

Homily of Pope John Paul II
Church of the Resurrection in Rome
January 4, 1987

Homily pronounced by His Holiness Pope John Paul II at the Church of the Resurrection at the Generalate in Rome, January 4, 1987, on the occasion of the 150th Anniversary of the Congregation.

“Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ” (Eph 1:3).

Dear Resurrectionists!

I am very happy to be with you today to commemorate some historic dates that are very significant in the life of the Church and of your Congregation, and to thank God sincerely with you for so many favors bestowed on your Order. I greet you all most affectionately, and with great joy I offer the Sacrifice of the Eucharist for you.

On this second Sunday after Christmas, the Liturgy recalls once again and celebrates the blessing of God our Father, which has been revealed in the Word made flesh. The Word of God, that is, the “wisdom of the Most High” (to use the words of the text from Sirach, in the first reading of the Mass), came to dwell among us. Jesus, the Child born at Bethlehem, is the light of the divine wisdom that shines in the darkness of our world and enlightens every person. In him alone do we find the light for our path in time towards eternity; from him alone do we have the supernatural life which makes us children of God. Jesus has revealed the Father to us; from him truth and grace come to us: “From his fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace” (Jn 1:16).

Gathered here today in this Church of the Resurrection, we reflect with profound emotion on the great gift which God has given to the Church through the foundation of your Congregation one hundred and fifty years ago. How could one fail to see in this a blessing of the Father, who has worked so much good for the advantage of the Church and of society through the members of the Congregation? Your Congregation continues to do so much good today also, with its priests and brothers, its students and novices, and its fifty-five religious houses spread wide among twelve nations.

In the atmosphere of Christmas, which we still breathe, it is good to turn our minds back to the events of your past and to meditate in particular on the example and message of your Founders, so that we may draw from this appropriate indications for the encounter with the present reality, and stimulating directives for the future.

INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

During the one hundred and fifty years of its existence, the Congregation has developed both in the exercise of the apostolate and in the awareness of its identity as a religious community. In the apostolate, the Congregation has dedicated itself principally to the pastoral care of the faithful in parishes and to the education of the young. As a religious community, the Congregation, while always aware of its Polish roots, has developed more its own international dimension, feeling itself called to share its own charism with the universal Church. Thus, while the Congregation lived its role to the full in the great Polish emigration of the nineteenth century and dedicated itself to the Church in Poland and the communities of Polish émigrés in many places in the world, it had also the fruitful experience of entering other cultures through its service of the local churches of Italy, Bulgaria, the Federal Republic of Germany, Australia, Canada, the USA, Bermuda, Bolivia and Brazil. An important example of this inculturation occurred in 1863, when my predecessor Pius IX asked the Congregation to go to Bulgaria, where it became a bi-ritual community at the service of the Church in both the Latin and Byzantine rites. In drawing attention to this missionary endeavor, I wish to honor the three Resurrectionists who remain in Bulgaria, all of them elderly Bulgarians, who serve the Church in difficult circumstances.

In the church of the Generalate of the Congregation of the Resurrection, there is the tomb of the Founders: Bogdan Jański, Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz. We recall the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: “Remember your leaders, those who proclaimed to you the word of God; considering carefully the outcome of their life, imitate their faith” (13:7). The Church reminds all religious of the need to “remember their leaders”, to know their founders and to give due value to their intentions concerning the nature, the aim and the character of the institute (cf. CIC 578). This commitment to “remembering” can be considered as a means to make one’s own the charism of the founders and to share in the spiritual experience which they handed on to their disciples, so that this experience may be “... lived, safeguarded, deepened and continually developed in harmony with the Body of Christ which is in a process of continual growth” (*Mutuae relationes*, 11). The Founders of the Congregation are men worthy of being “remembered”, men whose faith must always be imitated, and whose life must serve as a model for every genuine Resurrectionist.

In the church of the Generalate, in a prominent position, there is also the image of Our Lady of Mentorella, Mother of Graces. The position of this image reflects the importance of the sanctuary of Mentorella, as the first mission entrusted to the Congregation. It likewise reflects the importance of the Mother of God in the life and the spiritual tradition of the Resurrectionists. The Constitutions declare: “We believe that Mary is our model in all that we are called to be and to do as Resurrectionists.”

PROFOUND CONVERSION

Bogdan Jański (1807-1840), professor of political economy, public penitent and lay apostle of the Polish emigration at Paris, is known to the members of the Community as the “Elder Brother” and as the Father Founder of the Congregation. Disappointed in the socio-political movements of his time, he became aware that the true “resurrection” of society could come about only through profound conversion to the Lord and a life of faith attested in the service of others. The process of his conversion lasted almost three years. Shortly after making the general confession of his life, he invited his disciples, among whom were Peter Semenenko and Jerome Kajsiewicz, to begin a religious life in common in Paris. Bogdan Jański wrote: “It has pleased God to use me as an instrument and means of our fraternal union... God leads us to his own ends through strange means” (CRR 8585, Letter to J. Hube). Although they stayed together for only a short time, Bogdan influenced Peter and Jerome profoundly through the vision of the renewal of society which he was able to communicate to them. Bogdan Jański was destined to live for only a few years more. The last five years of his life can be described as a commitment to profound conversion, and an utterly generous service to his fellow countrymen at Paris. When he died at Rome in 1840, he was considered a holy man, not only by the members of the Congregation but also by all those outside the Community who had had the benefit of his ministry.

RICH HISTORY

Recently the Congregation commemorated the centenary of the death of Father Peter Semenenko, C.R. (18 November 1886). A disciple of Bogdan Jański, Father Peter is considered a co-founder of the Congregation. He was directly assisted in his conversion to the Lord by Bogdan Jański, whom he always venerated as his spiritual master. Father Peter was a man of extraordinary intellectual versatility and a thinker of great creativity. He was the author of all the most important Rules of the Congregation. By means of his writings in the area of the spiritual life, Father Semenenko developed a kind of spiritual tradition in the Congregation, making a subtle analysis of the obstacles to grace and to union with God that come from human nature and from our ego. Father Peter was the spiritual director of many sisters, including some founders of religious communities. For example, his direction of Celine Borzęcka and her daughter Hedwig Borzęcka led to the foundation of the Sisters of the Resurrection, who are considered to be the spiritual sisters of the Resurrectionists Fathers. Father Semenenko was a man truly dedicated to the Church, both as founder and first Rector of the Polish College in Rome and as a consultor of the Congregation of the Index. It is said that when Pope Leo XIII heard of the death of Father Semenenko, he remarked, “You have suffered a great loss. He was the soul of your Congregation.”

Father Jerome Kajsiewicz, C.R. (1812-1873), one of the first disciples of Bogdan Jański, is also considered as a co-founder of the Congregation. As a soldier

wounded during the uprising of November 1830, he, too, benefited from the personal example and the spiritual guidance of Bogdan Jański at Paris in the process of his conversion. Father Jerome, a lover of poetry, was a friend of the national poet, Adam Mickiewicz. With a practical sense that accompanied his poetic gifts, Father Jerome made a great impression as a famous preacher. As superior general of the Congregation from 1855 until his death in 1873, he served the Community as a guide in practical and spiritual matters. Father Kajsiewicz was also a fervent patriot. At the same time, he promoted the idea of the international development of the Community. As superior general, he was the first to accept non-Polish members into the Congregation, and he sent the Resurrectionists to serve the Church in Italy, Bulgaria, Canada and the United States. He travelled much to visit the brothers and encourage them. Father Jerome is a model for all Resurrectionists of how to seek the will of God in all things. He began every letter with the motto, “Wola Boża” – “the will of God”.

The lives of the founders – Bogdan, Peter and Jerome – teach you, their spiritual children, to strive for continual conversion. In the Constitutions of the Congregation, approved on July 2, 1982 after the chapters of renewal, this dynamic process of conversion, which is lifelong, is presented as a special form of sharing in the Paschal Mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ: “We must constantly die to ourselves (to our own will, to our independence of action, to our self-love) in order to rise again, through the Holy Spirit, to a new life of love in Christ” (Constitutions, 1).

FIRE OF TRUTH AND LOVE

My purpose in recalling these examples – with which in fact you are already familiar – to enable you to draw from your glorious past fresh light, comfort and directives in order to be always and truly “religious in the Church and for the Church” (Constitutions, 11).

The general chapter to be held next July will concern itself with the mission of the Community, and thus with the identity of the Congregation and with its charism, through a meditation on the subject: “The Mission and the Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection”. It is a vast and important subject, and it is my profound hope that the reflections and the discussion that will take place during the Chapter will be guided and enlightened by Christ’s words: “I have come to cast fire on the earth” (Lk 12: 49)—the fire of truth and love, which is able to offer clear opposition to error while always loving the person who is in error, with perfect availability and sensitivity towards others and with trust in the supreme goodness of the Father.

As members of a congregation dedicated to the renewal of society by means of a life marked by the Paschal Mystery, grasp the opportunity offered by this Jubilee Year and the coming general chapter in order to respond to the needs of the Church and of the modern world. Proclaim with great fervor the presence of the Savior in the midst of the people of today and every age. The world needs your witness and apostolic zeal.

I encourage you in your commitment and I assure you of a remembrance in my prayers, so that, as St. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him... that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1: 17-18).

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After the superior general Fr. Robert Kurtz, C.R., thanked the Pope for accepting the invitation to visit the Generalate on the occasion of the Jubilee, the Holy Father responded warmly and informally in Polish, English and Italian:

You have just given me a copy of the history of your Congregation to read in English. I must admit that if I know the history of some congregations more or less, I surely know the history of the Resurrectionists, for your history is deeply inscribed in the history of Poland, in the history of Christian Poland. The very truth of Resurrection, which is the greatest truth of the Christian faith, was a great light for the entire nation after the destruction of our country in the 19th Century; and your founders drew from this truth as a truth of faith, but at the same time conserved its character of inspiration for their countrymen and for the society of that time.

Yet this truth does not belong solely to the Polish nation, even though it has played a very important role in our history as an inspiration during the period that followed our downfall, our Calvary, our death on the cross. It is, at the same time, a truth of the Christian faith which has universal significance. I would like to say that your founders were moved by a prophetic spirit, as though they had foreseen the Second Vatican Council with its focus on the Paschal Mystery –on the mystery of the Resurrection, but clearly on the entire Paschal Mystery: from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. This, and thanks to the Council, the central idea and the charism of your Congregation have been renewed and updated in this century. As your Father General stated: “Our mission today is to proclaim the Resurrection, to work for the resurrection of society and of the individual societies in the places where we are located.” For all of these various societies are threatened today, in various ways, by death – a spiritual death.

The only force that can conquer death in these various societies is always and everywhere the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ. Wherever you are, wherever you work – in Poland, in the United States, in Canada, and even in Bulgaria where Resurrectionists more than a century ago undertook a special mission – I wish that, strengthened by this paschal truth, the truth of the Resurrection of Christ, you may be able to raise up groups of people, and even whole societies, from the many varieties of spiritual decay and death. This is my wish for the 150th Anniversary of your Congregation.