

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

item 369

living saints in our midst

While conducting the Local Community meeting at Zabkowice I was told that one of the confreres could not attend due to his advanced age. That prompted me all the more to go and meet him personally. He was **Fr. Józef Lisiak SAC**, a member of the Poznan Province.

Józef was born on 04 Aug 1918. He was ordained priest on 27 May 1945, thus on 27 May 2015 he celebrated 70 years of priesthood in our Society. It takes a while to realise that he has completed **98** years of earthly life!

After completing his studies in sacred scripture, Fr. Józef taught scripture, Latin, Greek and Hebrew in our major seminary at Oltarzew, for 35 long years. At the same time he remained a confessor, especially for the Sisters of the Congregation of St. Faustina, for 20 years.



It was very surprising to be told that, at the age of 98, Fr. Józef is still exercising his priestly ministry alongside the parish priest – hearing confessions, celebrating Mass and working in the parish office.

Looking into his face it was very evident that I was in front of a saintly Pallottine priest. There was an overwhelming serenity, humanity and humility in his words and gestures. He avoided talk about himself but continued to speak good things about his confreres. I did, however, manage to extract answers to some questions, as given below.

Fr. Józef what is most important in our life as consecrated persons?

Prayer, prayer, prayer. A profound friendship with Christ is the basis of such a prayer.

Fr. Józef what is the greatest danger that we face in our consecrated life?

Lack of faith in God.

He spoke about the founder of the Pallottine mission in Poland, Fr. Majeski. He remembered him as someone who spoke very little and appeared to be a little closed character. Fr. Józef has known two Pallottine martyrs - *Blessed Józef Jankowski* and *Blessed Józef Stanek*. They were two years senior to him in the seminary.

Asked what should be emphasised in formation today, Fr. Józef once again stressed the importance of prayer; the wisdom of the Holy Spirit should prevail over human knowledge and skills.

When asked what he thought of the Pallottine charism, Fr. Józef cautioned about talking too much about charism and not doing enough to realise it concretely. Just as the Father sent his Son as Apostle of the Father, we too need to go forth to the world. Prayer and suffering must also become part of following Christ.

He makes a spiritual pilgrimage to the five Marian sanctuaries daily: Fatima, Lourdes, Guadalupe, Czestekova, Ostrabrama (Lithuania), praying one decade of the rosary at each sanctuary. Each sanctuary takes care of one continent: Fatima – *Europe*, Lourdes – *North America*, Guadalupe – *South America*, Czestokova – *Africa*, Ostrabrama – *Asia-Oceania*. The prayer of Crocina (crown) of the divine mercy devotion will be also part of his prayers at each sanctuary.

Fr. Józef has great admiration for Pope Francis. He is "super" in his opinion.

His room is converted to a museum of religious images and statues. The sense of religion and of the sacred prevail completely in his room. The entire house, as well as his room, are extremely simple. The local people are also rather poor and the living standards of our confreres is also not very different. This 98 year old has to traverse the usual steps to go to the church. There is no complaint about anything. Many people bring simple gifts for him for his pastoral service and Fr. Józef faithfully hands over everything to his rector.

I accepted his blessing and he asked for my blessing which he received kneeling down. He compared my visitation to the mystery of the Holy Rosary, the visitation of Elizabeth by Mary.

This visit left with me a lot of thoughts about our life and mission.

There are still many ordinary, unknown saints walking on the face of our earth. The entire Church is made holy by such men and women of God. Serenity and joy are indications of a pure life according to the Spirit of God. Such persons are in perfect harmony with the will of God. Whether they are alive or dead, they are always in God. Old age, sickness or death does not frighten them. They are always ready for the journey into eternity. Such peace is not possible without a life-long journey of faith and charity.

The saints seldom attract attention to themselves; they are transparent and self-transcending.

I have visited many cloistered convents in different parts of the world. I have always noticed the joy on the face of those cloistered nuns. The reason, I believe, is their life of prayer, contemplation of the Word of God. Self-centredness is displaced by God-centredness.

How often we become unhappy about the food, living conditions and facilities! We tend to think that our unhappiness is connected to such exterior limitations. But here is a 98 yr old, going up and down the steps, almost doing the work of a parish priest. Neither the cold nor his age holds him back from doing good.



Every great saint, while alive, followed such a simple path of life. While I have read such things in books I can also personally testify that it is possible even today. Fr. Józef and the witness of his life show us that the path to sainthood is not something of the past. There are still many ordinary saints in our midst.

Jacob Nampudakam SAC – Zabkowice – POLAND
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jnampudakam@gmail.com

item 370

Dear Father General

From the beginning we would like to thank you for your interest in our opinions, on how we deal with novitiate life. Especially because it pushed us to organize a real brainstorming session which we found very exciting. Everybody shared some interesting thoughts. So now we respond with great pleasure.



In our community of 14 there are lots of contrasts. For example: the oldest one of us (34) is twice as old as the youngest (17); there are some who have just finished school, others who have already been teachers; there is one who speaks an ultra-Eastern-Polish dialect but actually is a half-blood African; there are two ex-professional football players, an ex rock band drummer, three who had previously tried to live the monastic life but have returned. For all of us it is a time of adapting to a new set of circumstances – new people, new rules. But for two of us, who are Belarusians, being in Poland itself is a whole new experience.

Needless to say, all these differences bring lots of fun to our lives but also sometimes – fights! Our older Pallottine brothers say that after a year of silence we brought some life to this house (read: noise). In our everyday life we learn how to submit to the rules set by our superiors, so sometimes we suppress our feelings. But on the other hand we do find an opportunity to express them in sport, such as at table tennis, billiards, gymnastics and football. We recently experienced two big highlights watching our national football team qualifying for Euro 2016. And just three days ago we celebrated long awaited and positive parliamentary elections. It turned out that all of us were happy about the results. These events created a strong sense of unity among us.

When we were discussing what to write in this letter, one of us said that he had never suspected that in a novitiate there would be so much fun.

However, there is also a deeper level that we have all noticed. We see it mostly in prayer. Something starts to change in our relationship with God. Meditation especially is a time and space where changes in our hearts occur. Although it often appears that we lack sufficient time for many things, everybody is very glad that the time for prayer is guaranteed here. We also get great support both from talking individually with our



superiors and during classes. However we felt a bit overwhelmed when Fr. Socjusz presented a list of books for us to read and we often feel nervous at the beginning of morning classes when our knowledge is tested with surprising questions.

The ones who have some previous experience in adult life emphasize that during the novitiate there is lots of space for a wide range of development – deepening faith, knowledge and even individual skills, or even availing of the possibility to spend time aside when needed.

The ones who had previously been in a novitiate say that it is a great opportunity to look closely at their own past lives and learn more about themselves, to learn how God led them through those lives and still does. It is just here that they can clearly see how God turned things right, even when they thought they were doing everything wrong.

We have grown to understand that a novitiate is a time of big change. A chance to lay a good foundation for the rest of our lives, no matter who we eventually choose to be in the future; a chance to know St. Vincent Pallotti and ponder what role God has prepared for us in this apostolic Society. We all hope that we will use this time wisely.

Finally we would like to ask you for a prayer for us, because we have begun to see clearly that we need it. Thank you for visiting us in such an open-hearted atmosphere. We promise to pray for you,

your youngest Polish brothers
Ząbkowice Śląskie
28.10.15

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