayed were: J. Wirszuto, K. Ugarenko, R. Marcilonek, A. Prytycka, J. Lowkis, E. Woronko, J. Trubilo, A. Moroz, P. Latyszkiewicz.

During those last months, the work was very difficult because Soviet partisans were roaming at night and imposing their rule, which was extremely hard on the local population. Meanwhile, during the daytime, the German military staff was conducting a reign of terror. Priests and Sisters could only do some work in the largest posts, and even then with great difficulties and in considerable danger.

The local military authorities discreetly let Fr. Leszczewicz know that there was imminent danger in this area and that it would be better to withdraw from these posts. Father informed the other priests and our Sisters about it. He also said that Father Superior advised them to withdraw from the work, but that he didn't make it an order. Therefore, Fr. Leszczewicz decided not to withdraw as he did not want to leave the people orphaned but to serve them in their misery. Two other priests remained with him: Laszewski and Kaszyra.

In January of 1943, Mother General went to talk with the Sisters in these territories. In discussing the matter, she tended to encourage the Sisters to withdraw from their posts. She left it up to them, however, because she knew it would really be regrettable to abandon those people in such a difficult situation. The Sisters made a voluntary choice and decided that they would stay with the Marians in these posts, despite the persecution in order to help people stand by God up till the end.

However, the Marian priests and our Eucharistic Sisters did not continue to work there for long, because by mid-February of 1943, the German military had arranged a roundup throughout the territory, allegedly against the partisans but in fact against the whole population of the occupied area where our missions were active. The partisans went into hiding, of course, and the troops, who were assaulting the whole area between the former Polish and Latvian borders assaulted the defenseless local population. After a few days, they rounded up people. Young people and healthy adults were taken in great numbers by train to Germany for labor, while the old, sick, and children were led to various barns and houses. There they were shot, doused with flammable liquids, and set on fire. This

inhuman work lasted about two weeks until the whole area was empty.

During this fury, Fr. Laszewski and two Sisters, A. Woronko and J. Lowkis, were working in Zaszczyryn near the Latvian border. The Latvian militia arrested them together with many civilians and drove them to a temporary prison in Lithuania where they stayed for about two months and were subsequently released. Father Laszewski then went to the Marian monastery in Latvia and the Sisters went back to Druja.

In Rosica, there was a large church that had been repaired by the Marian priests. This church was filled with people even before the roundup. There were also priests there: A. Leszczewicz and G. Kaszyra, and six Sisters who would soon be moved from the church to the rectory where they ran the kitchen for the military until the inhuman work was finished.

All day and all night during those few days, the people gathered in the church were confessing, receiving Holy Communion, praying, and crying; the priests were preparing them for inevitable death. The Sisters working in the kitchen could visit the people locked in the church and bring them food from the rectory. They took them pails of milk, coffee, and whatever they could. After a few days, the roundup was complete. Those able to work were taken to the trains; and the older people and children, together with Fr. G. Kaszyra, were taken to several buildings and burned alive. Father A. Leszczewicz was taken away somewhere as well.

When there was no priest left, the Sisters refused to work in the rectory and asked the German officers to let them join the people locked in the church because they wanted to share their fate. However, the chief officer said that they would be driven to Latvia and then to Druja. The Sisters agreed, even though they did not believe what he said.

So, the Sisters were given a few horse carts and a German or Latvian escort, and they were taken to Przydrujsk in Latvia. From there they were taken on a truck across the frozen Dvina to their convent in Druja. Together with the Sisters, two German officers and a male secretary went to Druja. An officer

wrote a protocol certifying that six Sisters — R. Marcilonek, A. Moroz, A. Prytycka, J. Trubilo, K. Ugarenko, J. Wirszuto — were brought from Rosica to the convent in Druja in good health and given into the care of Mother Superior General. She had to sign the protocol, and then, with great joy and excitement, she welcomed those Sister missionaries who had been so nearly lost and now were found. All the Sisters in the house embraced our missionaries who had been so very tried and tormented and seemed doomed to die.

Several weeks later, the same German officer came again, this time with a female secretary and a typewriter. Each Sister who had been brought from Rosica was summoned in her turn to the interview room. Then, in the presence of the Superior General, they were questioned. They were questioned especially regarding: how long each had been in the convent; who had sent her to work to those areas; how long she had been working there. Of course, each Sister testified that it was the Mother Superior General who sent her to do the work. When the German officer and the secretary finished their investigation and wrote the protocols, they went away, announcing that they would return in a few weeks concerning the same matter. However, they never came again. They also asked about Fr. Leszczewicz, especially about what he was doing in those territories and whether he had any contacts with the partisans.

A few days after they returned to Druja, our Sisters — some of the ones who had come back from Rosica — went back to that neighborhood, to the sites where the people had been burned, hoping to find someone they knew. They were trying to recognize the burned people by articles such as clothing but they did not have enough time. A German or Latvian patrol spotted them and chased them away, threatening to kill them if they ever came again. They said that all those people who had been killed were only bandits.

When they came back, the Sisters described what they were able to see at the fire sites. Human skeletons were lying on the ground in rows, as if arranged, all with their heads in one direction, necks outstretched, heads raised, skulls shining, gray in

color. Someone's scorched but not burned hand was lying separately, with a strongly clenched fist and a rosary in it, also unburned. Some corpses could be recognized by their clothing because there were fragments of their clothes that had remained unburned on the side next to the ground. For example, one woman was wearing a blouse, a sweater and a jacket: part of one side was not totally burned and underneath were pieces of this clothing. If the Sisters had had more time, they might have found someone, but time ran out. Looking at this terrible sight, the Sisters saw themselves in these corpses because the same fate had been intended for them, but they were saved by some miracle. We believe that this grace was obtained for them by Fr. A. Leszczewicz because he was very godly and therefore the Lord God granted his prayer.

For a long time afterward, the Sisters intensely relived those terrible scenes because they were extremely grieved for those innocent people of good will and especially for the godly priests who worked on their behalf, making great sacrifices. God showed His grace to these people in that the priests and Sisters had been able to prepare them for the Holy Sacraments. They were so eager to learn religion and to partake in the Holy Sacraments, as if they had a premonition of what was in store for them.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF EDUCATOR OF RELIGIOUS YOUTH FATHER ANTHONY LOS, MIC, DRUJA

I knew Fr. George Kaszyra in Druja from 1932 to 1938. I was then a student in the King Stephen Batory Marian High School. At the same time, I was a postulant. During the early years of my stay in Druja, Fr. George Kaszyra was the teacher of religion for the Marian seminarians in Vilnius. I met him only during semester breaks when he used to come to Druja. When I was in grades 6-8, he was the Master of Postulants and the teacher of religion for the lower grades of the high school.

As the Master of Postulants, he emphasized spiritual development. Every day we had common prayers in the morning, and in the evening, meditation and Holy Mass. Our confessor was the pious Fr. Witalis Chamionek, to whom we confessed regularly. For me personally and I believe for others as well, confession was a very emotional experience: preparation, confession itself, and compliance with the confessor's instructions. This was the result of the general atmosphere prevailing in the Druja monastery and among the postulants for which Fr. George was personally responsible.

Our direct supervisor was a religious brother, a student in the highest grade, who attended school with us. The Father Director, as the teacher of religion in the high school, was in constant contact with the professors, and therefore he kept himself informed about the progress of our studies.

He treated us, his charges, casually and with much trust. He educated us by his example of religious and priestly life. We could see that he valued communal life. He was always present during spiritual exercises in the chapel, during breaks between classes, during work and meals. The Fathers and Brothers

created a true family atmosphere. It was reflected in our communal evening leisure activities in the refectory during the winter, or outdoors under the famous linden tree on the bank of the Dvina River in other seasons, or when we played volleyball together. Father George was always present.

During the afternoon break in our classes, we performed physical work. The monastery in Druja had a big farm which partly supported the high school. Father George induced us to work there and worked with us himself.

The educational agenda of Fr. George included prayer, the Sacraments, participation in the Holy Mass, exposure to spiritual leadership, and common participation in leisure and work.

He was trying to help the religious community through his physical labor. He was never reluctant to do any work. When the war forced him to go to Skorzec (at that time I was a novice there), while enjoying the hospitality under such difficult conditions, he took to physical labor. He devoted his free time to chopping wood so as not to be a burden to the monastery. There is similar testimony from some witnesses in Rosica who saw him performing physical labor. He tried to earn his keep with his own hands.

Father George was calm and serene. He could only do good deeds. At the same time, he was not very courageous. He was very much afraid of the Bolsheviks. He ran from them on foot from Rasna near Brest on the Bug River to Skorzec near Siedlce and then, when they approached Siedlce, he kept fleeing all the way to Lithuania.

In 1938-39, I was in the novitiate together with Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz in Skorzec. I was a high-school graduate and he was a priest with 25 years of experience as a missionary in Harbin, Manchuria, working among Polish emigrants. He was quiet, calm, and helpful. I can see him even today in a white apron, smiling and joyous. He was serving us young boys in the refectory. To serve others, to serve with joy, was his first principle. He left his parish in Harbin and joined the Marians because he saw their work at the mission there.

I know about the events in Rosica from people I met in the area who were direct witnesses of the events or from those who had been told about them.

In May, 1942, Rosica had become a dangerous partisan territory. [The monastery in] Druja was very well informed about the situation in Rosica by the priests and the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist. In fact, the punitive company consisting of Germans, Latvians, and Estonians was stationed in the Druja monastery preparing for action. At that time, Fr. Walter Laszewski was withdrawn from Rosica by his superiors and sent to Zaszczyryn, which was thought to be a safer place. Father Czczott was sent back to Druja. Father Anthony Leszczewicz, the superior, stayed on in Rosica. It was better that local priests, rather than those from Poland, be in Rosica, but the only native was Fr. George Kaszyra and so his superiors sent him to Rosica to help Fr. Leszczewicz.

Father George obeyed the order and went. He surrendered to the will of his superiors, although it was not easy for him because of his fearful disposition. It was a heroic act on his part. He went there and stayed until the end. Soldiers from the punitive company would come during the day and frighten people. At night, the partisans came frightening the people even more. They had to carry on and fulfill their pastoral duties in continuous anxiety and fear amidst all kinds of interrogations.

On Sunday, February 14, 1943, Fr. Leszczewicz was in Dryssa. The inhabitants warned him and wanted to make him stay because they knew about the punitive company already approaching from Latvia. However, Fr. Leszczewicz went back because, as a pastor and a superior, he had to go back to Rosica. He belonged there. The faithful were waiting there, along with the Sisters and his vicar, Fr. George. He was responsible for them, so he went back. On the road, he was stopped by partisans. They checked his ID, but they let him go because he was a priest. Any contact with the partisans was punishable by death.

On February 14, 1943, Fr. George Kaszyra was in the church in Rosica hearing confessions and saying Holy Mass. Two partisans came into the church. They stayed quietly for a

moment and then went out. It was not easy to hold fast in this situation. It was an act of heroism for the priests and the Sisters.

The situation was becoming dangerous. Father Leszczewicz felt responsible for the lives of the Sisters because it was at his request that the superiors sent them there to work. He decided to send them back to Druja. The Eucharistic Sisters declared that they wanted to remain with the priests. They didn't want to abandon their post and their people, so they asked the Mother Superior to give her consent. She did so, and so they remained at their post in Rosica. The priests also had the opportunity to leave Rosica, but they didn't. They could also have run away in to the forest, as many inhabitants of Rosica had done, but they did not take this opportunity either.

On February 16, 1943, the punitive action began. The first group of people was rounded up in the church. Among them were the priests and Sisters. Father Leszczewicz asked for the Sisters to be released. Later the same day, an officer read a list of Sisters and told them to leave the church and go to the rectory. From that moment on, the Sisters were free, and they could move without hindrance as the priests did. The Sisters began to bring help to the people imprisoned in the church. The priests were doing pastoral service while the Sisters were distributing bread, bringing water and milk, mostly for the children.

On February 18 at 1 p.m., horse carts and soldiers were assigned to escort the Sisters to Druja, all the way to their convent. The superior was requested to confirm that the Sisters had really been returned. The priests remained and went voluntarily with the people who were to be burned. Eyewitnesses and others who heard about it from eyewitnesses at the Satsapils camp near Riga, confirm this. Riga was the first camp to which the people who had been saved from burning were sent. It was reported there that the priests were released but remained voluntarily, saying: "Where the people are, we are. If you don't release innocent people, do not release us either."

Many eyewitnesses have already died. It is generally believed that Fr. Leszczewicz and Fr. Kaszyra were zealous, devoted, and self-sacrificing shepherds who did not abandon

their flock. Instead, they tried to save them, and when they failed, went with them to their deaths out of love for Christ and their fellow man. They are martyrs for the Faith.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT FROM THE NOOK NEAR THE ALTAR OF THE MOTHER OF GOD JULIA BOBOK, KRZYWOSIELCE

My brother Victor, born in 1927, belonged to the partisans, and he urged our mother to save herself by running into the forest with us, her three children. This is what we did. Many others did too. They ran away to Latvia or to neighborhoods that were free of partisans. People knew about the imminent danger, but Mother stayed at home with us. On February 16, 1943, a group of mothers, children, and old people were rounded up by soldiers and herded toward Rosica, 20 kilometers away. Some were riding in carts, others were walking. During the march, a German officer allowed us to bake some potatoes for the children. When we were led into the church in Rosica, we heard loud wailing, crying, and lamenting. We found a nook for ourselves by the altar of the Mother of God.

The priests, Anthony Leszczewicz and George Kaszyra, were also in the church with us. They were celebrating Holy Mass, giving Holy Communion, listening to confessions, baptizing children, blessing and calming people in despair, and distributing bread among the children. They were supported in this by the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist who had earlier been teaching religion. At one moment, when one of the priests was celebrating Holy Mass, shooting erupted. The priest did not stop, and he did not leave the altar. He prayed and continued to celebrate the most holy Sacrifice.

The soldiers started to separate us into groups: the right side of the church — to camp, the left side — for burning. A policeman hit my mother with a rifle and threw her over to the group for burning. A German soldier lifted Mother, who was bleed-

ing, and assigned her to a camp together with us.

The priests were well aware of the threat and danger, but they did not save themselves by running away. They did not abandon their flock, but instead they stayed at the post assigned to them by their superiors. In their priestly consciences, they regarded this as their holy obligation arising out of their vocation. They stayed to help us. They did so out of love for Christ and their fellow men. This was the prevalent opinion predominant among the people, both those condemned to burning and the survivors in the camp. They went to death voluntarily.

CHAPTER NINE

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT TO A MAN OF DEEP FAITH FR. GEORGE BRIANCHANINOFF, MIC, MELBOURNE

I don't know the details concerning the departure of Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz from Harbin to Poland. I was still very young then and the Fathers did not discuss the reasons for their departure with us. When I later heard that Fr. Anthony joined the Marian novitiate I was glad, because I always considered him a priest worthy of respect. When I heard the news about his tragic death with his parishioners, I was not surprised either, because he was a man of strong character and deep faith.

I have long been convinced that not only Fr. Anthony but also Fathers Andrew Cikoto, Fabian Abrantowicz, and Walter Mazonas are real martyrs deserving to be raised to the altar. In my morning and evening prayers, I ask their support in daily difficulties and I am sure that their prayers are pleasing to God.

Father Anthony departed to begin his novitiate in Poland shortly before my decision to join the Marians. He deserved to go back to his own country after so many years and to go through the novitiate there. He had been a friend of our Fathers in Harbin for a long time, and that probably contributed to his joining the Congregation. They shared a language and a native land.

Father Anthony taught me Latin. He was conscientious, fair, and showed no favoritism. During the Latin examination, he asked me about the comparative and superlative in translation from Russian into Latin. I used the comparative, he corrected me, instructing me to use the superlative. One of the examiners then explained to him that *bolshuyu* and *menshuyu* should be translated as *minorem* and *maiolem* rather than "minimum"

and “maximum.” Father Anthony, who spoke Russian well but not perfectly, agreed immediately. That made a great impression on me, a lad of 15 or 16. Strange that I remember this event after 50 years.

I am prepared to confirm under oath the truthfulness of everything I wrote above.

CHAPTER TEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF A PRIESTLY VISIT FELICIA JURAHA, ROSICA

When the priests from Druja came to Rosica, religious life in the parish revived. People began to come to the church in throngs. The priests were very accessible, and they spoke our local language. They began to visit the villages. Joseph Szukiel took Fr. Leszczewicz to my native village Bandzile. First, people met together in one house for common prayer. Then the priest chatted with everyone. Only later did he visit each house. When he came to visit us, I remember that he asked if the parents were married, if the children were baptized, and if we went to confession. I was 25 years old then, and I had never been to confession. Then he said to me: "Before you confess, you must first be well prepared, learn how to pray, and know the main truths of faith. "I, too," said Fr. Leszczewicz, "before I decided to become a priest, first had to consider it thoroughly, and only then did I make my decision." He always tried to notice everyone, whether it was a child, an adult, or an elderly person. He didn't wait for someone to greet him; he would speak first.

My grandfather, Anthony Juraha, told me that when he went to Rosica as a cart driver, he was a witness when the Germans ordered the priests to walk away from the people and not join any group. But the priests didn't want to abandon the people. Being good pastors, they went to their deaths voluntarily, along with their parishioners, out of love for their fellow man and Christ. Therefore they died as martyrs for the Faith.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE EXPERIENCED PASTOR ANNA KRUMIN, ROSICA

I knew Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz very well. He was an active priest. He visited his parishioners. He visited my parents' house as well. He spoke the local language. He was accessible and serene. He loved children and old people. He liked to tell stories and did it in an interesting manner. He could also engage the interest of young people. He was an experienced pastor. He had lived in many countries. He had seen much, and he shared his experiences. Everybody loved him, and he admired us because we had been able to preserve our deep faith for seven years without a priest.

Owing to the zealous missionary work of Fr. Leszczewicz and Fr. Kaszyra, a great religious revival took place during the year and a half of their pastoral efforts. By their piety and zeal, the priests brought us even closer to God, and they awakened special devotion for the Virgin Mary. All this was ordained by God's providence to prepare us well to offer a pure and immaculate sacrifice.

God assigned a difficult role to them, but I believe that they performed this task well. They did their missionary work well, both during their missionary work and, on the day of trial, when they did not abandon their flock.

I remember that I was forced to go into the church on February 19, 1943. It was already the fifth day of the pacification, a Friday. The priests were no longer in the church. I was told, both in the church and later in the Satsapils camp near Riga, that the Germans had ordered the priests to walk away from the people and leave the church, but the priests pleaded for the imprisoned people, explaining to the Germans that these

were innocent people. “If you let them go free,” they said, “then we will return home with them. And if you don’t, then we want to stay with them. We will not abandon them.”

I was also told that, carrying a cross in his hand, Fr. Leszczewicz went with the people beyond the lake to a hill. There the group was directed to the left, where they were burned in the out-buildings.

CHAPTER TWELVE

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF A SCHOOLMATE WLADYSLAWA KRZYZEWSKA, DRUJA

I knew George Kaszyra from my school days. In 1924, I began my education in the King Stephen Batory Marian High School in Druja beginning in the second grade. I attended school together with George Kaszyra until graduation. I watched his conduct and attitude toward his male and female schoolmates. He was always a diligent student. He was a good mathematician. He did his homework well, and others took advantage of that fact. He had trouble with German, especially with reading. He always spoke slowly. Whenever he had to read some long German word, he had trouble. He was always smiling, helpful, and polite to his schoolmates.

He was never mean to anyone. Rather, he was helpful. Nobody ever developed a grudge against him for anything. He was a man of integrity and beyond reproach. He would be elected to judge disputes as part of the school's self-government — a fact that testifies to his character.

After graduation, he left Druja to continue his studies as a seminarian and returned as a priest. He was respected and liked by the young people. I have only heard from others what happened to Fr. Kaszyra later. I knew that during the war he was in Rosica.

In 1964 at a funeral in Boldugi, I met someone who lived in Diedzina in the Miorski region, whose name was Bobicz. He told me what he had heard from some peasants who had been forced to drive their carts for the punitive expedition to Rosica in 1943. At that time, they saw Fr. Kaszyra approaching a guard at the church in Rosica, where the inhabitants of the area were held captive. He asked the German to release a woman who

was holding a child in her arms and another one by the hand. The SS man would not listen and told the woman to enter the church. Then, Fr. Kaszyra also entered the church, and he was never seen coming out again.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF A SISTER WHO CONFIRMS THE MARTYRS' WITNESS SR. PAULINA LATYSZKIEWICZ, SJE, PRUSZKOW

I met Fr. Kaszyra when he was still a seminarian. As a priest, he was deeply pious. I heard from his penitents that he was an exceptional confessor.

I met Fr. Leszczewicz in the fall of 1941 when I arrived in Rosica. Six Sisters from our convent were there. Two of us worked in the rectory, and the others were teaching religion to children and adults in the countryside. Sometime later, the priests started going to the villages to say Holy Mass and administer the Sacraments.

In the winter, early in 1943, the German military decided to carry out a pacification of the area because of the activities of the Soviet partisans. Inhabitants of the neighboring villages were gathered in the church in Rosica. I remember that Fr. Leszczewicz had been warned even earlier and encouraged to leave, but he decided to stay with the people in the church. He heard confessions, gave Holy Communion, and baptized people. He could leave and reenter the church at will.

The Germans murdered both priests, and a great number of laypeople. Father Leszczewicz was taken away first. The Sisters accompanied him to the sledge. Father Kaszyra was taken away later. Supposedly they were taken to the railway station, but we all knew they were meant to die. We spoke about this openly.

We Sisters were also rounded up in the church with the faithful, but Fr. Leszczewicz, who spoke German, asked the

Germans to drive us to Druja because he brought us from there. The Germans gave us a sledge ride to the main road and then took us by car to Druja, where they handed us over to Mother Superior Josepha Zuk, who had to sign a certificate that she received us whole and in good health. I remember that on the way the soldiers offered us breakfast, but we didn't want to eat.

After the pacification was over, Sister Hedwig Wirszuto and another Sister, went from Druja to Rosica where there were stacks of charred bodies in burned-out buildings. Many of those who had been murdered had bullet holes in their skulls. They found a hand with a rosary in it.

Several weeks later, the officer who had escorted us from Rosica came back to Druja. He arrived with a secretary. Each Sister who had been in Rosica was summoned and questioned in detail about who had sent her there, when she went, what was she doing and why she left, as well as about other details of those events. There were also questions about the priests.

The priests, Anthony Leszczewicz and George Kaszyra, went to Rosica to do missionary work among people who had been deprived of priests for years. They were warned about the intended pacification, but they decided to stay with the faithful (and so did we, the Sisters) even if they were to die with them. They are regarded as martyrs, because they gave their lives voluntarily for the Faith, carrying out their priestly commitment. This is why they deserve to be raised to the altar. This is the predominant opinion in our Congregation and I agree.

I am deeply convinced that God has granted current changes in these territories that have led to religious freedom and the revival of faith, changes granted partly in response to the intercession of those priests as an effect of their martyrdom. I trust that the Holy Father will recognize them as martyrs and as Blesseds of the Catholic Church.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF A LOCAL RESIDENT DOMINIC MARCHEL, ROSICA

From 1941 to 1943, I attended religion classes in Rosica, taught by the Sisters and priests. At this time, I met Fr. Leszczewicz and Fr. Kaszyra. We attended classes very eagerly, and listened to the stories about Jesus and His mother with great interest. As children, we could see the great faith of the priests and the Sisters and their love of God, and we also experienced their love for us. We were poor, rural children and we felt that the priests loved us. We loved them too. All we could see was goodness and kindness. They addressed us in our local language. They never raised their voices to us. It was enough to say silence — and we were immediately quiet. This instruction prepared me for my First Confession and Holy Communion.

During the pacification, the Germans apprehended me and I found myself in the church as early as February 16, 1943. Father Leszczewicz was saying Mass and then he climbed the pulpit and gave the sermon. He tried to calm and console us since there was great wailing and lamentation. Germans walked around the church and formed groups of people. They subsequently took them to the school and burned them there. The priests were allowed to come and distribute bread and water among the children. So, they were free.

I heard from people that the Germans wanted to set the priests free. They actually ordered them to leave Rosica. The priests pleaded and begged on behalf of the people. They pointed out their innocence. They said: "If you set everybody free, we will go with them. If you don't, we will stay too." This was the story told in the Satsapils camp when we were there after our expulsion from Rosica.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE MARTYRS' ASHES SR. APOLONIA PIETKUN, SJE

As an adolescent girl, I had heard that there was a convent in Druja, 20 kilometers from where I lived, in which beautiful services were held. The priests delivered wonderful sermons and there were also Sisters. I felt a desire to go there. I visited the church in Druja for the first time on August 2, 1925, when I was 17. I wanted to stay with the Sisters whom I saw there. After I came home, I kept thinking about it. I was in Druja again at the Feast of the Virgin on May 3, 1926. Again, I had a similar feeling. I even spoke with the Mother Superior, Wanda Jeute, about my desire to join the convent. My wish did not come true because a dowry was necessary. In the fall of 1927, I went to Druja again. Then I spoke about joining the Congregation with the new Mother Superior, Sister Josepha Zuk. I was accepted and soon I found myself happy among the Sisters in Druja.

As a postulant, as I was cleaning the high school classrooms in the fall of 1927, I met George Kaszyra. He was a student in the seventh grade. When Br. George was preparing kerosene lamps and bringing them to the classrooms, he didn't talk much. He would just praise Jesus and not say another word. I admired his concentration, modesty, and helpfulness. I was and still am convinced he was a good religious. Later I used to see George when, as a seminary student in Vilnius, he sometimes visited Druja. Finally, I saw him when, as a priest, he celebrated holy Mass in the Sisters' chapel and I was the sacristan.

I met Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz in the fall of 1939 when he came to Druja. I was closer to him. I benefited from the opportunity to make my confession to him. I believe that he

was a truly saintly priest. When he began working in Rosica, he started to come to Druja quite often. The last time he was planning to return to Rosica, we tried to convince him to wait till a safer moment. He replied with a smile: "How can a shepherd leave his flock without protection? If I die, nothing will happen and the earthly globe will turn more easily." He was glad when the Sisters' Mother Superior gave them a chance to decide themselves whether or not to stay in Rosica. I experienced many proofs of good will from Fr. Anthony. He was a true ambassador of Christ.

Father Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. George Kaszyra sacrificed their lives voluntarily for the spiritual good of the faithful. Together with the inhabitants of Rosica and the vicinity, they were burned during the pacification carried out by the German military in February of 1943.

The Sisters, who went to Rosica two weeks after the pacification, found unburned remnants. Among them, they found pieces of Fr. Kaszyra's coat. They were chased away by soldiers who threatened to kill them.

Many years after the war, a monument to commemorate the murdered victims was erected in Rosica with an inscription in Russian: "Unspeakable pain for us and eternal memory for the victims — our compatriots. In memory of 1,528 inhabitants of Rosica who died at the hands of fascist criminals on the sixteenth day of February, 1943." Ashes collected from nearby burned-out buildings were then buried near the monument.

Archbishop Kazimierz Swiatek from Minsk, who came to Rosica on a parish visitation, was welcomed at this monument on October 20, 1991.

Next to the church in Rosica, the current pastor, Fr. Anthony Los, MIC, erected a cross to pay homage to the Servants of God, Anthony Leszczewicz and George Kaszyra. People pray at that cross, light votive candles, and lay flowers.

In the Congregation of Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist, there has been a belief from the beginning that the burned priests are martyrs for the Faith who gave their lives voluntari-

ly out of love for their fellow human beings. They did so, so that those condemned to death would not despair but would accept their terrible death by surrendering to the will of God.

The churches in Druja and Rosica, where both priests used to work, as well as the monastery in Druja, where they lived, were confiscated by the communist authorities and converted to lay use. Recently they were returned, but they are in ruins.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF AN OFFICER GRANTING A GIRL'S WISH MARTHA PIROH, KRZYWOSIELCE

I remember very well when the soldiers were rounding up everyone who didn't run away in time, although many did. Soldiers put them into various buildings, locked them up, threw in grenades and set them on fire. I, along with three children, Gala, Halina, and Michael, who was only three years old, ran away into the forest. After a week, I had to come back home because of cold and hunger. On the same day, soldiers appeared, rounded us up, and herded us into the church. There was no one there yet, but new groups of people began to arrive soon after. We spent a few days there. I know that a priest came with one of the groups and he was calming the others, saying: "Don't cry. This is our service to God." They were walking with candles in their hands.

I also remember the following event: A girl from the Grabowski family was assigned to the group which was to be saved, while her parents and her small brother were in the group destined to be burned. The girl fell at the feet of a German officer, kissed his feet, and asked for her mommy. The officer moved the mother to the saved group. She fell again, kissed his feet and asked for her daddy. The officer saved the father too. She did the same for the third time and asked for her little brother. Again, the officer granted her wish.

I am sure that if the priests wanted to save themselves, they could have easily obtained release, but the priests were aware that this was their place, that the people needed them very much. That is why they stayed, for the sake of Christ and their fellow human beings.

In my opinion and that of my Orthodox co-religionists, Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and Fr. George Kaszyra gave their lives for Christ and the Church, and they are martyrs for the Faith.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE WHOLE SKY ON FIRE SR. HEDWIG WIRSZUTO, SJE, SLOBODKA

Father Anthony Leszczewicz, as the Superior of the mission in Rosica from 1941 to 1943, felt responsible for us Sisters. It was at his request that Mother Superior sent young Sisters to do missionary work. Therefore, he asked us officially if we wanted to go back to Druja or to stay despite the impending danger. All the Sisters filed a declaration in writing that they had decided to stay with the priests and didn't want to go back to Druja. He presented this declaration to our Mother Superior. This shows how experienced in life and prudent the priests were.

At the end of 1942, we could tell that danger was near. The partisans began to intensify their activities. We went through a difficult moment in Borsuki when they assaulted the house where we slept, and again in Rosica itself when they stormed the rectory at night just before the All Saints Day celebration. A few times they also harassed Fr. Leszczewicz to make him meet with them.

But even though the priests knew well that danger was approaching, they did not leave the parish but continued to do their pastoral work. We were even traveling around less, concentrating more on work within the church. The faithful were seeking more and more support at church, so how could we leave them without help?

On Sunday, February 14, 1943, Fr. George Kaszyra was left alone in the church in Rosica because Fr. Leszczewicz went to Dryssa where there was no priest. People were warning him of the danger. They even tried to keep him there because the special troops were already beginning their march from the Lat-

vian border. Still, Fr. Leszczewicz went back to his post. His religious brother, younger friend, and vicar, Fr. Kaszyra, was there. The Sisters he had brought for missionary work were there. His parishioners remained there. So, like a good shepherd, he went back to his flock. On his way he was met by partisans, but they let him go because he was a priest.

On Tuesday, February 16, bells began to ring. The Germans rounded up the first groups of people and held them in the church in Rosica: Mothers with babies, children, youngsters, and old people. They also herded us Sisters inside. In the church there was shouting, crying, and despair. At the request of Fr. Leszczewicz, a German read out our names and ordered the Sisters to leave the church and go to the rectory. The priests stayed in the church during all of Tuesday and all night. They celebrated Holy Masses, listened to confessions, and administered other sacraments.

On Wednesday, February 17, Fr. Kaszyra came to the rectory, heard our confessions, and gave us Holy Communion. During the day, the priests persevered in their priestly ministry in the church. We kept bringing bread, milk, and whatever we had to the church, especially for the children.

In the afternoon of February 17, about 4 p.m., Fr. Leszczewicz appeared. He said farewell to us. He was full of joy. He said with a smile: "Bear up and pray. I am going to show them the warehouse." And he never came back. When we tried to return to the church, the officer stopped us and didn't let us in. He said that Fr. Kaszyra would come right back. Late in the evening, Fr. Kaszyra actually returned and said to us: "Father Leszczewicz is already dead and tomorrow I will be dead too."

At night, from Wednesday to Thursday, February 17-18, the Sisters were continually praying in a bedroom. In the dining room, Fr. Kaszyra kept vigil all night long. He was praying, walking around, kneeling, and prostrating himself.

On Thursday, February 18, he brought the Blessed Sacrament from the church and distributed it among us. At 10

a.m., Fr. George Kaszyra was taken away. In front of the church, he was ordered to mount the sledge. He was taken away among many other sledges. He bade farewell to us, turned toward Druja, and then said: "Pray and ask forgiveness from God for my sins, because I will face God's judgment in a few minutes."

Together with Sister Rozalia Marcilonek, we went back to the rectory and we looked through the window at the entire convoy. Fr. George Kaszyra was in the first sledge. They went uphill and turned right. A moment later, the entire hut erupted in flames. Rosica and the neighboring villages were being burned. The whole sky was on fire; and when the fires burned out, partially burned bodies, piled together, could be seen.

I am unshakably convinced that the priests consciously and voluntarily stayed with the people and didn't want to leave their flock, even though they had a chance to gain their freedom many times. They wanted to remain with their parishioners until the end, until death. They accepted martyrdom for the Faith.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF PRIEST'S HEROISM FR. STANISLAUS ZDANOWICZ

As a seminarian, I was a student in Vilnius with Fr. Kaszyra. He was a seminarian whom everyone liked. He was humble. He never had any conflicts with anyone.

In 1936, the two of us went from Vilnius to Landwarow to hear confessions. When we arrived, there were only a few people in the church, so it seemed as if there would be little to do. But, when Fr. Kaszyra sat down in the confessional, people felt something and confessions lasted all day long. He was very fond of listening to confessions, and he took a long time for each penitent.

In 1940, I met Fr. Kaszyra in the Marian monastery in Samogitian Calvary — Zemajciu Kalwaria. Expecting deportation or imprisonment, he copied the text of the “Common of the Blessed Virgin Mary” (*De Beata*) from the Missal. He carried the pieces of paper with him and was learning the text by heart, so he would be able to celebrate Holy Mass in prison or in exile. He had a foreboding that something tragic was coming.

In 1943, I learned from Mr. Euzebiusz Lopacinski, a landowner and art historian, of the death of Fr. Kaszyra by burning. According to this gentlemen, Fr. Kaszyra had an opportunity to run away, but he didn't want to abandon the people.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF A GIRL WHO LOST HER MOTHER AND BROTHER ANNA ZURAVLEVA, MOSCOW

I knew Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz very well. After the priests came to us, we were decorating the altar. At that time, the church was not in the ruined condition it is now. There were five of us girls who worked with Fr. Leszczewicz. He told us what dresses to sew. My mother was sewing and I was embroidering. During solemn holidays, we spent time adoring the Blessed Sacrament, and during processions we carried the little pillow with the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

I was present in the church in Rosica on February 16, 1943. Dear God! How many people perished! They burned my mother and brother on February 16. We were herded into the church. There we were told that Fr. Leszczewicz had been led out of the church and shot and killed near the Orthodox church. After the priest was shot, I ceased crying. I was trying to understand what was going on in the world. I thought that the Day of Judgment had begun. Everybody, without exception, was being killed, believers and non-believers, and even priests.

The other priest — I don't remember his name — was killed together with the people. A German said to him: "Bless this group of people and you may stay." The priest answered: "I am where my people are!" He stood at the head of the column, and that is where he died. I was standing next to the priest when the German was talking with him.

The image of what was going on in that church has stayed with me my entire life.

I was kept in concentration camps in Satsapils, Majdanek, Ravensbruck, and Neubrandenburg.

What my eyes have seen only God and myself know. God helped me to endure all of this.

CHAPTER TWENTY

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT OF THE RETURN OF CHRIST TO ROSICA FR. FELIX CZECZOTT, MIC

The front moved swiftly into the interior of the U.S.S.R., and it was calm again. Catholics from beyond the Dvina came to Fr. Leszczewicz and insisted that a few priests be sent to them, as they needed them very much. They had had no priests for eight years, and there were so many priests in Druja!

Father Leszczewicz went himself and personally evaluated the situation: "Harvest season has arrived! Send out the harvesters!"

Father Leszczewicz set out to organize the new project. For the celebration of the Feast of Christ the King (1941), he invited priests from Poland to a large church fair in Rosica. I also went by horse carriage to Leonpol with Fr. Granz, from there by a barge across the Dvina, and then 14 kilometers north to Rosica. Beyond the lake, the Rosica church stood, made of red brick in the Roman style. Completed before 1914, it could accommodate more than 5,000 people. From far away, you could hear the powerful singing of the joyous congregation. After so many years, they wanted to sing their hearts out.

There were huge lines awaiting confession. There were five of us: Fr. Leszczewicz, Fr. Gramz, Fr. Perkowski from Bobolewo, Fr. Lawcewicz, and myself. At dinner we had a discussion about the confessions: Why after so many years did the penitents have little to confess? But I understood this only on the day I left Rosica. I went to see a sick old woman who said: "I don't have many sins because when they took our priest away, we said to ourselves, we cannot sin as there is nobody to absolve us." These were saintly people. The working of God's grace was palpable there.

The sun was setting and we had to return. A small group of people met in front of the house of Miss Helenka — the tertiary and caretaker of the church. It was time to leave when they started to sing: “Don’t abandon us, don’t abandon us, Jesus, don’t abandon us ...”

“How could we abandon them?”

“No! We won’t abandon them. We’ll come back!”

In fact, circumstances would make us come back.

We celebrated the main fair in Druja properly on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and a few days later we set out for Rosica with my own cart and mare. Two Sisters, Fr. Leszczewicz, and myself went out for unusual missions. Nobody had ever dreamed about this, and now it was real! Everything is possible with God!

THE RETURN TO ROSICA

In Rosica, the church was thoroughly cleaned so that not a trace was left of the cinema, which the communists had installed when they seized the church. The partitions, ceilings, beams, boards — everything was secured. There were only holes left in the walls where the beams had been. The Roman architecture of the church showed off its splendid lines. The acoustics were perfect. The side altars, which had been made of wood, had been destroyed; and there was nothing left of the high altar. So, it was necessary to build new ones. There was material available. One day about 30 men showed up to work.

Out of sturdy beams, we made altar steps, a strong podium, and the altar. We built a tall table out of boards which we then covered with dark burgundy cloth. Thus, a relatively large altar was created with a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Visibility was great.

I was good with an ax, so the good old man Kuryksza came to me and said: “Father, you’ll never go hungry!” They were proud of the work, and this was our bond.

We had a fairly large rectory that we made out of a hospital which was no longer in use. In winter, we were cold because there were holes all the way through the floor. We put down newspapers to prevent drafts. There were as many as nine rooms, enough for everyone. Parishioners brought beds, tables, and wardrobes. There were three of us. Father Laszewski came from Lithuania and Seminarian Henry Tomaszewski was supposed to be helping us while finishing his studies.

The territory covered by our work was expanding. Rosica became the base. Since the church was in need of repair, I took up permanent residence in Rosica and Fr. Laszewski took over the more remote parish in Zaszczyryn. There the parishioners created a large chapel in the barracks.

Father Leszczewicz reached out even further, as far as Zamosze. There used to be a beautiful church there, but the “good people” could not stand looking at it, so at night they blew it up with dynamite and left the rubble as a monument. He also reached out to Oswieja, where people prepared a chapel in the manor. In the town of Dryssa on the Dvina, there was an old church, so he took over a large area in which he already had four organized parishes.

The war was far away, and we could live and work undisturbed. On Sunday, after travelling and working, the priests returned to headquarters.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, I announced that on the fourth Sunday there would be a rehearsal of carol singing so as to be well prepared for Christmas. Therefore, the church was full of people for the High Mass. I wondered why they didn't bring their prayerbooks, but where were they supposed to get them? They could be sent to Siberia for five years just for having a Polish prayerbook.

I stood in the presbytery, and I began to sing and conduct. Suddenly the whole church picked up the words and tune of the first carol. The church was trembling on its foundations, and the people were singing all the carols from memory, one after the other, according to “my” songbook edited by Fr. Siedlecki. After

we finished, they asked: "Father, do you know this carol?" "No, I don't." "So, we shall sing it!" And so they sang some more, as much as they already had. I have never had such a rehearsal again!

Shepherds Mass (Midnight Mass) arrived. The entire church was decorated with fir trees, especially the great altar which was lit with candles against a background of firs.

The church was filled with people singing Polish Christmas carols out of the depths of their hearts. Looking from the altar, one could see thousands of eyes bright with tears. Finally, there was a Shepherds Mass after so many years. The unforgettable Shepherds Mass!

On the same day, we were invited to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bielinski for Christmas Eve dinner. Mr. and Mrs. Zacharewicz were there too. Mr. Koslowski arrived late and said: "Come out and listen!" Curious, we went out. The night was beautiful. Snow lay at our feet, stars shone above, and half a mile away in the village the dogs were barking and wolves were howling, awaiting their prey. We felt shivers run down our spines.

Time for Christmas pastoral visits! After the holidays, we had to visit and get acquainted with the parishioners. Fr. Laszewski took up residence in Zaszczyryn and visited people there. Father Leszczewicz went out to the most remote towns such as Zamosze, Oswieja, and Dryssa. I made visits in the parish of Rosica almost alone, which took a lot of time because there were about 5,000 faithful in the parish.

Since the road was good, I started from the most remote villages. It was a wonderful time for making pastoral visits! Everywhere I was received with joy. Once I went to a village 12 kilometers away. There were about 30 houses there. I wasn't in a big hurry, but they said they were happy I was not in a hurry, because there was another village which must be visited as well.

So, we went through the forest to the next village. It was wonderful sleigh weather! The full moon illuminated our way.

We drove about four kilometers, and we entered a clearing where we could see buildings and lights in house windows where the people were awaiting the priest. In the moonlight, I could see the master of the house come out and shout:

“Who is there?”

My cart driver shouted back: “I am bringing you the priest!”

Then the host took the hat off his head, and his bald pate shown white in the moonlight. He waved his hat and shouted: “We gentry have been awaiting the priest for so many years.”

I greeted them with the old expression: “Praise be to Jesus Christ!”

It was very frosty out, so we came into the spacious, clean house. So as not to make it too long, we made a quick circuit of all the houses, of which there were about 12, and then we came back. The children spoke fluent Polish. I asked: “How is it that you are not afraid to learn Polish?” Speaking Polish was punishable by five years of deportation! “We were afraid, but we took the risk, hoping no one would betray us!”

They introduced a six- or seven-year-old girl to me, allegedly from Leningrad and not yet baptized, and they asked me to baptize her. I questioned her about prayers and her catechism. She knew everything very well. This was due to the wife of the house who knew how to transmit faith to a stranger’s child. I was happy to baptize this child. Unfortunately, later I was told that it was a little Jewish girl; somebody had betrayed her and her mother. The mother had been shot and killed by the Germans.

During that time, I visited Druja and Slobodka where I was given the Stations of the Cross. The images were in bad shape, but sufficient for our use. Lenten lamentations were softening the hearts of the faithful. Holy Week! There was the sepulcher and adoration, and then a joyous resurrection. Everything was calm here. No information reached us.

Spring was coming. We cleaned up the cemetery and the garden. We installed window panes in the church since many of

them were missing; in winter, I sometimes celebrated Holy Mass wearing gloves because it was so cold. The temperature reached almost minus 30 degrees centigrade.

The holes from the beams were filled with masonry. The roof was partly rebuilt over the side naves. In springtime, the ice melted on the eaves and water flowed down the walls. From one such spot, I emptied 37 pails. This is how the faithful were taking care of their buildings.

The Sisters mobilized themselves, and 13 of them started working. One worked in the kitchen, another one around the church, and the others went out on mission in pairs. Fr. Leszczewicz prepared them for teaching religion. So, the Sisters started going in pairs to each village for two weeks and there they taught religion to children, youngsters, and adults. At the end of each course, an afternoon time chapel was arranged when we listened to everyone's confession. Then, the next day there was Holy Mass with a solemn Holy Communion. These were wonderful services. First, the Rosica parish went through the religious curriculum, and then Zaszczyn. In the village of Piernieczki, after one such catechization, 17 candidates sought admission to the convent. Unfortunately, subsequent events interfered with these vocations.

The organ was completely destroyed by the "cultural barbarians," but the church had very good acoustics. When the girls began to meet there to sing, their amplified singing sounded as if it were a large choir. The souls of the faithful were particularly touched when they sang the Litany to the Sacred Heart of Jesus with its very peculiar melody. As I had no musical score, I began to teach the *Missa Tertia* by Haller for two parts from memory. The talented girls were soon singing during Holy Mass in two parts without accompaniment, so we had a choir as well.

A SPECIAL CELEBRATION

Corpus Christi was approaching. What about the procession? We had nothing! Inventive Miss Helen suggested weav-

ing thin cloth out of white wool and making banners and a canopy from it. So we set to work. Girls spun the wool in their houses, wove cloth, and made tassels. One of the Sisters who knew embroidery began to embroider. I made designs and drawings myself, and the Sister and the girls did the embroidery. Though there was no thread for this, some clever girls even got silk from stockings and dyed it various colors. And so the work progressed. When the girls saw that I could draw and embroider, they said: "Father, you can do anything. And those Jews were maligning the priests so much." Finally, four banners were ready, one completely embroidered. The canopy was so wonderful it could compete with the most beautiful ones. More and more children joined the White Group for Corpus Christi, while the Seminarian Tomaszewski recruited more and more altar boys.

They even found a bell in some *kolkhoz* (a collective farm run by the State) and it was hung in a makeshift belfry. A volunteer, Czeciuk, rang the Angelus passionately. After a while, however, his zeal subsided. He would sit down on the beam during the ringing, and finally he would lie down altogether so that the ringing got weaker and weaker.

On Corpus Christi, four beautiful altars were arranged in the cemetery next to the church. Quite a crowd congregated, coming in from neighboring parishes and even from Latvia since that was close to us.

For the first time, the procession went out of the church with standards, banners, a canopy, girls in white throwing flowers, altar boys, and three priests. The bell was ringing joyously and happy folks marched and sang and sang. Many Orthodox people came. They stood off to the side and watched with awe.

Later they asked: "When will there be a service like that again, so we can come?" The Orthodox were switching to the Catholic Church. They used to say: "We want the Polish faith!" I was explaining that there is no "Polish faith," only Christ's faith to which everyone should belong!

"So we want it!"

One day, 17 people came. I asked: “What happened? Did somebody let you all out of the bag?”

“If you don’t know, Father, then we’ll tell you!” The most outspoken one, Franka Kuryksza, began the story:

“Yesterday an Orthodox priest approached the Orthodox people to arrange a Mass in the ‘*Selmag*’ (a warehouse for the local collective farm or *kolkhoz*) because their church is in very bad shape. I was curious, so I and my girlfriend went there too. The priest had earlier renounced his faith, but the Orthodox took him back.

“So, first he announced that he would make a list for baptism and that a certain amount in rubles must be paid on the spot. Then he continued the baptism subscription. In the meantime, a line formed for confession.”

“That many of you?”, he said. “I am not going to hear all of your confessions.”

“But Father! The Catholics have three priests,” we responded. “They hear confessions all day long. Do you refuse us confession after so many years?”

“So count up your sins,” said the Orthodox priest. And he went away to continue his collecting. When he returned, he asked each person how many sins he or she had committed. One said seven; another, ten; another, twelve. And so forth.

Finally he said: “Well then, I absolve you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”

People looked at the priest in amazement at what they heard.

“What? This is how you treat us?” They spat with scorn. “We are all going to the Catholic Church.” Then they left the service. And Frania added: “This is why the whole bag full of us got untied and so many of us are here. Because that Orthodox priest converted us!”

SOME SPECIAL MEMORIES

Some kindly families there were committed to us whole-

heartedly. But after so many years, I have forgotten their names. The most important one was the elderly Helen, the tertiary (a layperson involved in the Third Order.). Then there was the Bilinski family. The husband was a doctor who suffered a lot for his convictions. He and his kindly wife had two small daughters. Next, there was Joseph Zacharewicz with his wife Hedwig (a member of the nobility) with their son Jozik and small daughter Kocia. There was also Mr. Kozlowski. They took care of our needs.

Father Henry Tomaszewski, the seminarian, helped us as much as he could. He was finishing his studies for ordination.

It was very joyous for us because we had also found a treasure. A woman who was in on the secret came to us and said that the last pastor, Fr. Kapusta, came and told her that when the right time came, the next priest should look for the c h u r c h vessels behind the chest of drawers and behind the masonry in the sacristy. So, that evening we went to the sacristy with Fr. Tomaszewski. We chiseled behind the chest of drawers into the masonry, but we did not find anything immediately. Only when we looked at a certain angle in the candlelight, did we notice the outline of brickwork showing on the wall. We chiseled the plaster away, and we hit the chimney flue where the treasure of Rosica had been hidden. There was a beautiful sixteenth century Gothic monstrance made of hammered silver and then gilded; another monstrance, new but plain; and an old Roman cross with a relic of wood from the True Cross. There were also three chalices, one of them very precious, made of silver in the Roman style.

Summer came. Only in front of our rectory were there flowers blooming, planted by the Sisters. Everybody looked at them and admired them.

Father Laszewski took strong root in his Zaszczyryn parish, and he rarely visited us. Father Leszczewicz wanted to visit Druja, and he set July 22 as the date for me to go to bring him back.

On the appointed day I went with little Jozik as the horse driver. On my way I visited two sick people with Holy Communion.

The old lady said that she had no sins to confess because after the pastor was taken away, she said to herself: “Don’t sin, because there is no one to absolve you.”

Another person was an 18-year-old maiden who had not left her bed since her First Communion. She was a strange invalid — always smiling and singing and always busy. She handed me a piece of lace to be used for the cloth of the great altar — six meters long and 50 centemeters wide. She had made it herself with beautiful patterns of lilies and roses. In the evenings, the young people would congregate at her bedside to admire her and to learn from her the patience and joy which she projected. They regarded her as their saint.

One night, the partisans came to her. One of them asked:

“So you believe in God?”

“I do.”

“But what has this God given to you? Look, you have been lying here for ten years!”

“That is just how much God has given me, so that I could lie here for ten years!”

One of the partisans turned around to wipe away a furtive tear. Such were the people we had there!

After we left the sick, we went the three kilometers to the Dvina, where Fr. Leszczewicz was already waiting. He looked somewhat concerned.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

“Listen” he said. “You must go back to Druja because you are needed there, and Fr. George Kaszyra will come here in your place because the authorities refuse to register him as a resident in Druja.”

“How can that be?” I said. “Am I supposed to drop everything? I was supposed to take a lot of commemorative photos.”

“So you will come some other time and take them!”

It must have been the will of God. I bade farewell and went to the opposite bank of the Dvina by boat, continuing in a small cart to Druja. It had been burned down.

During my absence, the Germans had murdered the Jews and torched part of the town. Unfortunately, a handful of local riff-raff helped the Germans in this crime. Many inhabitants had left and sought refuge in the nearby villages. At the Drujka River by the bridge, I was shown some common graves where Jewish people had even been buried alive.

In Druja, the work with children had been interrupted and had to be resumed, so I drove around the neighborhood parishes.

We learned from the radio newscasts that the Germans had had to withdraw, which meant the front was coming closer again.

The Latvians were complaining that Soviet partisans were attacking and stealing their possessions, so the Germans mobilized the Latvians, issued them German uniforms, and prepared them to perform a criminal action of which nobody had any idea. The Latvian military crossed the Dvina River in winter and stationed itself in Druja and the vicinity. They installed their command post on the upper floor of the monastery. After the New Year in 1943, carts were rounded up from villages in the neighborhood and an expedition set out beyond the Dvina into our missionary territory.

Aircraft were setting villages on fire, and the people who ran away were shot, while the others were rounded up and herded to certain holding sites.

The church in Rosica was turned into a large concentration site. People were brought together, not knowing what would become of them, but expecting the worst. Father Leszczewicz and Fr. Kaszyra listened to confessions and administered the Sacraments all day and all night. They prayed and prepared themselves for martyrdom. This lasted for three days. In Fr. Kaszyra's place, they found a map of the local terrain, and so he was assumed to be a partisan. Some young people were taken out of the church and sent to Germany to work in labor

camps. The elderly and children were sent to barns and burned alive.

Our parishioners from Druja, who were forced to drive the sledges, were losing their minds seeing this bestiality. A lot of time passed before they recovered.

Father Laszewski was in Zaszczyn. The police chief from Latvia, a Pole, came to him and said: "Run away from here, Father, because no one will be left alive here."

Father Laszewski replied: "I will not abandon my parishioners and I am not going anywhere!"

When the chief saw this attitude, he said: "So, you are under arrest! Please step up on this sledge!"

This is how he "saved" Fr. Leszewski as well as a Sister, who was a cook.

In one village where I hadn't made pastoral visits because I had set aside doing so until later, the Germans herded everyone into the middle of the village square under the cross which was still there. Everybody was praying and singing "Holy Lord, Holy and Immortal." Nobody was running away. They all kept praying. A tanker full of gasoline arrived and the soldiers began to douse the innocent people with it. Then they ignited the sacrificial pyre under the cross. This was how many of our most holy people perished. They deserve heaven!

This "purge" engulfed a belt along the border over 60 kilometers long. Two weeks later, two Sisters went back to look around in Rosica.

They found one large pile of ashes. In one burned barn, they found a compact mass of standing skeletons and among them they noticed an unburned hand. Curious, they investigated and noted that the hand held a rosary. The Sisters recognized that this hand belonged to Fr. Kaszyra.

This is how our two martyrs died.

All the Sisters were transported away and later sent to Druja.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

MEMOIR OF “INHUMAN LANDS”

REV. HENRY TOMASZEWSKI, MIC,
BRAZIL

In the evening we had more time. The pastor of Druja, the young priest Vincent Smolinski, came to me for a long conversation. We kept remembering the past month together, over and over.

Things happened quickly. We crossed the Lithuanian border at Dukszty. We witnessed the first Bolshevik bombardment by vintage bi-planes, the flight of the Vilnius wing to Lithuania. In the evening, we reached Soloki. We continued our progress to Wilkomierz. The Lithuanian people were extraordinarily friendly and good to us. From there I went to Kaunas to continue my studies.

The Bolsheviks returned Vilnius to Lithuania. It was a great joy, but only for short-sighted people. Still, my friends didn't like to hear me when I said: *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*, “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” People began to believe more and more in the transient and illusory character of the free Lithuanian state with the imposed friendship of the Red Moloch crouched next to the Baltic states. On June 12, 1940, on the eve of President Smetona's name day, the menacing steel birds appeared over Kaunas. This was the end of freedom and of friendship. Soon after, Lithuania lost its independence, and we then “joyously” joined the world's “Leader of Freedom,” the Soviet Union.

We experienced terrible moments in Mariampole, the center of the Marians in Lithuania. First, the communists took away the high-school building. They needed it for the Allied military. From then on, they would “defend” the integrity and sover-

eignty of Lithuania. The soldiers were now having their drills in the high-school yard, so they would be ready to fight the enemy. Large rallies became fashionable. Days were full of joy. People cried themselves breathless. During enthusiastic speeches, we had lumps in our throats. Yes, that was the end. There was no more Lithuania, just another republic of the Soviet Union, a province of the Euro-Asian colossus. Allegedly, during one of the rallies in Mariampole, a Communist hotshot, of Jewish origin, proposed a project of amazing daring. "The time has finally arrived when we have to start to exterminate superstition and destroy prejudice. I make a motion to destroy the church in Mariampole."

There was silence as if in a cemetery. A peasant arose to second the motion: "We agree, Comrade. Prejudice must be destroyed. But, you see, the Catholic Church is very large. We have to gain experience in blowing up buildings. Your synagogue is a smaller building. I propose a motion: Let us begin to exterminate superstition by blowing up your synagogue."

Laughter and applause filled the room.

Finally, the painful day of July 15 arrived, the day of the dispersion of the Apostles. It was Sunday. During lunch, the superior came in with an official letter. "Within four hours the monastery must be emptied and the keys deposited in the office. You may take your possessions."

How kind the authorities proved to be by allowing us to take our possessions. They realized it was impossible to take everything within four hours. The *Gorsoviet* (City Council) was so indulgent that it extended the deadline for eviction by many hours.

On a rain-soaked day, we left the monastery, having been told to leave. But the good people did not allow us to perish. We never went hungry. For some time, I lived with a very decent family of two elderly people, a brother and sister. I wanted to help them with the farming chores. They wouldn't allow it. All I could do was rake hay. The old man would often call me: *Sviecias, eikim karves vesti!* "Guest, take the cows and tie them to another spot!" May God reward their good hearts and their

great love for other human beings. Later, when I had returned to Kaunas, the good old woman visited me, bringing beautiful linen cloth and food.

After a few months, Father Joseph Jarzebowski, who cared for us, picked me up and took me to Gielgudyszki on the Niemen River. We, the wanderers, were received by the pastor, Fr. Augustajtis, a relative of Bishop Buczys, the Superior General of the Marians. These were good times, but I had to return to my studies. At Christmas, I went to Kaunas. Happy times don't last long. This monastery was also confiscated. The seminarians were scattered in town. I found shelter in Lucjanowo, eight kilometers from Kaunas, where I was taken in by a kind Polish family.

WAR BREAKS OUT

The inexorable moment for the tormenters was close — the war with the Germans. A week before war broke out, my friend Boleslaus Jakimowicz was supposed to be ordained a subdeacon. He made his retreat. He invited my host, Mr. Borowski, to the occasion. Mr. Borowski went to Kaunas he came back sad. Boleslaus was not among those consecrated.

“What happened?” I asked. “Maybe you didn't notice him?”

Oh, no, Mr. Borowski saw quite well. Boleslaus was really not there. On Saturday he finished his retreat, and also on that same Saturday the communist authorities came to deport him to Russia. Slowly the tragic news unfolded. On the huge city square in Kaunas, several thousand trucks had massed. They had been driven madly all around town, arriving at preselected addresses to pick up the people on their lists for deportation, together with their personal belongings. Mounted loudspeakers had kept playing some popular Georgian tune. I don't remember the title of this garbage, but each time I hear it I feel revulsion. People were being taken away, while this fiendishly mawkish Stalinist song was playing.

I got more news in Kaunas. I, too, was on a list for deportation. The caretaker was ordered not to let me leave. I prepared

a travel kit of biscuits, lard flavored with the tears of my landlady, and some odds and ends. At that time, my colleagues were taken away: Stephen Chojnacki, Stanislaus Bogucki, and Fr. Przybysz from Mariampole. They didn't allow me to stay in my room in the garret; in fact the room was sealed. To have the seal removed I was supposed to apply to the head caretaker. I was quite determined to share the fate of my colleagues rather than stay by myself with the war imminent.

Finally, on the eve of the war, I reached Mr. Head Caretaker and I demanded that my apartment be “unsealed,” no matter what the consequences. The master of my residence deigned to give permission for the seal to be removed. I spent the night in my own place. On the lower floor, there was traffic all night long, with doors slamming. Troops were marching on the streets — eastward.

At dawn it started. Boom, boom, boom. The house trembled. I ran to my Lithuanian colleagues, my neighbors. I shouted: *Karas!* “War!” They were skeptical. “No, it’s maneuvers.” But they believed me after the next bombardment. I watched the Aleksot airport. An aircraft took off. Then another and a third one left. Was it to defend us? No. They were fleeing. Kaunas was completely unprepared to defend itself.

The rule of the new masters — the Supermen — began. After establishing themselves well, the Germans began to martyr the Jews. They created a ghetto in Vilianpole, a suburb of Kaunas. From there, they led large groups of Jews to an old fort, I believe it was Fort Number IX, and killed them. The memory of this crime will always stay with me. Fort Number IX was not far from Lucjanow where I would go during the summers. A

convoy of trucks brought these miserable people who were guilty only of being born Jewish. From far away, one could see a crowd of people standing in a long row in front of a ditch. Suddenly a terrible wailing and crying was heard from the mass of humanity. And then a hellish burst of machine gunfire. Then silence. Inhuman, deadly silence. And then single shots. Finally, it started all over again.

The Nordic race introduced the new Germanic culture. Wotan was in a fury, and when the autumn came and the ghetto was empty, the masters decided to fill it with us, the fugitives. We had to interrupt our studies, which had begun in the fall, and run for our lives. We fled to Druja. I thought that others would show up too.

Father Smolinski began to share his memories — our life was hard too. After Fr. Kulesza died, they came for us. Like hyenas, they enjoyed the taste of human blood. I saw them from the window of the house in which I took refuge as they went by looking for me and Fr. Bakalarz. We had to change into civilian clothes, put cigarettes between our teeth, and continue walking toward the Dvina. Luckily they had to run away too. They had no time to seek their vengeance.

We heard the following news from a fellow priest: “Thank God, Rev. Pastor, because this bloody beast was terrifying in its flight. One of my colleagues from Vilnius, a young priest, was found murdered with outspread arms. He was tied to a tree with barbed wire.”

If the priestly Golgotha could be commemorated by crosses on the Vilnius Calvary as in olden times, a lot of crosses would have to be added. Under the new government, life is also hard. I felt much fear when the order arrived to hand over the bells to be made into cannons for the Germans. What could we do? The bells had to be taken down. And how pretty they were, especially the largest one. Its sound resounded far over the Dvina, announcing the glory of God.

But do you think the Germans got them? Yes, the three old broken ones; all the good ones never arrived at their destination. The largest one lies buried in the ruins of the belfry. We didn't even bother to take it out. The others are buried far away from here. The Germans didn't have any idea, although they were surprised by their puny size. But the numbers matched their list. Fortunately, our people governed and policed the community. As I would soon find out, they would warn us and help in everything.

After some time, Lucek Pawlik joined us. After him, our provincial delegate from Poland in Lithuania, Fr. Walter Laszewski, joined us. He was a vburdened and weary man, yet he was also very kind with a beautiful heart, great goodness, and a noble spirit. He cared so much that he was sometimes a nuisance. He had been a distinguished gentleman, an attorney.

Attorney Laszewski often acted as a diplomatic courier, and during the plebiscite in the Mazurian district, he was one of the delegates of the Polish government. Theological studies in Rome had ruined his health. A nervous type, he was nevertheless always composed. None of our Poles remained in Lithuania.

SENT TO ROSICA

A few weeks before Christmas, the superior of the house summoned me: "Brother Henry, you will go to Rosica as a sacristan. We need help there. Please get ready. Father Felix Czczcott will take you along."

"All right, with great pleasure."

Rosica was 40 kilometers away, in the former Bolshevik territory. The superior was Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz, my best friend from the novitiate. He had joined us three years earlier. Before that, he had worked in Harbin among Polish immigrants. In recognition of his labors, he received the Golden Cross of Merit. So I would again see my dear Father from whom I had parted during novitiate. I remember him in the refectory waiting on table. Dressed in a white apron, he approached me and whispered: "If I missed something that needs to be done as a server, please tell me because I don't know how to wait on table yet."

He served the tureen and passed the platters with a smile. He cleared the tables. And he was to be my superior.

Father Czczcott prepared everything and off we went by sledge, bundled up in hooded coats and sheepskins, because of the biting frost.

“May God guide you in good paths.” said the Fathers, bidding us farewell.

Father Laszewski came with us too, to help with the pastoral work in Rosica.

We left the church far behind us. What a pretty, trim silhouette and a mighty spire — one of the most beautiful churches in the region of Vilnius, a wonderful baroque one with an ornate plaster ceiling. I wondered how tall it was. A splendid new organ had been built just before the war, praise the Lord.

We spent the night at Leonpol on the Dvina, and then we entered Soviet territory, the “inhuman land,” driving 13 kilometers alongside the *kolkhoz* fields (collective farms run by the state). Finally, we arrived in Rosica. We stopped on the hill. In front of us was the church, which had been built in the first decade of this century. It was maimed. The former tall spires were ruined, their remnants sticking out like the stumps of severed hands. The big church door was bricked over, but two side doors had already been made accessible. People were working at the main entrance. We drove downhill carefully to prevent the nag from sliding out of control. Father Czczott, a good cart driver, kept the horse going along the edge of the road. We arrived. By the church, there were stacks of lumber, many beams.

“These are the disassembled rafters from the movie theater,” said Fr. Czczott.

I looked surprised.

“Don’t be surprised. Our church was used as a cinema. The projector is still up in the choir loft. Because the church ceiling was too high, the theater was created by constructing a lower ceiling. We have already removed the timber.”

We entered the church. Deep inside, in the apse, there was a temporary altar. There were holes in the pillars of the main nave exposing the red bricks, like bloody wounds in the living flesh of the plastered walls of the temple. These were the holes from the ceiling rafters.

“Well, Henry,” said Fr. Czczott. “We will have to do a lot of work to prepare the church for Christmas. First of all, we have to clear out the choir loft. Tomorrow people will come to help with the work, and then we can look for the holy vessels that are walled in somewhere in the sacristy.”

Father Czczott was an active, energetic young man. He looked into many matters. A few days after our arrival, we moved from a small house where we had been staying up until then into a spacious building that was the former Bolshevik school. There were stoves in the rooms, so it was not going to be cold.

Father Laszewski left Rosica and went to Zaszczyryn where Fr. Leszczewicz had organized a large chapel in Zastawa. Zaszczyryn is close to the former Latvian border. It is from there that there is access to Zamosze. In the old days, there was a parish there, but the pretty brick church was blown up by the Bolsheviks. Only remnants of the walls remained, giving painful testimony to so-called Soviet “freedoms.” Thus, there is a chapel in Zastawa.

Father Leszczewicz often used to go to Oswieja on Sundays. He celebrated Holy Mass there in a beautiful oval palace salon, apparently once belonging to the Lopacinski family. The people hungering for God, for freedom of prayer, for the Holy Sacraments, for the bloodless Sacrifice, eagerly came to church. The Sisters helped us to teach religion. Most of the 20-year-olds had already had their first Holy Communion. The children still had not. They were taught in the villages. They congregated in one of the houses to learn about God. But quite a few of the younger people also came to partake of the Holy Sacraments because as late as 1937, there was a Catholic priest here, Fr. Wojciechowicz. The former pastor, Fr. Kapusta, who had been taken away a few years earlier, had disappeared without a trace.

Father Wojciechowicz, who had expected to be arrested, locked himself up in the church at night and hid the holy vessels behind the brickwork. Nobody knew exactly where they were. Carpets and some church robes and church linen were slowly

returning to us from the countryside, but not much had survived. Whatever had been buried had rotted away completely.

Father Leszczewicz delegated the matter of the church completely to Fr. Czczott as he was traveling around the parish, giving examinations, teaching, and encouraging religious practices. Sermons were given in three languages. Father Laszewski did his best in Russian, Fr. Leszczewicz in Belarussian, and Father Czczott in Polish.

Father Anthony once said to me: "People are now more interested in you than in the priests."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because they have been able to see priests for some time, but they have never seen a seminarian before. They don't know what one looks like."

They saw me soon, a young man with a mustache, as I read the passion narrative to them on Palm Sunday.

Then soon Christmas was coming. We arranged the creche in the church. We brought tiny figures from Druja. We hammered the manger together out of sticks on the spot. People were coming in throngs for wafers, so they could enjoy the popular Polish custom of sharing the Christmas wafer with family and friends on Christmas Eve.

Finally, Christmas Eve arrived. The Sisters were busy preparing the feast. Meanwhile, we were tapping on the walls in the sacristy. There were two sacristies. We decided to look in the one in which light was seen during the last days of Fr. Wojciechowicz. We wondered where the precious vessels had been hidden. Where was the cache? The hammer wandered in the hand of Fr. Czczott. Tap, tap, tap. Father was tapping and listening for hollow space. But the sound was the same everywhere. Finally, we seemed to hear some resonance.

"Take the pick and strike. Maybe our treasure is hidden here."

I hit hard, but the mortar was strong. It was scarcely yielding. Suddenly, I saw signs scratched in the plaster. Two small crosses.

“Father, it’s here. Look at the signs” I said.

“Thank God,” he replied.

Enthusiasm doubled our strength. We were hammering at the wall in turns. We picked out one brick, then another, but in vain. The vessels were not hidden there. Father Czczott thought a little. Finally, he questioned a local friend of ours who worked in the town hall and was now helping us: “Mr. Joseph, where exactly were the children baptized during the winter here?”

“Here, in the sacristy,” he replied.

“Was there a stove?”

“Yes.”

“So let’s look for the chimney flue,” Father concluded.

We looked at the wall carefully. Finally, we noticed a different shade of plaster. It marked the flue.

“Move the table. Now the chair,” Father said.

He swiftly jumped on the scaffolding and ordered:

“A hammer!”

He knocked on the wall.

“Yes. Here is the chimney. Chip away.”

He hit hard. The plaster between the bricks was yielding. Slowly, he pulled out a brick.

“Climb up. Keep hitting,” Father told me.

I took out another brick, then a third one. A hole appeared. I put an arm in. My heart was pounding hard. I could hear it. There it is, there it is. Slowly I took something out, carefully wrapped in linen towels. It was a chalice — a beautiful, heavy chalice, silver, with thick gilding. It also had a paten that matched it.

Father Czczott now took my place and kept searching. He took out another chalice, then a third one, then a fourth. He also found a large ciborium, a smaller one, and finally a cross. Tears were flowing down Mr. Joseph’s face. These were the relics of

the True Cross. It had been so many years since he had kissed it. The reliquary was made of solid gold. Finally, we recovered the last item. It was too big to pull out through the hole, so the hole had to be enlarged. Then we took it out, a most beautiful Gothic monstrance. It had a huge base made out of hammered silver. On its side were crystal figures of St. Stanislaus the Bishop and of St. Adalbert.

We were all moved. Our search had not been in vain. We would use this beautiful chalice for Shepherds Mass, and the Blessed Sacrament would be exposed at the early morning Mass in our own Rosician monstrance. Mr. Joseph said: "Father, there is also another monstrance, much larger and more beautiful than this one. It is behind the bricks in the other sacristy."

"We shall look for it later."

But we never did. It is still behind the bricks in this "inhuman land" where people are not allowed to worship God. It is waiting there for the moment when perhaps another priest under different circumstances will take it out in order to place the God-Host in it. Jesus, make this time come sooner, so that You can go out to the meadows and grain fields of this miserable land. Make this land become human, so it will no longer be ruled by the law of hatred but instead by love. Then human dignity will be respected at long last.

We ate our Christmas Eve dinner in a family mood. As usual, we wished each other well, hoping for better times — the end of the war and the opportunity to work for those poor, so-long-abandoned souls. Father Anthony shared the Christmas wafer with me and said: "Finish your theology soon, so you will be able to help us fully." And he smiled from his heart.

The Shepherds Mass would have to be in the morning, instead of midnight. At night we could not move about, because it was wartime, after all. After the meal, we went out to the church for a moment, then returned to the rectory. From the nearby forests, we could hear a long, sad wailing.

“The wolves are howling,” said Fr. Czczcott. The Shepherds Mass was next morning, the first one in many years. The large church was filled with people. Children and youngsters crowded around the manger. Maybe they were seeing it for the first time. The Holy Mass began. A weak sounding harmonium played an old Christmas carol that had been sung secretly for a long time, just as it had been a secret that the people had shared Christmas wafers smuggled from Leningrad.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

“In the Quiet of the Night” was sung by voices full of emotion, sometimes breaking into loud sobs as everyone joined in singing the praise of the Holy Child, the Prince of Peace, who came to bring consolation. The lyrics of the carols were pouring hope into these tormented hearts exhausted from their misery.

For a short, a very short period the people could feel more fully human. The yoke of slavery was loosened. But those people were unaware of the terrible fate that the future had in store for them. Singing their carols, they were flocking to the Little Jesus, God incarnate, warming Him in their warm hearts in the cold December night. They wanted to forget about the tumult of war which rumbled far away to the East. They wanted to forget the uncertainty of tomorrow and enjoy the day when Christ was born for them. They were embracing the Little One with their singing, “Lullaby, Infant Jesus, my Little Pearl.” And they ended the Mass with the splendid “God Is Born” and “Raise Your Arms, O Child of God, Bless Our Beloved Land.” This invocation was very moving. It touched the heart. It brought tears to one’s eyes.

I was looking at the full church from the altar, but I could see everything as if through a mist. Poor folks, poor good folks! What a terrible fate was to be theirs. For such a long time, they had wandered aimlessly like sheep on barren pastures without their shepherds, without direction, and still they had not forgotten the songs and the prayers. Many of them took out prayer-

books that they had kept hidden, and they prayed from them.

On the second day of Christmas, we went to visit Fr. Laszewski in Zaszczyryn. His holiday had been lonely, so we would bring him some joy. The trip was long, through the forests. We had to hurry as dusk would fall early. Bundled up as usual because of the bitter cold, we set out with Fr. Czczott right after lunch. Still, half the way we traveled in splendidly shining moonlight. If we could have forgotten about the war, the sleigh ride would have been wonderful. In the calm of the night we sang. We sang all the carols old and new — it was Christmas.

The Father received us with great joy. We sat down to a humble dinner, which was prepared by a Sister. Then we talked about our common work, our troubles, and our joys. The chapel was large and well furnished, but it was terribly cold. It was so cold that the wine froze when used, even at the consecration. It had to be heated with our hands and breath in order to bring it back to a liquid state. Father Laszewski said goodbye to us with regret when we left to go back to Rosica.

We still managed to go to Druja with Fr. Czczott before the end of the year. Most of the way we went along the Dvina, which had been frozen solid for a long time. A few kilometers before Druja, a blizzard began. We could not see more than a few paces ahead. We drove up to the river bank. We lost our way, even though Fr. Czczott knew this neighborhood well. After half an hour of going back and forth, we found out that we had remained in one place. Finally, we saw a weak light. Then it disappeared. Then we could see it again. We approached it. At last, there was a hut. Our salvation! Father found out where we were. It was only three kilometers away. We reached home quickly, looking like white forest spirits.

After the New Year, the superior and the pastor summoned me. “We have to entrust a very delicate mission to you. The Gestapo has issued an order for the arrest of Fr. Miecislaus Bohatkiewicz, the pastor of Dryssa in the Soviet territory. He must be warned. The Belarussian police will hold off for another two days before they carry out the order. A stranger must go

so as not to attract attention to himself and bring down the revenge of the Germans. I believe that you will be able to perform this mission. A priest has to be saved. They have information about his past secret activities.”

“All right. I will go if necessary,” I replied.

“You will go alone. You have already been to Leonpol and this is only another ten kilometers farther. Father Lawrynowicz, the pastor, will show you the way.”

“But I have never driven a horse cart,” I said. “I don’t know how to hitch or unhitch a horse.”

“We shall hitch it well to avoid trouble,” they replied.

There was trouble with that horse, real trouble. Just ten kilometers from home, the *dukha*, the wooden bow connecting the shafts of a one-horse sledge, gave way. I knew I had to put my foot on the *dukha* and pull on the strap to reattach it on the bottom. Then the *dukha* needed to be tied. But I couldn’t raise my foot high enough. I took off my hat, sheepskin, and coat. I managed to pull the strap a bit and continued my ride. But not much farther along, maybe one kilometer, it happened again. Luckily, somebody was coming from the opposite direction. I stopped and I asked graciously for help, and my sledge was again ready to continue on its way. But the peasant was looking after me for a long time afterward.

This *dukha* was my Achilles heel. I had trouble with it many more times. This time the urban cart driver, who knew a horse only had a head in front and a tail in back and legs at the bottom, made it happily to Leonpol. I spent the night there. The next morning after Holy Mass, I sped up to Dryssa.

I had the good luck to find Fr. Bohatkiewicz. He was in the church, which was much smaller than the one in Rosica. During the Soviet period, it had been converted into a granary, and marks could clearly be seen on the walls showing how high the grain had been stored. We went to the rectory together. I delivered my message. Father grew very pale. Drops of perspiration covered his forehead.

“What should I do? Hide, run away? Where can I hide? Where can I run away? It would show the Germans that I have a guilty conscience when I haven’t done anything wrong.”

“Father Pastor, I advise you to be careful. I am warning you. The police may come today. This is a serious matter.”

“Whatever, I am staying,” decided Fr. Bohatkiewicz.

He chose death. The Gestapo murdered him in prison, together with several other priests. It was a sacrifice of priestly blood offered for God and nation.

LOSING MY WAY

I went back to Leonpol. I was watching the road carefully going from Leonpol to Dryssa to be able to find my way back without any mishaps. However, traveling without mishaps was probably not destined for a driver like myself. The forests looked the same everywhere, and the roads looked the same as well, so it looked to me as if I were driving in the right direction. Alas, I drove into the forest. In fact, as I was leaving the town I really was not sure if the horse was guiding me in the correct direction.

It seemed to me that I hadn’t seen this little square with a toppled monument to Stalin, but maybe I just hadn’t noticed it? It was lying there in the bushes, probably made out of plaster. A bit of straw was sticking out from under the armpits of the General’s uniform. So off I went, of course, not where I needed to go. After an hour’s ride, all I needed was to have the *dukha* give way again. There was no way for me to tie it up. Luckily, I was at the edge of a village. I went to seek help.

I entered a house and told them who I was and what kind of trouble I was in. The woman looked at me suspiciously, but she came out to help like a Christian. She tried, but she could not manage either. The two of us couldn’t do it together, so she went back and called her neighbors. Three women tied up the worthless *dukha*. They smiled at me. So I asked them if I was on the right road to Leonpol. They looked at each other. They

had never heard of it. So where was I?

“Fifty kilometers from Polock,” they said.

“Some mistake!” I muttered.

I now asked about Dryssa and the Dvina. They showed me the way. I thanked them for their kindness and help, and then left. I wanted to make up the wasted hours quickly. But would my horse Hurricane understand that our choice of direction was not the best? He just dragged one hoof after the other. There was no way to encourage him. I named the horse “Hurricane” because he was the slowest horse ever, and at that time, we were probably reading *The Merry Demon* by Cornelius Makuszynski. That is where the name came from.

Noon had long past. The sky became clear. The sun was shining. I bypassed Dryssa as advised by the women and got on the road to Leonpol from the Dvina. I rode along for a long time until finally, I could see a clearing in the forest. The horse proceeded along the tracks. The sky had been red for some time, but now the blood-red ball of the sun sank below the horizon. The sky turned purple. I looked to see how far from the road I was, and the horse stumbled between the stumps of some cut trees.

Suddenly, a runner caught on a stump and the sledge stopped. I wanted to go back. I pulled. Nothing budged. Then I pulled to the side with a different result, a very bad one. A shaft broke. I thought it could be tied back together with a piece of rope, but there was no way. With a piece of rope, you can tie up your pants to avoid a mishap if you are a pessimist and don’t trust both your belt and your suspenders. But you cannot tie a shaft together with a rope. What to do? I unhitched the horse. That much I already had learned to do. I put a horse blanket on him, and I left the sledge with the fur blanket, along with all my possessions, in the middle of nowhere. I didn’t intend to spend the night in the forest.

We went on. I was going in front and the horse behind me as I was leading it by its bridle. The forest would end soon. A village was in front of us. The chimneys were smoking. People

were cooking their dinners. Hurricane neighed and trotted a little more energetically, even trying to go in front of me. I entered the nearest house and asked if there was a Catholic living in the village. Yes, there was, but he wasn't there now. They advised me to go to the *soltis* (village headman). He had a larger house. It would be more convenient for a seminarian and there would be space for the horse. So that is where I went.

The host was Orthodox, but he received me kindly. We took care of the horse, and then he led me into the house. We entered the room. It was very clean, the table covered with a cloth. There was an icon in a corner. I told him what had happened to me in the forest and where I had left my sledge. The good man calmed me down. At night nobody will take the sledge, he assured me, and first thing in the morning we would ride out to it. I was given dinner and then he showed me a place to sleep.

I would sleep in a room with a young teacher. It was difficult for us to have an extended conversation as he only spoke Russian and I only spoke Polish. But this young man was searching for the truth. His young, restless soul was looking for God, no matter that according to the Soviet constitution, there is "no God." The people he was meeting, people from the West, were believers. His mother used to believe, too. She prayed. There was an icon at home. He wanted to find out more. Among the weeds so generously sown at the University in Minsk, tiny plants of faith were sprouting. It was awakening in him. He wanted to arrive at eternal truth. Did he find it? Or, looking at the new masters, their pride, hatred, and murders, did he leave the question unresolved?

Very early in the morning, my host hitched the horse to his sledge, took an ax, and off we went. My sledge was not far away, with its useless shaft. A few blows on a young fir with his ax, and there was a new one. We attached the sledge and went back. Can one remain indifferent to such kindness from a stranger. I wanted to show my gratitude, but with what? I myself was as poor as a church mouse.

I reached Leonpol without further obstacles. The Rev. Pastor was upset.

“Father Bohatkiewicz was arrested,” he said to me. “Yesterday they took him off to prison. They stopped at my place for a moment. They came for him soon after your departure. He was very grateful for your kindness and warning.”

I went back to Druja.

“Do you want to listen to the news?” asked the pastor, Fr. Smolinski.

“Where from? What kind?”

“Come to my place.”

We entered. I didn’t see anything.

“Where is the radio?” I asked.

“Just a moment,” answered Fr. Smolinski. He opened the wardrobe. He took out a nail on one side, then another. He removed the bottom, and then he pulled another nail from the floor. Finally, he took out a floorboard. I was looking into a huge hole dug in the earth. An apparatus was installed in it.

“What is this?” I asked, pointing to a huge box full of small bottles interconnected with copper and zinc.

“It’s the battery. Br. Sigmund Czerwinski rigged it up, since it’s a fact that it’s hard to live without news.”

“Yes, really hard,” I agreed.

We really needed to have some hope for a better tomorrow. We used this radio until the end of German rule, even on those days when the SS punitive expedition was housed on the floor above us before they went off to annihilate Rosica. We needed a soapstone substitute for sodium chloride in the cells, and later we used rechargeable batteries.

It was perhaps as early as 1942 when London began its broadcasts with its signature drumbeat and the words: “This is London calling.” Beginning broadcasts in this way would become a recognition code to signal some interesting news — such as when the Germans began to take a beating. That happened when they were driven out of Africa and when they were defeated outside what used to be Stalingrad.

Later, we also heard encouragement from Kosciusko (Soviet radio broadcasting in Polish) about an uprising in Warsaw. Our Eastern friend is now with us. We are going to choke the Nazi hydra together. Oh, yes, we could talk! And then the lonely martyrdom of the capital city followed. Yes, we always had news, but when the partisans began to be active, we even had detailed typewritten bulletins.

GOING BACK TO ROSICA

But I digress, now I needed to go back to Rosica. They needed me to serve there as sacristan. The three of us were going: Father Laszewski, the Mother Superior of the Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist, and myself, sacristan and cart driver. I even knew how to tighten the *dukha*. The draft horse I was using now was a mare. We planned to go along the Dvina. All went well. After four or five kilometers, we headed toward the river. To my dismay, I learned that I was not the master. The mare was in charge. She would not go out onto the ice. Each time I led her into the track toward the river, she would jump into the bushes and quite happily turn around and go back toward Druja. I would bring her back to the trail, but she went back her way. She began to swish her tail hard. She started to jump on her hind legs and stomp her hooves. We stopped to let her calm down.

She calmed down. Slowly, I led her down toward the river. Oh, but this mare was not so stupid. She was back in the bushes and on her way home. I held her tight with the reins and things went very well. Then, the sledge turned upside down. The mare evaluated the situation immediately and pulled. She got loose and left the whole mess behind. Before we could scramble from underneath our blankets, coats, and all our other things, the mare was far away. She was joyously going back to her manger and her warm stable.

She kept walking quietly, without even looking back. That was good. I could catch up with her. I ran, and I almost caught the sledge. But the clever devil looked back and took off again

as fast as she could. Am I a horse, to be able to catch up with a running mare? And, of course, I was also burdened by my heavy coat. A few times she actually taunted and teased me, my darling little mare. Finally, after about two kilometers, she was caught by a man who was coming from the opposite direction. The horse probably recognized that she had had enough fun for one day, because she made no more difficulties about stepping onto the ice, especially since I was leading her by the mouth on a short bridle. Father Laszewski took care of the rear part and Sister was driving. The mare could do nothing against three people who had been alerted to her mischief. This was Mr. Napoleon's beast, and, oh, how she made a nervous wreck out of me!

I stayed in Rosica until Corpus Christi. The Germans were not faring very well. One evening we were standing in front of the house when a flare went up in the sky. It flashed, glowed red, and then went out.

"They're parachuting down supplies for the Soviet partisans who just started to show up in our neighborhood," said Fr. Czczcott. "It will be merry here."

Oh yes, it will be merry. The earth will be soaked with the blood of innocent murdered victims. It will be smoky with burning houses, turned into rubble by punitive SS companies.

By Corpus Christi, Fr. Czczcott had prepared a beautiful canopy as well as a beautiful standard, embroidered by the local girls under the supervision of a Sister. For the first and last time, God in the form of the Host was taken in procession through their fields and through the streets of the village. He saw their faces, worried and fearful of the future. He saw their tears. He looked into their souls that stood open to Him. Was it then that the hidden God was moved and cried silently over the future of Jerusalem? "For the days would come to you and surround you with a rampart, O Jerusalem." But Jerusalem was a God-killing city, while they are following You with love, Jesus. The tears of the God-Host must have been bitter indeed.

Around that time Fr. Leszczewicz was asked to go to Dryssa to celebrate Holy Mass, and he took me along. We were return-

ing after Holy Mass. There had been much talk about the partisans, and Oswieja was under their control. One could not go there, although the partisans were not interfering with the administration of priestly services. Had Fr. Anthony been getting together with them already at this time? Who knows? We drove through Saria, a former estate of the Lopacinski family. The beautiful gothic chapel stood out, red against the background of the chestnut trees in bloom. Father Anthony took out a pipe.

“It is from Harbin,” he said, adding, “Don’t be offended if I smoke. I have permission from my superiors. It’s nerves.”

And then without warning, he said, “I often wonder how I would feel if I were told, ‘You will be shot and killed in a moment.’ ”

“Why would you wonder since it’s improbable?” I asked.

“Well, don’t forget. It’s wartime and our area is being overrun by the partisans,” he replied.

I could no longer see the burning candles of the chestnut flowers, the greenery, or the sunshine. Everything disappeared. Only his question was drumming in my ears: “How would I feel if I were told, ‘You will be shot and killed in a moment?’ ” You will cease to live. Would I be afraid? What would I do? Probably nothing. Oh dear, where did my thoughts wander to? Come back to reality, I thought to myself.

A few days after Corpus Christi, Father drove me to Leonpol. They were supposed to be waiting for me there with a horse to bring me back to Druja. Father was driving. He did not speak much. He didn’t like to show his feelings.

“You are not needed here. Go back and study so that you can replace me. It will be safer there,” he added. We arrived at the Dvina. Father stopped the horse and called the boatman. The boat came. We shook hands. I kissed his. But I could still hear: “How would I feel if I were told ...” Father was concentrated and focused. He was staying on in the “inhuman land” to give himself in sacrifice for the people whom he loved in God. I jumped into the boat. I left the land which would soon become

an altar. Far away I could see a human figure. Father Anthony was standing, solitary. There was a faint cloud of smoke above his head. He was smoking to calm his nerves. He waved his hand in final farewell. The solitary sacrificial victim remained on his altar.

It was still June. Each day we sang the Litany of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. How different it was from the tune sung in Rosica. When I listened to it there, I was permeated by some indefinite emotion. There was something very sad in it, just as this land was sad. When I was listening to it, I could see the unending, limitless Russian spaces. When I listened to it, I could see the people behind barbed wire in Siberia and in Kazakhstan. I saw gray faces, people in rags, in cloth and bark shoes, hungry, looking for bread. It was a tune that grew on tears and blood like flowers in the swamps grow out of decomposing life. It was full of hopelessness. It could be heard in the Litany to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus as this melody was sung in Rosica.

In the summer, Fr. George Kaszyra, who had been brought up around here, came to us from Lithuania. Even before the war, he had worked in the parish of Druja. He was of Belarussian origin, so he was going to help Fr. Leszczewicz while Fr. Czeczott returned to Druja.

Then, in the fall of 1943, we had a new organist in the parish, Mr. Walter Bohatkiewicz, brother of the murdered Father Mieczyslaw. He was terribly tall, so tall that he had to lean down to talk to us. He was probably two meters tall.

“They’ll need a large coffin for you,” someone told him indecently.

Mr. Walter replied with his youthful smile. I believe he had come here about the same time Polish partisan activity began.

It was Christmas again. The new organist taught the choir beautiful carols. What a joy when the organ played a beloved tune in the full church. The singing came from behind the main altar. That is where the singers were, in the old Bernardine cloister choir. Everyone experiences so many fond memories at

Christmas. I especially remember the darling children! Even though there was cruel war all around and danger was threatening, everybody was joyous during those holy days. Our hearts were filled with hope, even though it was just for a brief moment.

We even had guests for the holidays. Father Laszewski came, and Fr. Leszczewicz visited. Their news was not happy. The work was more and more difficult. Partisans were overrunning the area, and the Germans were furious. They suspected the priests of collaboration with the partisans. Indeed, Father had already met the partisans. They came when he was in Zaszczyryn to spend some time with the man of God.

“Well, what do you think,” the question was asked. “Are we doing the right thing by being partisans, by fighting the Germans?”

His answer was: “Everybody has the obligation to defend the Motherland. You are fighting for your country.”

“So, join us,” the partisans had asked Father.

“No, I have to serve the people in the church,” he replied. “That is my mission, to teach, baptize, hear confessions, and celebrate Holy Mass. The Church wants to make the atrocities of war less severe.”

“Well, then, all right, but it would be nice if you, holy man, funded a machine gun for the partisans.”

Father smiled.

“You know that’s impossible,” he replied.

“Yes, we know. It’s hard for you because you don’t look good to the Germans, working in our territory. You are a hero.”

The situation was very difficult, like being between a hammer and an anvil. We couldn’t do anything to upset the partisans or, even more, the Germans. But we had to stand firm. We couldn’t abandon the people. We needed to share their sad fate with them.

Father was calm. After a few days, he returned to his post. In the meantime, we heard rumors about a possible punitive expe-

dition. Reportedly, they were already assembling local troops in Latvia for pacification of the area where our Fathers were working. Finally, those rumors became fact. SS troops arrived and occupied a floor in the monastery. They trained for a few days before moving against Rosica and the surrounding neighborhood. Father Superior summoned me again.

WARNING THE PRIESTS

“We must save the Fathers, warn them, Br. Henry. Father Leszczewicz will be in Dryssa on Sunday, and you must go there. Warn him that the punitive expedition has already set out. They should come back. You will go with Mr. Modest Gramz, father of Fr. Boleslaus, the pastor from Idolta. The Dvina is already off limits, but he will make some arrangements,” explained Father Superior.

So off we went. That evening we arrived at some friends of Modest's, and we spent the night there. On Sunday morning, we continued on to Dryssa. There were roadblocks along the Dvina, and we were asked for our documents. I reached into my pocket, but Mr. Modest had already explained things to the Germans, showing them some kind of police passes, and we were able to continue. We arrived at the church. Then after Holy Mass, I met the police chief from Dryssa and our Mr. Joseph from Rosica. They came to me with their concerns.

“Brother, you must do all you can to make sure Father Leszczewicz doesn't go back to Rosica for a few days, because he won't listen to us. All he does is joke and laugh, but he must not go back there. The punitive expedition is already active.”

“All right, I will tell Father,” I replied.

I had to explain it to Fr. Leszczewicz at length. He listened and smiled. He was a bit nervous, but he couldn't be convinced.

“I have to go back. There are people there,” he explained. “Moreover, I left the Blessed Sacrament in the church. I cannot allow it to be desecrated. There is also Fr. George. How could I abandon my subordinate in such a moment?”

Finally, to console me, he added : "I'll do what has to be done, and I'll come back with Fr. Kaszyra the day after tomorrow."

The next day, we each went on our way. He went to Rosica, and I went to Druja. We saw each other one last time.

"We'll, hold on. Pray for us," he said, as we parted.

"Please, Father, come back to Dryssa today. Tomorrow it may be too late," I pleaded.

And so the day of sacrifice and martyrdom of our Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz and George Kaszyra arrived. What should I write about it? Many years have now passed, and the reports about the heroic end of their missionary work were so scanty. All we had were just bits and pieces of information. As for Fr. George, we assume that he was shot and killed and then burned along with other people at the edge of Rosica. Nobody knows how Fr. Anthony died. We only know that he did not come out alive after the punitive action. Was he consumed in Hitler's living torch when several dozen people were locked up in a barn, doused with gasoline, and burned alive? There's some evidence for that. Was he shot and killed, or murdered in some other way? Only God knows, and only God knows where his ashes are.

Where did he meet the SS men coming back to Rosica? Was he arrested immediately? Suffice to say that when he arrived in Rosica, he landed right in the middle of the expeditionary force. People from all the villages had already been rounded up there. They would be penned up like cattle. The young and able-bodied would be taken to Germany, and all the others would be murdered. The church was the assembly site. They led everybody into it. What terrible scenes were played out there? Wails and cries, the whimpering of children and the lamenting of the old people must have filled the church. It was to them that Fr. Anthony came. Fr. George was already in the church.

THE MARTYRS' HEROIC MINISTRY

Father Anthony stood in front of the altar and spoke. As usual he spoke like a man. Calm down. Don't cry. God requires sacrifice from us, the sacrifice of our lives. We need to lay down our lives at His feet. It is one brief moment and eternal happiness awaits us. Let us prepare for death together. We are with you. We are here to die. To live a few years longer — is that so important? The most important thing is to end one's life well, and I assure you in front of God who is here with you in the church, I assure you on His behalf that, if you accept His will, you will attain heaven. Now come to the confessionals. We will listen to your confessions, and we will give you Holy Communion. It is easier to die with God. Slowly, the people in the church calmed down. Lines for confession formed. The Fathers sat in the confessionals and listened. They were also distributing Holy Communion. At one moment, a group of Orthodox believers approached him.

“Father, we want to be Catholics. Please accept us.”

The priest had tears in his eyes. These were tears of joy. Only God knows how many people accepted Catholicism during those many hours.

“All right, dear ones,” he said. “Come to the altar. You will say the Profession of Faith. I will hear your confessions and you will receive Holy Communion. Let God be blessed.”

“Father, please baptize my child.” “And mine.” “And mine.” “And mine as well.” “Father, will you baptize mine. I am Orthodox.”

“Yes, Mother.”

And Father baptized them. Then, he started listening to confessions and distributing Holy Communion again. It went on for a whole day and a whole night as the SS men continued to bring more and more groups of people into the church. People gathered around the priests. There was sobbing and crying again. The villages kept on burning, and the church windows were red from the fires' glow. The newcomers were numbed by

so much pain, sitting and looking vacuously into space. Father Anthony spoke again, to encourage the people to prepare themselves for a good death. He ordered an old man to recite the Litany of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and of Our Lady. The whole church responded.

“Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, full of goodness and love, have mercy on us. Salvation of those who trust in You, have mercy on us ...”

A new group came. A young woman pushed her way toward them because the newcomers were from her village.

“Where is my mother? Where is my child?” She asked.

“They were left behind,” said someone with a tired voice. He pointed to the ground. “They were left behind forever,” he added.

The woman looked as if she didn’t understand. Her face slowly turned to stone, and her eyes revealed that everything in her soul was broken and collapsing. Father Anthony approached her.

“Well, Mother, God demands sacrifice from us.”

“Yes, yes, He demanded the sacrifice of a mother and a child” came the reply. And she laughed, but it was the terrible laughter of a deranged woman.

“Father, someone is dying over in the corner,” someone called out.

Father Anthony left the miserable woman and hastened to the dying person. The beaten old man was about to breathe his last, but he was still conscious. Father knelt by his side and began to hear his confession, but first he took the Profession of Faith because the man was Orthodox.

“Yes, I want to become Catholic,” he gasped.

Then, he humbled himself before God and accepted the Last Rites. He died in the priest’s arms.

New Holy Masses began at midnight. Before they started, both priests, servants of the altar, knelt before each other in

prayer to bring order to their own souls. My God, how insignificant human faults are in the great moment when men stand ready to offer You a complete sacrifice of their own lives. How insignificant their human faults are compared with the immensity of their love for their fellow man on which altar they are offering that most beautiful gift — their own lives. Could they not repeat after You, O Jesus: “I am the Good Shepherd”? A good shepherd gives his life for his flock. How insignificant were the faults of their lives compared with those last two days. They forgot about themselves and were wholly committed to their spiritual children. A priest must be like daily bread that everyone takes and eats. They were that daily bread.

The confessions were over. The last Holy Mass had been said. The last sacrifice in life had been offered. What must their feelings have been as they offered it all to God! They must have reached in their thoughts to the room where the Last Supper took place, where Jesus, preparing Himself for death, offered t h e sacrifice of bread and wine. How close this sacrifice was to His Good Friday sacrifice. Again, people were crowding around to receive Holy Communion. After the Holy Mass, Father gave a plenary indulgence at the hour of death, and then heard more confessions. Some people fell asleep on the benches and the floor of the church. The windows were becoming gray and the red glow was subsiding. The day was coming, the last day of life.

The SS men entered, Germans and Latvians. They ordered the young people to go out. There was agitation in the church. All the young people approached. There was a review, and they were led outside. They would go to work for the Fuehrer, for mighty Germany. They should feel honored: Even though they were themselves bandits because they had helped those bandits, the partisans, they would escape the punishment they deserved.

The soldiers came to take the first group away for execution. There was silence in the church. Complete silence. People were immobilized. This was it. This was the time for death. Father Anthony approached them, pale and tired. He tried to smile. He

held a cross in his hand. He blessed them once again and gave them general absolution. Through a tight throat and tears, he called: "My dear children, goodbye. I will see you in heaven."

Crying, wailing, and shouting started.

"Father, save us! Merciful Jesus! Why are they killing us! We are innocent."

"Have courage, dear ones. It is just for a few moments. Then God is with you."

Father intoned the song "He is hanging from the cross." It reverberated from the rafters. Meanwhile SS men herded them out as they wailed and sobbed.

They did not go far, just to the edge of the village. The echo of the shots resounded in the ears of those still living and reverberated painfully in their skulls. Others were already still and lifeless.

The door opened again as the soldiers came for a new group. Mothers with children and old men dragging their feet went out. Father bid farewell to everybody, just as he had with the first group. He gave them courage before the terrible moment of death.

Finally, Father's own time came. Only the last group remained in the church. Father distributed the Holy Eucharist. The tabernacle was empty. There was no more Jesus-Host. He was now residing in people-hosts, which would soon become bloodied as He had been on the cross. The body of an old man who had died at night lay still by the wall. The door opened. All were ready. Lord, it is time. You have called me to a painful roll call. So, I am coming. Please accept my life for this miserable earth, doused with tears and blood. Let the innocent victims that You are taking today bring forth a harvest. Let our blood be the seed of new life, the life of Faith.

The priest took a last look at the church. He had experienced so much in it. He had served Christ faithfully in it, especially during those final hours which had been full of miraculous conversions. A stream of beauty was flowing through him from

God to the people. We cannot grasp the magnitude of sacrifice and the huge scope of grace activated through his priestly mediation. He was a good channel of graces used by God.

They now went to perform the last act of the magnificent drama. The blood sacrifice would soon be complete. Somewhere off in the distance, a stable was on fire, and terrible shouting, wailing, and crying rose up to heaven. A living human torch burned. A mass of people was aflame. Individual torches, individual pyres, were not in fashion then. "Modern" culture could afford collective torches as gifts to "the Great Fuehrer."

Hamlets burned. As far as the eye could see, there were fires everywhere. The sun was veiled with smoke. The cemetery of human evil and bestiality smoldered. And finally, the villages and bodies were reduced to embers. Unburied corpses looked into the winter sky with blind eyes. An entire countryside was covered with the silence of death. O God who art in heaven. Extend Your hand of justice.

Virgin of Good Counsel, O Virgin Mary, what should we do?

A PRIEST IS SAVED

In the chapel in Zaszczyryn, Father Laszewski knelt in prayer. He and the others there could see the smoke rising since morning. It was not an accidental fire. It was a purposeful action. It was the expedition, rumors of which had been coming from Latvia. The frontier was near. Shall I run away? He wondered. Oh, no. I will not leave the people. I will not abandon them. I am their shepherd. Mother of Good Counsel, please support me with your wisdom and kindness. He left the church and went back to the rectory. A pale-looking Sister was there walking around as if blindfolded.

"Sister, please run away to Latvia. It's close."

"And you, Father?"

"I am staying. I must stay. It is my duty. Everything is in God's hands."

“So I will share my fate with you,” she replied.

They went out of the house. The ring of smoke began to close around Zaszczyryn. It came nearer and nearer. They were guessing which villages were burning.

Suddenly an SS troop ran into the churchyard.

“Where is the priest?” asked the officer.

“Here I am” Father Laszewski came forward.

“Father, you must run away to Latvia immediately. There is not a moment to lose. In an hour, it may be too late. We are Latvians. I am a Catholic. I have come to save you.”

“Thank you very much, but I cannot abandon the church. The Blessed Sacrament is here. I cannot leave the people in their misfortune.”

“You will not help them, Father. You cannot save them, and you will perish yourself.”

“I am a Catholic priest. I will not abandon my post. You may arrest me. I am staying with my people.”

The officer was nervous and agitated. When Father spoke the last sentence, he seemed to have an idea. He went to his group. After a brief huddle, a decision had been made. The lieutenant approached Father again and declared harshly: “Father, you are under arrest. You must be ready for travel in five minutes. Please consume the Blessed Sacrament.” The Father and the Sister went to the church. They paused for a moment of adoration. The Father opened the tabernacle, and they ate the Holy Hosts. Jesus was there no more. The church was empty. What to do with the vessels? The officer was there, too. He brought a scarf, a breviary, and a fur hat to the Father.

“We are leaving,” he said.

“Lieutenant, what about the church vessels. The chalice and the ciborium.”

“We shall take them with us, and we will bring them back at the nearest opportunity.”

One of the soldiers ran into the church. The fires were very close.

“Sister, let us pray for the dying. Oh, dying Heart of Jesus, take pity on the dying and those who will die today.”

The road to the military post was short. One could see people darting toward safety in Latvia. Father was put into jail and then transported to a prison in Dvinsk. Who was that Latvian? Who knows? I don’t know his name or birthplace. I only know he was an exceptional man.

A week had passed since the end of the punitive action. The SS troops had already withdrawn from the silent wilderness. The Handmaids of Jesus in the Eucharist decided to go to Rosica to learn what had happened. There was terrible uncertainty concerning the fate of the Fathers, so they obtained permission and traveled to the places of execution. There was no Rosica left. Even the embers were no longer smoldering. The church was in disarray. They looked for bodies. They found a huge stack of ashes in the village. They could see remnants of clothing.

It was here, the place of inhuman execution, that the innocent had been murdered. One of the Sisters moved the charred remains and ashes with a shovel. The bodies were only partially burned, but unrecognizable. Then, she dug out a whole, unscathed hand from under the burned corpses. The pale fingers held a rosary.

Out of nowhere, as if from under the earth, some Latvians appeared. They cursed at her angrily and threateningly.

“Do you want the same to happen to you as happened to them. Go away from here. Drop the hand.”

“Sir, that is a priest’s hand. We shall take it with us,” the Sister replied.

“Go away!” They shouted.

One of the Latvians pulled the shovel away, pushed the Sister with his full strength, and she fell into the ashes of the human bodies. He threw the hand with the rosary back into the ashes.

“Go away, so that we never see you again, or else we will arrest you,” he said.

The heroic saga of Rosica had come to its end. The sacrifice of blood soaked into the earth. We continued on toward our own uncertain fate.

A TIME OF SUFFERING

Then, in March, we celebrated the resurrection of the Lord from the tomb. As we had done since 1940, we started the Easter resurrection hymn with the words: “He overwhelmed the powers of hell, He trampled His enemies ...”

Time was going forward with increasing suffering. At that time, the Latvian Provincial Superior, Father Valpitrš, took charge of our monastery. He came to us for a visitation. He was a serious, middle-aged priest with a beard and mustache who performed his priestly functions in both rites. Probably it was the same time that Bolek Zajac went to Latvia where Bishop Sloskan secretly ordained him inside a closed church. His first Masses were celebrated very quietly.

When would I be able to stand at the altar as well to make the bloodless Sacrifice to God? Autumn came, and again the superior summoned me.

“Brother Henry, we would like you to go to Warsaw to tell them what is going on here and to bring us news from there.”

Go? All right, even though it wouldn't be easy and it was very dangerous. The partisans were in full operation, and every week a train was blown up somewhere. But, a man must do what a man must do. It was not easy to obtain a travel permit. The German authorities gave them very reluctantly. I went to the deputy regional commandant in Braslaw with an interpreter, Fr. Anthony Szubzda.

Even though it was 1943 and the Germans were no longer so self-absorbed, I still didn't get the permit. Maybe the turkey was too small and maybe the Commandant didn't understand he was getting it in exchange for a favor. And maybe — and this is most likely — the Commandant's secretary, a reprehensible sort, had her say in the matter. Anyway, they told me to go to Glembokie. But how could I get there? The whole territory

around Glembokie was overrun by the partisans and the roads were mined. I had to go to Latvia, to Dvinsk, even though it wasn't my country; I would take a better turkey and maybe I would manage. I managed, but I was very afraid.

I went to the office in Dzwinske. This time the turkey went where it was supposed to go. As the official was signing the permit and I was sitting meekly in the waiting room, whose nasty red head should appear? Of course, the Commandant's secretary. A moment later, the commandant came in too, with her, of course. They pointed to me. Shouting erupted in German, so I didn't understand anything. But I didn't have to understand much to know what was going on. The Latvian official did not say a word. Nothing. He was like a wall, mute. I was sitting there waiting to see what was going to happen. The Commandant shouted to his heart's content and left. Then the official quickly handed me the signed pass and said: "Please leave Dzwinsk immediately."

Later on it was easier to get permits. The proud rulers were only thinking about going back to the Fatherland. Another turkey appeared in my stead in Braslaw, along with a letter announcing that I was sick. I thought it didn't matter where I got my pass if it was issued by the German authorities.

So I packed up immediately. A narrow gauge train took me to Dukszty. There was a train to Vilnius immediately. I had to change trains many times. I stopped in Grodno. I stopped in Bialystok, taking advantage of the hospitality of Msgr. Abramowicz, the pastor at St. Roch's. And finally from Bialystok I went to Warsaw, where I made a sensation.

"How did you get here?" They said in wonder.

"By train, dear, by train," I replied.

I wanted to visit Father Provincial Sobczyk, but he was dying in a hospital. He had exhausted his heart so much helping the poor intelligentsia that he had to pay with his life for his charity, so I participated in the funeral. I saw his body to its eternal resting place in our cemetery at Wawrzyszew.

I was very much impressed by the chapels located in the entrances of the houses in Warsaw. The people of Warsaw prayed in them in the evenings with singing and litanies, just to survive another night, to avoid another roundup, to avoid deportation. The city appeared so sad with its ruined Royal Palace and destroyed houses. The city fought on. I obtained underground pamphlets and read them avidly. I made a date with one of the leaders of the underground movements. He told me about how our eastern territories were being given away. I was told about the decision made by the Allies for the fourth partition of Poland, and my heart filled with bitterness.

MY PRIESTLY MINISTRY BEGINS

Supplied with sweets for Polish children that the Pope had provided, as well as with encouragement for the seminarians who were to be ordained in Druja, I returned home. It was the middle of December. In mid-January of 1944, I went off to be ordained. I received all the orders at once. The Lithuanian Provincial, Father Andziulis, got permission for the imprisoned Metropolitan to ordain me. I asked the Metropolitan to move up the time of my ordination. In February, there is a holy day devoted to the apostle, St. Matthew. As ordination must be done on a Sunday or a feast day, I suggested that day. I received the answer: Traditionally, only bishops are consecrated on an apostle's holy day. You're not ready for that.

After ordination, I returned to Kaunas. There, a lady who was looking after Poles suggested that I might visit our Vilnius priests in a labor camp. She had been looking after them. The camp was near Kaunas, and my professor, now a Bishop, was also there. We took along some wine for Mass. This was how they were celebrating the Holy Masses. They took me to the place where they celebrated the Most Holy Sacrifice, the attic of a house. A tiny bench served as an altar and a glass was used as the chalice. Was it not then God's most beloved temple? And wasn't their Mass, linked to such personal sacrifice, the most gracious gift?

They had to rise before dawn to be on time for camp labor. Hiding from the eyes of the guards, we took some photos near the house. Together with my dear hosts, I visited Lucjanowo. Then, I returned to Druja where I celebrated my First Mass and began my work as a priest. Events took place very quickly after that. Easter went by, and rumbling could be heard from far away. This time it was land artillery, not air bombardment. The front was approaching quickly.

The feast of Corpus Christi arrived. In the morning I was suddenly awakened by the pastor. "Listen, you must go to Idolta. The Belarussian police have arrested Fr. Gramz and taken him away. You will celebrate Low Mass and come back. The people cannot be left without Holy Mass."

"All right, I am going," I replied.

Our neighbor from Idolta, Fr. Gramz, was a saintly man. He had so much personal charm that everyone was attracted to him. Many years later, I chanced upon some people who knew him in Warsaw. They had spent time together studying in Rome, and they couldn't stop telling stories about this man with such a beautiful spirit. He had such great reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. He used to spend long, lonely hours in his old church in front of the hidden God. As a seminarian, when reading the passion account on Palm Sunday, he couldn't finish because he simply started crying. His was an ardent spirit. He was a simple man, natural in demeanor, without any airs or affectations.

One day he visited us in Druja and the conversation went on and on until evening arrived; and it was ten kilometers back to Idolta. Father Gramz had not been invited to spend the night, so he set out on his way home. Right away, I went to Fr. Smolinski, our pastor, who allowed us to keep the guest overnight. He was a quiet, non-imposing, saintly man.

So I went to Idolta. I entered the church and vested for the Holy Mass. I began to pray at the foot of the altar. A woman was trying to keep from crying. She couldn't. In a moment the whole church was filled with uncontrollable, helpless sobbing,

like the sobbing of a child whose father had been taken away. I finished the Gospel. Somebody pushed his way into the church.

“We found Father’s body,” the person explained.

“Was he killed? I asked.”

“Yes. Shot.”

We took a cart to transport the body. I turned around to the people: “This Holy Mass is being offered for your pastor, Father Boleslaus Gramz of blessed memory. Do not cry, but pray.”

They had been transporting Fr. Gramz to Dryssa as a German hostage. In some hut by the wayside, they started to drink, leaving the prisoner alone. It was conjectured that they arranged an opportunity for him to run away, and, when Fr. Boleslaus took advantage of this opportunity, he was shot and killed. The funeral was a few days after Corpus Christi. Special care was taken not to make it a solemn occasion. So the heroic priest, the wonderful patriot, went to his rest alongside the new church in Idolta. It is a beautiful place, worthy of receiving this poetic soul.

At that point, the instinct to flee set in among our oppressors. The German military was running away. The road to Dzwinsk in Latvia was constantly in a cloud of dust from caravans of vehicles. At night, the first bursts of flak glowed, charming but dangerous. The walls of our church were white from their light. Beams of multi-colored light streaked up over Dzwinsk as the German anti-aircraft artillery defended against the bombers. The front was very near. On July 2, we celebrated the last Holy Mass in the church at Druja, and then we waited as the front passed through. Brother Sigmund and Mr. Walter Bohatkiewicz stayed behind. They said that it was safer inside the walls. On July 4, we watched the bombardment of Druja from far away. With Fr. Smolinski, we crouched in a forest grove.

“Look,” I shouted at some point. “See the smoke. It’s the church burning.”

We could see the fire engulfing the entire roof and flames bursting out of the windows. Yes, the church was burning like

a terrible torch. The Soviet Air Force was making its presence felt.

Brother Sigmund later told us that it was not possible to save anything. The broken windows caused such a draft up to the spire that the organ burned like dry logs. The largest bell, the hidden one, melted down. And what happened to Mr. Walter? He died, the only one killed in the bombardment. He went to sleep after dinner. He wanted to rest, so he went to the Father Superior's bedroom, just as a bomb hit the room. There were several bombs. We could tell that they were phosphorus bombs because the bed had completely melted. We collected his remains, just some bones, in a very small coffin, 20 to 30 centimeters long. A large man, almost two meters tall, he did not need a large coffin after all. A small one was enough. His blue eyes still look at me, blue as cornflowers, forget-me-nots, or flax flowers. I can see his smiling face high above mine: The organist, Mr. Walter Bohatkiewicz, brother of the murdered Fr. Miecislaus, was buried in such a tiny coffin.

The front passed through. There was calm again, and again Soviet rule. We resumed our work as priests, organizing a chapel in the vestibule of the church. We moved into the cells that were still fit for habitation. In my old one, there was a huge hole over the bed with a view of the sky. I was assigned to the church in Malkowszczyzna, and I went there every Sunday. It was nine kilometers away. I had to take care of everything: confession, Holy Mass, baptisms, and the sick. Around four o'clock, I had breakfast and then returned home.

A dysentery epidemic broke out and was spreading terribly. I explained to people how important it was to observe personal hygiene during epidemics, but I had to do my own work as a priest. I administered Last Rites to a woman who was suffering from dysentery, and then I buried her. My body, weakened by my recent experiences, succumbed to the disease.

The old Orthodox believers laughed about my plight. Your priest was so learned. He told you what to do not to fall sick, and now he is sick himself. In proverbial fashion, they said, "He who is destined to fall sick will get sick." Reportedly, I was in

very bad shape. Good caretakers took me in despite my illness. The pastor gave me the Last Rites, but my stubborn spirit did not yet want to depart my body and I slowly recovered. But our little brother, the young 16-year-old Jozio Mikiel, flew up to God. Death reaped a generous harvest. About 30 people died of dysentery in the parish.

Of course, we were also cursed with typhus. One day they called me to visit a sick child. I arrived at the house. There was no one there, but a small girl with a fever lying on top of the stove. The parents had gone to the steam bath.

“Are you sick?” I asked her.

“Yes.”

I lifted her off the top of the stove and wrapped her in a sheepskin. I sat next to her and heard her confession. Her lips were parched and black. Finally, the parents had returned.

“What is wrong with her?” I asked them.

“Typhus, Father.”

In the evening, I felt something crawling up my leg. Quickly I took off my sock. It was a louse, but what a louse! It was enormous. It sent shivers down my spine. Someone else had passed it to me and fortunately I didn't fall sick. Or maybe it just hadn't had time to bite me.

During this critical time, we introduced a service on the First Saturday of each month in accordance with the revelations of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Fatima. The people were coming in throngs, just like on the First Fridays, to confess and receive Holy Communion as well as to meditate on the mysteries of the rosary. They were getting closer to God, gaining spiritual force and hoarding it for the lean years which would soon come.

It was then that the prayer for peace of Pope Pius XII reached us. We were very much impressed by this most beautiful prayer in which the Holy Father embraced us all with his heart.

WE REMAINED ENSLAVED

Finally, the front moved far away. Warsaw was destroyed. Then the armies reached Berlin and, on May 7, the war ended. I can hardly express the feelings which I experienced then. Anything I might say would be pale and bland, so it is better to say nothing. The joy was for others, not for us. We remained enslaved.

In the summer, deputies of the Lublin Committee (the Polish authority sponsored by the Soviet Union) arrived, and people were able to leave for Poland. I wouldn't even describe my miserable 100-kilometer ride by horse cart to Glebokie while the rivers were flooding. Once, I got stuck in the middle of a bridge made out of loose logs. The horse was walking as if on loose piano keys, and finally he fell completely into the water. I had to take off my shoes and, up to my waist in water, unhitch the horse from the carriage and then pull it out by myself. The way to Glebokie went through Berezwezc. What a pretty baroque church it had been and what a terrible place it was now — a cemetery. The Bolsheviks had murdered their prisoners here before leaving. Then, the Germans allegedly murdered 19,000 Soviet prisoners of war. A total of about 27,000 people perished there. It was a sad, very sad place.

In Braslaw a very long line of people waited for departure, including an old grandma who wanted to go to Poland.

“Babushka, you, too, in your old age?” a Soviet asked her.

“Yes, me, too, in my old age.” Came the reply.

“Is it that bad for you here? It's always better wherever we are not.”

And the old woman answered angrily: “Exactly, that is why I am going. Because you won't be there.”

I have been told many times that I should write my memoirs because so many things are forgotten about our Marian Martyrs. So I tried to summon from my memory those beautiful, wonderful figures of our frontier shepherds: the seductively

beautiful face of Fr. Boleslaus Gramz; the magisterial figure of Father Superior Kulesza; Fr. Leszczewicz who was so close to me; and Fr. Kaszyra, a straightforward man who came from this people and gave his soul for them.

So many of them stayed put to suffer and be humiliated, so as not to leave the people without spiritual care.

“Joziu, come with us,” I said to my friend Fr. Frackiewicz explaining my own plans to leave..

“I cannot. I am the pastor. There is no one to take my place. You don’t have such obligations. Go.” He remained and soon after he found himself in Kolyma, Siberia, the country of permanent night for several months and where the sun doesn’t set for several other months. Everyone spent time in prison during the Stalinist era. Now others have come back to work there again, and they don’t give up. But how many have gone forever? They are the heroes of their vocation.

No wonder that Joziu Frackiewicz, when he came to visit and spend a few years with us in Brazil and then went to see his family, did not come back to say goodbye to us. He told his relatives: “If I went there again, I would have no strength to return to Russia, but I must go back.”

Prayer through the Intercession
of Bl. George Kaszyra and Bl. Anthony Leszczewicz
(for private devotional use)

Almighty and Eternal God,
You granted the grace of martyrdom
to Your Blessed Servants, Anthony and George,
who at the moment of danger to their lives
showed a spirit of love and pastoral zeal
by accepting death with their brothers and sisters.
Through their intercession, grant us
the grace of strength and love,
that our daily service to others
may build up the Church and lead us
to the eternal joy of Your saints.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In honor of the beatification of the Marian Martyrs,
Fr. George Kaszyra and Fr. Anthony Leszczewicz
among the group of 108 martyrs of WWII
elevated to the honors of the altar
by John Paul II on June 13, 1999 Warsaw,

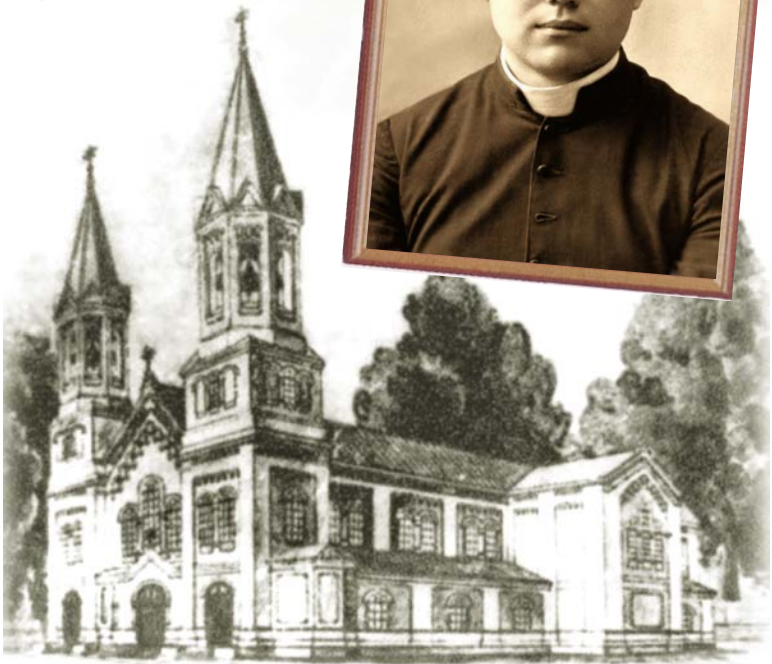
For more information about the
Marian Martyrs, Blessed George and Blessed Anthony,
please write to the following address:
Vice-Postulator of the Marian Causes of Canonization, Eden Hill,
Stockbridge, MA 01263



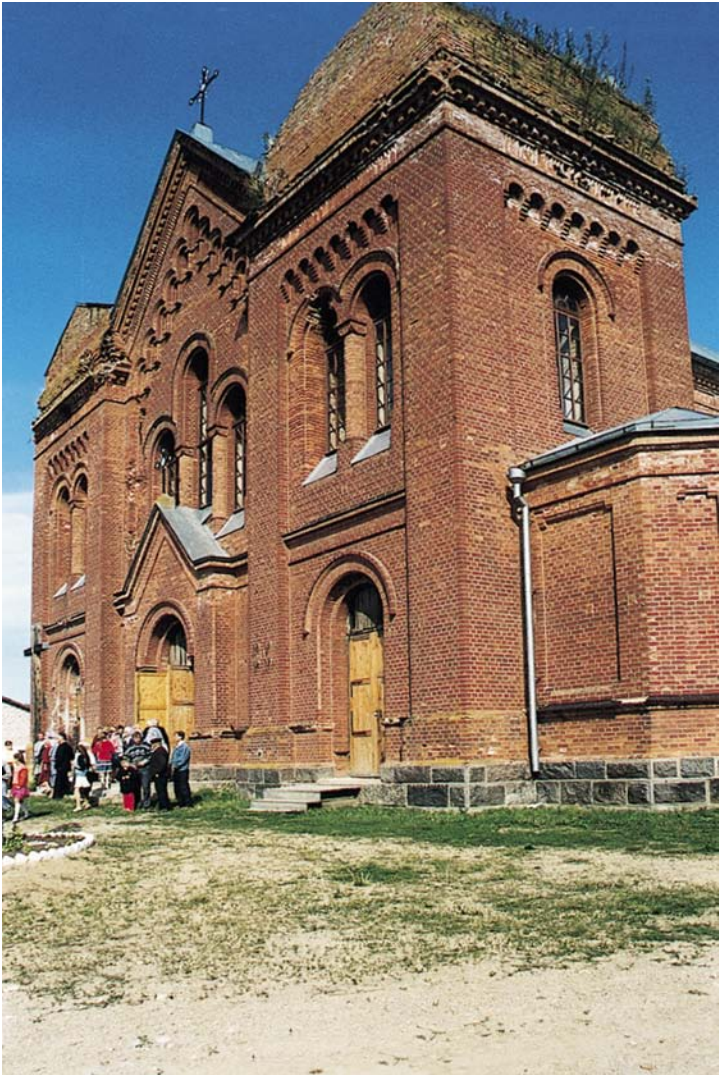
*Blessed Anthony
Leszczewicz*



Blessed George Kaszyra



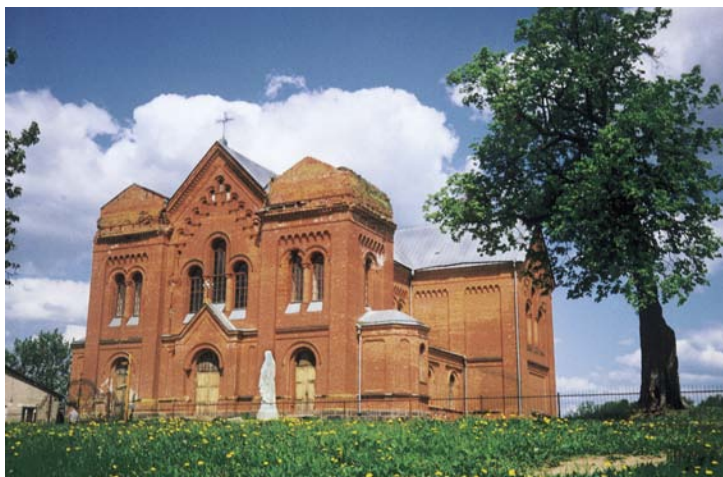
The Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Rosica before its twin spires were razed. Before they were martyred, Blessed Anthony and Blessed George spent their final hours in this church.



In 1998, parishioners gather outside the Church of the Most Holy Trinity in Rosica. In honor of the Marian Martyrs, efforts are now under way to restore the Church to its former glory.



The Church in winter.



The Church in spring.



*Parishioners celebrate Christmas in a side chapel
in the Church in Rosica.*

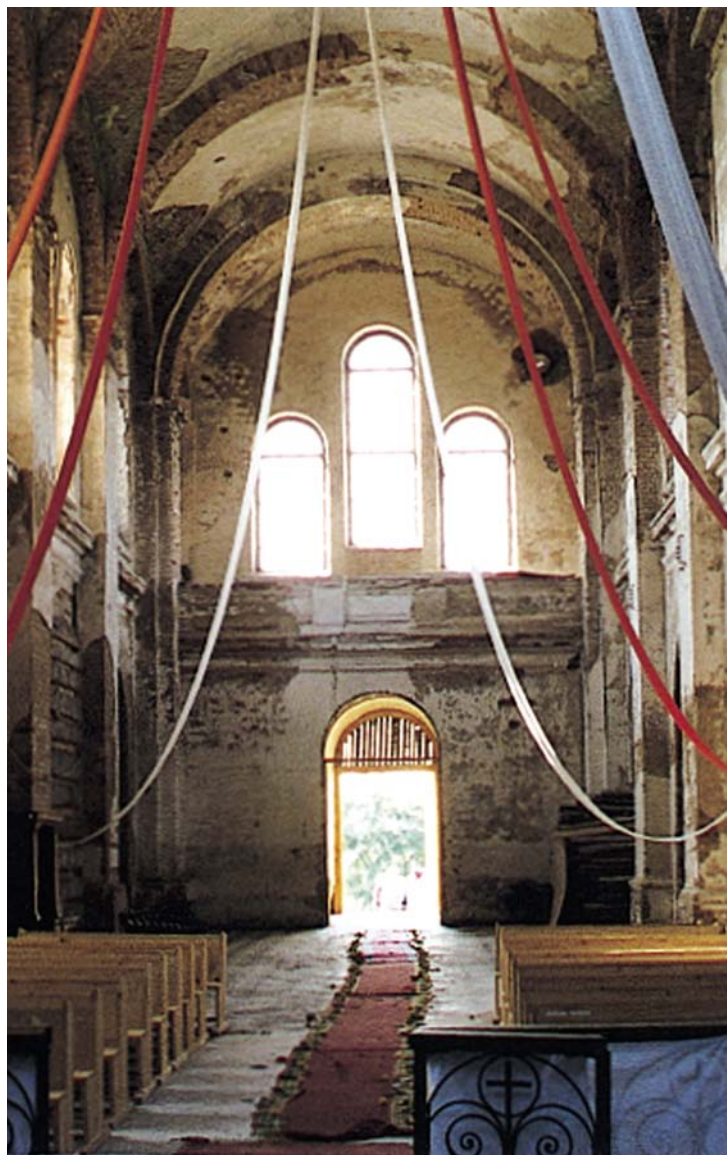


Parishioners gather for prayer in the Rosica church.



Parishioners make daily visits to Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament





*Interior view of the church i Rosica
facing the main entrance.*



*In Rosica, the site of the martyrdom
of Blessed Anthony Leszczewicz.*



The symbolic tombs of Blessed Anthony, Blessed George, Bishop Joseph Lopacinski, and 1, 526 other people who were martyred at Rosica.



*Blessed George and Blessed Anthony,
Marian Martyrs,
Pray for us!*