

E-BULLETIN #57

"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5,16)

item 108

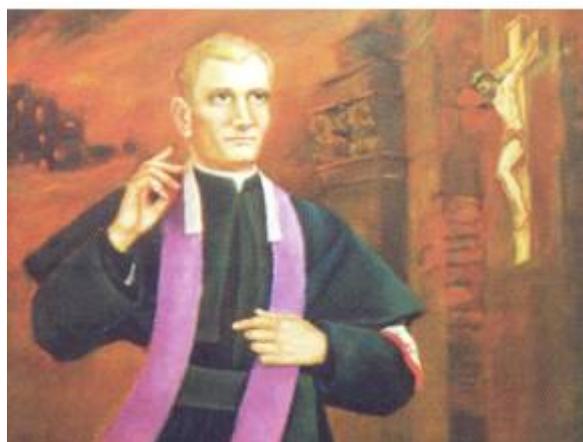
Blessed Józef Stanek sac

When he died he was a fine young man of only 28 years. He had been ordained just three years. He was killed because he was a true Christian. He is Blessed Josef Stanek, the Pallottine martyr from Poland.

brief biographical sketch:

Josef Stanek was born on 4th December, 1916 in Lapsze Nizne in Poland. At the age of 6 he lost both his parents. He completed his school education in a Pallottine institute and later joined the Society of the Catholic Apostolate. He made his first consecration on 15th August, 1937 and on 7th April, 1941 he became a priest. When he was ordained his country had already been under occupation by Nazi Germany for two years. In 1944, when the patriotic spirit was rising high in Poland, insurrection movements began against the oppressive forces. Among all these movements the most well known was the Warsaw Insurrection (1st September, 1944). Just at this volatile and historic moment Josef Stanek was asked to be chaplain and pastor of the Home Army Unit in Czerniakow. There he offered his service both as pastor and as co-patriot. As a pastor he tended to their spiritual needs – hearing confessions, celebrating Holy Eucharist, anointing the sick – and as a patriotic Pole he steeled himself against the crisscrossing bullets to rescue the wounded. The meagre rations that he received were more often than not shared with the wounded.

When the insurrection failed he feared for the lives of the members of the Home Army Unit. He wanted to save as many as possible. He was willing even to risk his own life and to try to negotiate with the



occupying forces. On 22nd September, dressed in his typical Pallottine cassock, he accompanied members of a negotiation group. But the occupying forces arrested him and on the following day (23rd September, 1944) he was paraded in his cassock to the main courtyard of the place (by then the insurrection had been suppressed). There, in the middle of the ruins of the war and in the midst of the Polish prisoners, he was hanged. His execution in public was intended to instil fear into others so that any future thoughts of insurrection might be checked. According to one of the eye-witnesses, as Josef Stanek was about to be hanged he blessed the crowd with a sign of the cross. They comprised both soldiers and prisoners.

a personal reflection on Fr Stanek's life:

Besides the Word of God, the Sacraments and personal and community prayers, the lives of saintly persons have always been a great and important source of spiritual nourishment for me. The 'ordinariness' and the fragile humanness of such heroic people have always been the major reason I endeared myself to them and they endeared themselves to me. And so, when I heard about the Pallottine martyrs, I was always eager to know their life stories. But language was a barrier. Now today my ability to read and understand Italian relatively better has given me the opportunity to know the life of Josef Stanek. And to tell the truth Josef Stanek struck my heart immediately.

Later, as I reflected, I was awestruck by the fact that his life was as close a reflection of Jesus' life on earth as possible. Human beings with their limitations can never possibly reflect in exact detail the life of Our Saviour. Nevertheless as Christians we are called to do that. And heroic people like Josef Stanek time and again remind us that it is humanly possible too.

Let me elaborate. Jesus died as a young Jew under an oppressive government. Josef Stanek died as a young Pole under an oppressive regime. Jesus had just three years of public ministry. Josef Stanek had three years of priestly ministry. Jesus took up the cross willingly for the salvation of all. Josef Stanek chose to be a member of the delegation hoping to save as many lives as possible. Jesus was paraded and jeered at before being crucified. Josef Stanek too was paraded in his cassock and was mistreated and verbally abused. Jesus loved all, and loved all till the end, praying even for the ones who crucified him. Josef Stanek loved all and blessed everyone as he was about to be hanged.

How was that possible? The answer is: Love of God urged him on. There is a Polish biography on Josef Stanek titled: *HE LOVED TO THE END*. Fr Jan Korycki, the Postulator of our Society, reflecting on that title writes that Josef Stanek felt the love of God in him and that in turn made him realize that to live the life of love is obligatory for a Christian. Love of God urged him on to live a life of Love. That is the universal call for every Christian – to live a life of love. Josef Stanek lived it and thus he was a true Christian.

As a Pallottine one more fact in his life made me reflect even further – he died wearing a typical Pallottine cassock. My reflection on that made me realize that Josef Stanek was a true Pallottine too. St Vincent Pallotti always exhorted his companions to have the Life of Our Saviour as the first and supreme law. Each one is asked to question himself in a given situation as to the response of Jesus in that situation and then act accordingly. Josef Stanek did exactly that. He knew what Jesus would have done in his circumstances, and he chose it even though that choice meant a journey to Calvary.

Also St Vincent Pallotti always considered sanctification of one's own self and the salvation of one's neighbour as the supreme aim for every member. Josef Stanek sanctified himself by imitating Jesus in every way possible and his sacrifice resulted in the salvation of many of his neighbours.

Josef Stanek died as a true Christian and a true Pallottine.

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ice breakers..and fellowship

On 16th of February 2013, most of the Indian Pallottine fathers and sisters working in Italy gathered together for the annual gathering of the Indian Pallottines. This time it was arranged at the Generalate of the Pallottine Missionary sisters, Rome. The day began with a prayer session followed by ice

breakers. Rev Sr Izabela Swierad, the superior general of the Pallottine missionary sisters gave a very inspiring talk. At mid-day there was a solemn Eucharistic celebration, which was followed by a fellowship meal. In the afternoon some informal games were arranged. The gathering was a time to get to know each other and specially to meet the new members who have come to Italy this academic year. Here below are some photos highlighting the day's activities.

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