

The Pastor's Corner...

Give Thanks to God for the Gift of People

Every time I celebrate the anniversary of my ordination or my birthday, I feel an internal call not to praise myself for my ministry to the Church and not to collect praise because of that from people. I have a completely different attitude during these celebrations. I feel obliged to remember all the people who were important in my spiritual and intellectual growth. I recall all those who shaped my character, helped me to develop virtues and helped me fight vices. Not only do I recognize and remember them, but above all, I give thanks to God for their presence in my life. I do think that it is quite accurate to say that I was genuinely lucky that I met so many good and interesting people in my life: priests, nuns, teachers, colleagues, parishioners and fellow Christians. All of them, and each one in a specific way, have contributed to who I really am now. May God reward them abundantly in this life and in the fullness of life in God's Kingdom.

On the very day of my 60th birthday, which is the feast day of the "Black Madonna," I celebrated Mass in the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Poland. On the following day, I visited Sister Beata Szydelko, a nun from the contemplative congregation of St. Bernardine Sisters in Wielun, Poland. I met her for the first time 47 years ago on the way to the Czestochowa Shrine when I was just 13 years old. My older brother and his friend took me for a five-day bike pilgrimage to visit the "Black Madonna." Because we had no accommodations in Wielun, we went to the nuns' convent asking for some help. Sister Beata's hospitality began our friendship, which has lasted through my high school, seminary and priest years. Providentially, my brother's friend also became a priest. From that time on, our parents and we were in touch with Sister Beata, although the long distance between us did not allow us to visit her very frequently. While being a seminarian, I decided that the first money I ever received for ministering in the Church would be sent to Sister Beata in Wielun. Such an opportunity came in my fourth year of my priestly formation, when I was sent to the Franciscan monastery in Włocławek to assist at Sunday Masses. At that time, I received a fairly generous financial gift from the pastor of that church, which I then sent to Wielun. Sister Beata

expressed her gratitude for this donation from me and informed me that with the money she received, she bought several bouquets of flowers which she placed before the altar in the monastery church. She desired that my gift, and in this way, my person

would be present in the church. I honestly protested to myself at the time: "How could she waste my gift like that? I wanted to support the sisters and not just buy flowers for church!" It took me some time to understand that she had done the best thing possible from my sincere gift. It was one of many lessons I have received in my life and which I took deeply to heart.

While visiting Sister Beata's convent two weeks ago, I received a book about the history of that convent and the lives of the sisters. To my surprise, I found a picture of our bike pilgrimage group from the year 1980. Seemingly, that short visit there had meaning and made an impression on Sister Beata and the other sisters. Those sisters served us supper and gave us a tour of their huge garden where they have a rose garden, an orchard with apples, plums, cherries, and a vegetable garden. What a privilege and what a grace to be there.

May God bless Sister Beata and all those sisters for witnessing to the hope of Christ and praying for us.

Fr. Mark Jurzyk



Fr. Mark and Sr. Beata



Sr. Elizabeth

PS. Traditionally, we gave the sisters a generous donation, as my mother and father always did in the past.