



CULT OF THE MOST HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Together with fidelity to Catholicism, Polish Christianity is distinguished by its Marian cult. The Marian cult began spreading throughout Poland from the dawn of Polish Christianity, and soon became part of everyday life and the spiritual culture of the nation.

The oldest Polish churches are named after the Blessed Virgin Mary. The oldest Polish religious hymn, written by St. Adalbert, sung to the present day is Bogurodzica (Mother of God).

Architectural monuments with Marian icons and sculptures testify to the antiquity of the Marian cult. There are over two hundred shrines with crowned, wonder-working images or the Mother or God in Poland. The largest shrine at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, attracts thousands of pilgrims both from home and abroad. Polish royal families had the custom of paying homage to the Mary on Jasna Góra.

Testimony to the Marian cult is also found in the monuments or Polish literature of all periods and types. Folkloristic creativity has transmitted to us a whole series of legends, poems, and songs about the Virgin Mary, as well as primitive folk sculptures and paintings.

Mary has become part of Polish daily life through rites and feasts of the ecclesiastical year (the mysteries of Christ's and Mary's life), through ties to folk observances, through many devotions, songs, litanies, the rosary, the "Hours" (formerly chanted daily at home), and most of all through her wonder-working Częstochowa icon, a copy of which is found in almost every home.

"O You, whose image is seen in every Polish cottage,
Church, and store, in every sumptuous apartment,
In the hand of the dying, and over the child's crib,
And before whom both night and day shines the eternal light.
You who bear pearls from kings, gold from knights,
In whom even those believe who believe in nought,
Who sees us all with thy beautiful eyes..."

Jan Lechoń

MAY

The most beautiful month of the year is dedicated to the Blessed Mother of God, Mary. The celebrations are initiated by the Feast of the Queen of Poland on the 3rd of May. This feast is one of the greatest observances to be celebrated at Jasna Gora and throughout Poland. This feast was established by Pope Pius XI in conjunction with the commemoration of Poland's May 3rd Constitution of 1791. In 1962, Pope John XXIII declared Mary the Queen of Poland. She was made the major patroness of Poland along with the Holy Bishop-Martyrs, St. Adalbert – April 3 and St. Stanislaus – May 8.

May is the month of devotions to the Mother of God. The Litany to the Virgin of Loreto is sung daily, along with special Marian sermons and hymns. The churches are usually jammed with worshipers for the popular "May Devotions." In remote villages and settlements that have no churches, worshipers gather at any of the numerous wayside crosses and chapels and conduct May devotions with a priest. May evenings are a great hymn of praise in honor of the Mother of Christ, Mother most sweet, Mother most beautiful: The month of Mary closes with the Feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary Queen on May 31.

AUGUST

This is the month of harvests and vacations. The activities are interrupted by two Marian feasts: The Assumption of the Mother of God and the Feast of the Czestochowa Mother of God.

The most numerous pilgrims come to Jasna Gora (Bright Mountain) on August 15 which is the Feast of the Assumption, as well as the day commemorating the victory of the Poles over the Bolsheviks at the Battle of Warsaw in 1920. This battle, also called „the Miracle Over the Vistula,” is believed to have been won through the intercession of the Mother of God. This day also marks the arrival of the Warsaw pilgrimage to Czętochowa, which usually numbers between ten and twenty thousand persons.

In the Krakow region, pilgrims make their way to the Zebrzydowska Calvary on the day. During the Great Fast, the „paths” of this Calvary are filled with pilgrims recreating and observing the mystery of the Lord's Passion and Death. In August, the Zebrzydowska Calvary becomes the site of recreating the Dormition and Funeral of Mary, the Mother of God.

On this day, there are also solemn parish observances in honor of Mary. It is customary to have church blessings of harvest wreaths composed of grain stalks, flowers, and medicinal herbs. Hence this day is also called the Feast of Our Lady of the Herbs.

August 26, is the Feast of Our Lady of Czestochowa. On this day, pilgrims from even the most remote corners of the country make an effort to come to Czestochowa. An old Polish proverb says that who does not make the pilgrimage during his lifetime, must do so after death. During the main observances, the faithful renew the National Vows of 1956, which were a renewal of King John Casimir's Vows of 1656.

OCTOBER

October is the month of the rosary. Just as in May, the rosary is said in churches, chapels, and private homes with participation of the entire family. „Welcome Mother of the Holy Rosary, Shrine of God, One in the Trinity...”

October Marian hymns differ in mood from the May hymns. They are more meditative in nature, reflective of autumn.