

Reports, forum

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Zbigniew Kras

Chaplain of the President of the Republic of Poland

Contemporary Pastoral Activities For the Sake of Humanity, And Peace. Report of the Chaplain of the President of the Republic of Poland

Due to the current situation of ongoing conflicts in various parts of the world, the issue of peace is present in many statements made by representatives of the Roman Catholic Church. While recognizing the dignity of the human being, they appeal to his/her deepest depths: heart or conscience. In this perspective, the heart/conscience reveals itself as the place where peace or war begins. The lack of peace in the world stems from internal disorder, chaos of values, failure to observe accepted norms, or arbitrary actions. There are many internationally recognized documents concerning the preservation or restoration of peace. Nonetheless, it is often forgotten that peace depends upon every individual, primarily on the transformation of their heart, on the acceptance of the principle of respecting human dignity and rights, freedom, and justice. Without this transformation, the implementation of peace will not occur, and even the most beautiful appeals and declarations will remain mere empty slogans. Therefore, it is worth pointing out even the smallest actions that can contribute to the transformation of a person and thus, to the acceptance of the right to peace for every individual. In this paper, the topic of peace will be presented in a brief report of events, which demonstrate that even seemingly insignificant actions can have a huge impact.

To Pray For Peace Incessantly

On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine. Political analysts had already predicted the outbreak of the war a few weeks earlier. The only questions were: When will it happen? Under what circumstances? This week or next, day or night? A few days earlier, on February 13, I woke up very early and, as I never do, I headed straight to the desk with the computer. It was my first inspiration in the morning to write a prayer, correcting hardly anything. It then became the prayer of many, of people seeking peace, of representatives of different nations, a prayer for every day, for a long time. It has become a prayer that must not cease. Usually, when I write such texts, it is for myself, but this time I decided to share it on Facebook. I did so three hours after writing it. And this triggered a chain of events that I could not have predicted.

In the afternoon of the same day, a nun from the Missionary Sisters for the Polish Diaspora Abroad wrote to me. She proposed to create a graphic design for the already published prayer. In the evening, this new version appeared on social media replacing the original one.

The next day, on Monday, I recited this prayer for the first time in the chapel of the Presidential Palace. On Tuesday, information about this prayer was transmitted by Radio RDN Małopolska. On Wednesday, one of the diocesan bishops assured me that he would forward it to all priests in his diocese, in order that it could be prayed in parish communities. On Thursday, a Vatican official whom I know, informed me that he was forwarding the prayer to everyone from his electronic address book.

At the same time, people began to contact me, willing to translate the prayer into foreign languages. It all happened spontaneously, confirming the significance and meaning of the prayer for many people in different parts of the world. My role was limited to expressing gratitude and posting subsequent versions of the prayer on Facebook. Also, I encouraged everyone to constantly pray for peace. Gradually, the prayer I initiated was translated into Ukrainian, Russian, Belarusian, Italian, Portuguese, Turkish, French, Spanish, Czech, English, German, Japanese, Arabic, Romanian and Korean. The Archbishop of Olomouc, who was keenly interested in praying for peace, helped with the translation into Czech. The translation into Arabic was made by a Muslim from Syria and a professor at one of Warsaw's universities. A few Koreans asked if the prayer was already available in their language. Having heard a negative answer, they said the translation would be ready the next day. One of the Krakow

publishing houses prepared a Polish-Ukrainian prayer book and placed this prayer on the first page.

Two years after writing this prayer for peace, I can admit that the way in which things developed was inspired by God. If the war in Ukraine continues, it means that we must not cease praying, that we must pray even more intensely for an end to the war, for a change of human hearts, for peace in the world. Apart from reciting the prayer, Christians are welcome to include other forms of penance and sacrifice.

Currently, this prayer is recited every day in the chapel of the Presidential Palace by those who participate in the Eucharist. People entering the chapel during the day can use the prayer text available at all times. The President of the Republic of Poland also does this. Particularly during the course of the first year of the war, the text of the prayer was passed on to Ukrainians, during numerous group meetings.

Prayer for the Homeland—a Competition

Another example of an initiative to pray, this time for the Homeland, is the organization of a competition by the weekly „Niedziela” in three categories: children, youth, and adults. For the first four months of 2018, this Catholic paper published the terms of the competition and invited people to write prayers, then reviewed them.

Despite initial concerns about whether the competition would meet with readers’ response, approximately 2,000 prayer texts were received in three very proportional groups (children—primary school; youth—secondary school and students; and adults). In the competition commission, there were: Fr. Krzysztof Pawlina, poet, professor, and rector of the Catholic Academy in Warsaw; Fr. Waław Buryła, a minister and poet; Anna Wyszynska and Marian Florek from the editorial board of “Niedziela”, and Fr. Zbigniew Kras, chaplain to the President of the Republic of Poland. Their task of selecting the best authors was not easy.

Ultimately, the first place among the children was shared by Małgorzata Kaczmarek for the prayer *Panie Boże, Królu nieba...* [Lord, King of Heaven] ex aequo with Maciej Dyl for *Kocham Polskę 7 lat*. [I have loved Poland for 7 years]. In the youth group, Julia Mączka was placed first for her prayer *Moja modlitwa za Ojczyznę* [My Prayer for the Motherland]. Among adult

competitors, Anna Oliwińska-Wacko won the first prize for her *Psalm polski* [A Polish Psalm].

On June 2, 2018, after a solemn Holy Mass for the Homeland in front of the image of the Black Madonna in Częstochowa, the competition winners heard the verdict and received their prizes. The weekly “Niedziela” published the best prayers in 2018, the year of the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining independence. A few weeks later, the winners met with Mrs. Agata Kornhauser-Duda—the First Lady—at the Presidential Palace in Warsaw.

Fr. Zbigniew Kras, the initiator of the competition, compiled the 100 best prayers that were subsequently published in a volume titled “100 Prayers for Poland.” In the book, one may easily find prayers for the Homeland and use them both privately and publicly, as well as during family, regional, and national occasions.

One may express love for the Homeland and concern for it in various ways. Christians know that every action for the Homeland should be supported by prayer. The above-mentioned collection of prayers can serve Poles of all ages and initiate new actions for the good of all inhabitants of Poland.

Words of the prayer by Fr. Zbigniew Kras Chaplain of the President of the Republic of Poland

Merciful and gracious God,
 Ruler of the world, Father of humanity
 Lord of history, Prince of Peace!
 Hear our loud cry
 When the world is threatened with destruction and war.
 In your name, we ask for peace for humanity.
 Help us, Lord, to overcome anger and hatred,
 That a man would not kill another man,
 That the leaders of nations would shake hands in a friendly manner again
 That lethal weapons would be locked back in their bases
 And the armies would return to the barracks.
 Lord Almighty,
 We fold our present and future into your hands
 We entrust to you the rulers and the ruled
 Commanders and soldiers
 Every man and every creature
 Forgive us our weaknesses and sins

Provide us with your paternal care.
We ask for peace, harmony and love through You
Through the mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Queen of Peace and Your saints

Amen. Amen. Amen.