



Sunday Reflection with Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners and Visitors,

As you read my Sunday reflection for this weekend on **Respect Life Sunday 2025**, I am sending my regards from East of Poland: Bialystok. This is my first visit to this city, which is located several miles from the Belarusian border. The weather at this moment is around 55-59 during the day, very different than our Bradenton

hot weather!! There are few interesting facts about this city that I want to share with you so you may learn more about the beauty of Poland:

- The Podlaskie region surrounding Białystok is often called the "Green Lungs of Poland" due to its pristine environment. The city itself is very green, with parks, squares, and forests making up about 32% of its area.
- The city is a gateway to several national parks, including the world-famous Białowieża National Park, known for its European bison, and the Biebrza and Narew National Parks, which protect vast marsh and wetland areas.
- Jagiellonia Białystok is one of the best soccer teams in Poland at this moment: last and this year playing in the Conference League European competition (which is a big deal!) against Real Betis Seville, Molde, Strasbourg or Rayo Vallecano
- Before World War II, Białystok was a major center for Polish Jews, who made up over half of the city's population. This ended during the German occupation. The city's Jewish history is remembered today on its Jewish Heritage Trail.
- Białystok is the largest center of the Orthodox faith in Poland. The city features significant Orthodox architecture, including the Holy Spirit East Orthodox Church, which houses an immense 1,200 kg chandelier.

Sending my prayers and blessings to all of you. Should be back at the parish by October 14 along with my mom, Zofia, who will be visiting us for couple of weeks.

Also, let's remember why we gather this weekend - Respect Life Sunday:

When we look at the Gospel today, Luke chapter 17, we see that Faith gives us this ability to hope. The example of the apostles in the Gospel encourages us to ask God Himself to "increase our faith." If we struggle to find the courage to speak boldly about human life, we shouldn't be ashamed. The apostles—who themselves lived, ate, and prayed with Christ—needed God's grace to carry out Christ's saving mission. We needn't be afraid to ask God to increase our faith. For if we have but "faith the size of a mustard seed," Christ can give us the power to do incredible things in service of the Gospel.

Sadly, there is a devastating absence of hope today. We see this most profoundly in a sweeping disregard for human life in its most vulnerable forms and stages. Abortion and assisted suicide are products of hopelessness and despair. Yet even amid the increasing attacks on human life, we know that the "storms that buffet us will never prevail, for we are firmly anchored in the hope born of grace, which enables us to live in Christ and to overcome sin, fear and death."

So today, as we recommit ourselves to upholding the teachings of the Church on the inviolability of human life, may we recall that we have merely "done what we were obliged to do" as followers of Christ. Through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven, death is overcome, and life is victorious. The gift of life that God has granted to us is indeed a sign of hope.

Have a Blessed Sunday!

Fr. Rafal Ligenza,

Pastor — St. Joseph Catholic Church