



Stronica Proboszcza



The Pastor's Page

September 8th, MMXIX

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Month of Our Lady of Sorrows

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Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!
Praised be Jesus Christ!

Sunday, September 8th – Birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary!

Do we have any passages in the bible that confirm September 8th, as the birth date of Mary, the Mother of God? Absolutely not! Do we know for certain what her parents' names were? Nope! Do we know how old she was when she married St. Joseph or when she gave birth to Jesus? Sorry, no data available. So how is it we have feast days on our liturgical calendar for Mary's birthday, and a feast day for her parents, Joachim and Anne, July 26th, and even on the really old calendars a feast day for Mary's espousal to Joseph on January 23rd.

As I have said many times in my sermons, the Catholic faith is a very logical religion. The facts are that we know that Mary was human, flesh and blood, like you and me. She was not divine! And every human person is born in time, into this world. So there had to be a birthday. No, we don't know exactly which day, just as we do not know exactly which day Mary's Son, Jesus was born for sure.

What we are celebrating is the fact that this important event DID take place. Observing Mary's birthday confirms our faith that she really did live on this old earth like us and that she became a mother and that she is still a mother to us all, only a cry or prayer away! The Immaculate Conception of Mary is celebrated on December 8th, which is nine months before this day. And it is fitting that we honor her birth in the harvest season, because Mary is the model for all who wish to bring forth Christ in their lives.

In some parts of Europe, the summer harvest and the seed for the winter crops are blessed today. For centuries, Catholic wine growers have used this day to bring the grape harvest to church to be blessed. Alpine farmers drive their cattle and sheep down from summer pastures today.

Also, Sunday, September 8th – Feast of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd

About 120 miles north of Warsaw lies Gietrzwałd, one of Poland's best-kept religious secrets. In this village is found the sanctuary of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd, which houses both a miraculous icon of the Madonna and a statue of the Immaculate Conception commissioned in honor of the Blessed Mother's apparitions there.

The icon of Our Lady of Gietrzwałd dates from the fourteenth century. Over the course of their turbulent history, the people of Poland have consistently appealed to Our Lady of Gietrzwałd for assistance and have filled the church with precious gifts in thanksgiving for the healings received from her. The painting received a singular honor in 1967 when the primate of Poland bestowed a golden papal crown upon our Lady.

But it was the Blessed Virgin Mary's appearance at Gietrzwałd that really made the village a

pilgrimage destination. On June 27th, 1877, thirteen-year-old Justina Szafryńska, who was preparing for her first Holy Communion, and her mother knelt down to pray when they heard the angelus bell. Suddenly, Justina saw a dazzling light in a tree nearby. She became enraptured and in her state of ecstasy told her mother that she could see the Blessed Mother sitting on a brilliant chair surrounded by angels. The apparition lasted only a few moments, during which the lady asked Justina to return the next day.

She did, bringing along her friend twelve-year-old Barbara Samulowska. They began reciting the rosary when the lady appeared, both children seeing angels place a child on the lady's lap. The lady appeared again on June 30th, telling the girls to pray the rosary every day.

The next time, when Justina asked the lady to identify herself, the apparition replied, "I am the Blessed Virgin Mary."

The apparitions continued daily for the next two months, and the growing crowds of onlookers told the girls to ask our Lady specific questions about people they knew. Our Lady's answer was always the same: "You must pray the rosary." She also requested that a shrine be built to enclose a statue of the Immaculate Conception. Once she instructed the girls to wash in a nearby spring, which she blessed for healings.

Church authorities quickly began an investigation, interrogating the girls separately after each apparition and testing them medically and psychologically during their ecstasies. The reports were positive, but it was not until 1977, on the hundredth anniversary of the events, that the local bishop declared the apparitions authentic.

Now that Communism has fallen in Poland, the fame of Our Lady of Gietzwald is finally spreading, and she calls out to all the world, inviting pilgrims to come to her sanctuary and pray the rosary for healings both physical and spiritual.

Thursday, September 12th – Feast of the Holy Name of Mary

In accordance with Jewish custom our Lady's parents named her eight days after her birth, and were inspired to call her Mary. The feast of the Holy Name of Mary follows that of her Birthday, September 8th, as a Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus follows Christmas. The feast originated in Spain and was approved by the Holy See in 1513; Pope Innocent XI extended its observance to the whole Church in 1683 in thanksgiving to our Lady for the victory on September 12th, 1683 by John Sobieski, king of Poland, over the Turks, who were besieging Vienna and threatening the West. This day was commemorated in Vienna by creating a new kind of pastry and shaping it in the form of the Turkish half-moon. It was eaten along with coffee which was part of the booty from the Turks. The Hebrew name of Mary, Miriam, in Latin Domina, means lady or sovereign; this Mary is in virtue of her Son's sovereign authority as Lord of the World. We call Mary our Lady as we call Jesus our Lord. When we pronounce her name, we affirm her power, implore her aid and place ourselves under her protection. The name of Mary brings grace, hope, and sweetness to the hearts of men.

Friday, September 13th – Feast of St. John Chrysostom, Doctor of the Church

St. John was born at Antioch, which is in Turkey, around the year 349. His father was of the Latin Rite while his mother was of the Greek. He was educated by his mother, who was widowed at the age of twenty, and by the famous Greek master Libanius. At the age of eighteen he was baptized a Christian and at the age of thirty-two he was ordained a priest, after having lived the monastic life for six years. He spent twelve years as a preacher at Antioch, where his sermons, which sometimes went on for two hours, won the admiration of the faithful, largely because he was able to incorporate both exegetical, or dogmatic content with moral application, "Chrysostom" means "golden-mouthed."

It was largely because of his fame as a preacher that St. John Chrysostom was elected patriarch of Constantinople, but it was also because of his preaching that he aroused the hostility of the imperial court. Angered by one of John's sermons against pomp and luxury, the empress Eudoxia prevailed on Theophilus,

bishop of Alexandria and an adversary of John Chrysostom, to have John sent into exile in 403. He was soon brought back by the emperor Arcadius, but two months later the empress had him exiled once more, first to the frontier of Armenia and then to the Black Sea. He died en route at the little town of Comana, in Turkey, at age 52, saying: "Glory be to God for everything. Amen." It was the feast of the Holy Cross, September 14th, 407. His body was transferred to Constantinople in 438. In 1909 Pope Pius X proclaimed him the heavenly patron of preachers.

Saturday, September 14th – Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

The most common symbol of the Christian religion is what used to be a device for murdering criminals. The Romans set up crosses outside the city walls. Criminals were nailed or tied to them and left there to suffocate slowly. After they were dead, their naked bodies were left hanging as a warning to anyone who passed by.

Since then, many writers of the Church have reflected on the meaning of the cross on which Jesus died. A sign of shame has become a sign of honor. In dying on the cross, Jesus became one of the poorest, the outcast, the least among us.

A beautiful legend is told about the cross: When God sent Adam and Eve out of paradise, they carried with them a seed from the tree of life. After they died, their children buried them with the seed. From their bodies grew a new tree, which in time was cut down to make the wood of Jesus' cross, a new tree of life. The cross spread its four beams to wrap around creation, to join earth and heaven.

We Christians make the sign of the cross when we enter or leave a church, when we eat our meals, when we go to sleep at night and when we awake in the morning. The cross is our protection in danger and a constant reminder of God's love. Before we were baptized, we were marked with the sign of the cross. That stamped each of us as a Christian.

The feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross began in the year 335, when churches in Jerusalem, built on the sites of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, were dedicated. It became a major feast, and any Christian who could make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem would try to be there for the celebration. The whole 40-day period between the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6th) and the Exaltation of the Holy Cross became a time of pilgrimage to welcome the autumn season.

Christians in Ethiopia have a special love for this day. Crosses are put on poles and decorated with wild flowers. Every household sets one up outdoors. People sing and dance around the holy cross. But they do not feast. Today is a strict fast day, like Good Friday, on the Eastern Christian calendar. In the presence of the tree of Paradise, no one eats. Adam and Eve's sin of eating the fruit of the tree will not be repeated this day.

Early in the fourth century, St. Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, went to Jerusalem in search of the holy places of Christ's life. She razed the Temple of the Goddess Aphrodite, which tradition held was built over the Savior's tomb, and her son built the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher over it. During the excavation, workers found three crosses. Legend has it that the one on which Jesus died was identified when its touch healed a dying woman.

The cross immediately became an object of veneration. At a Good Friday celebration in Jerusalem toward the end of the fourth century, according to an eyewitness, the wood was taken out of its silver container and placed on a table together with the inscription Pilate ordered placed above Jesus' head. Then "all the people pass through one by one; all of them bow down, touching the cross and the inscription, first with their foreheads, then with their eyes; and, after kissing the cross, they move on."

To this day the Eastern Churches, Catholic and Orthodox alike, celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on the September anniversary of the basilica's dedication. The feast entered the Western calendar in the seventh century after Emperor Heraclius recovered it from the Persians, who had carried it off in 614, 15 years earlier. According to the story, the emperor intended to carry the cross back into Jerusalem himself, but was unable to move forward until he put off his imperial garb and became a barefoot pilgrim.

The cross is today the universal image of Christian belief. Countless generations of artists have turned it into a thing of beauty to be carried in procession or worn as jewelry. To the eyes of the first

Christians, it had no beauty. It stood outside too many city walls, decorated only with decaying corpses, as a threat to anyone who defied Rome's authority – including the heretic sect which refused sacrifice to Roman gods. Although believers spoke of the cross as the instrument of salvation, it seldom appeared in Christian art unless disguised as an anchor or the Chi-Rho until after Constantine's Edict of Toleration.

"How splendid the cross of Christ! It brings life, not death; light not darkness; Paradise, not its loss. It is the wood on which the Lord, like a great warrior, was wounded in hands and feet and side, but healed thereby our wounds. A tree has destroyed us, a tree now brought us life." *Theodore of Studios*

**We adore Thee O Christ and we bless Thee,
for by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world.**

Dożynki – The Harvest Festival

That wonderful time of year is finally here, when almost all of the good things we have planted in our gardens, and have been planted in fields on farms throughout our nation, are ripe and ready to be harvested! Nature is really at her best these days and all the fresh and delicious foods that come with the harvest bring a great deal of joy with them! In the Polish tradition this time of year has its own name and its own customs that go along with it. It must be remembered that Poland has been an agricultural country for most of its history. That together with its deeply Catholic roots come together in what is known as Dożynki, a harvest festival to thank God for the bounty of the earth and to celebrate the gift of life itself.

In old Poland the Dożynki celebration was held by the owner of a large estate for the people who had worked during the reaping. On a beautiful afternoon after the crops had been harvested, a deputation of the farmers from the village, in their colorful folk costumes, went to the church, singing and playing their violins. The group always included the best workers.

They carried great wreaths made up of all kinds of grain, flowers, fruits and vegetables. These were brought to the church to be blessed as a thanksgiving for the gifts of the harvest. Then everyone would march off to the nobleman's estate to present him with the wreath. The master of the house greeted the people in front of the house, and praised them for their hard work. The people then sang songs in praise of God, the lord of the estate, and the harvest. When the music was finished, the host thanked them and invited them to a dance and supper and a day of fun and games and rest from their work.

Today Dożynki is a festival of praise and thanksgiving to our most merciful God for the goodness He has given to us. It is also a time to enjoy the gifts God has given us. In Poland extremely creative works of folk art are still prepared at this time of year made from grain, flowers, fruits and vegetables. There are even competitions to see who can create the most elaborate decorations. Everything created is blessed by the priests and many are brought to church to adorn God's house and remind the faithful to be truly thankful for what God has provided.

As we enjoy these days of bounty from our own gardens, and from the many farmer's markets around us, it would be good to call to mind the graciousness and generosity of God and to remember that the very food we depend upon for our lives is a gift from His hand. Let us not take for granted or waste what God has given and let us be thankful for His goodness to us!

*The first one to apologize is the bravest.
The first one to forgive is the strongest!
The first one to forget is the happiest!*