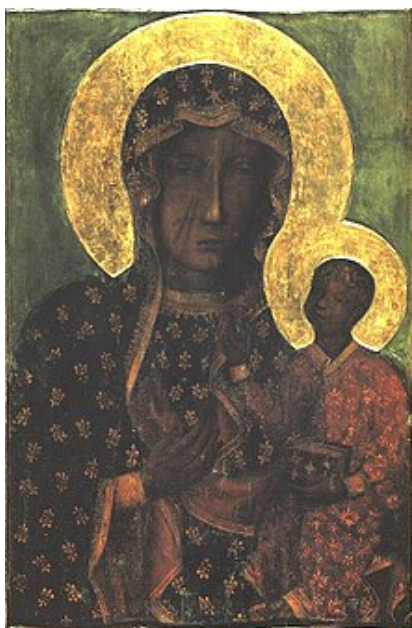


DAY SIX: 12 MAY: OUR LADY of CZESTOCHOWA, POLAND



We walk up the avenue, from the Car Park, past many national flags - pilgrims come here from every continent and many an island. As we enter through the archway ahead of us we can see the Basilica on our left. We can either go straight in, and make our prayerful way around the different chapels, or go to the ramparts for a look over the town.



This is a mighty fortress, indeed a citadel of the Faith and a bastion of Polish national spirit. We have come to the praying heart of Poland.

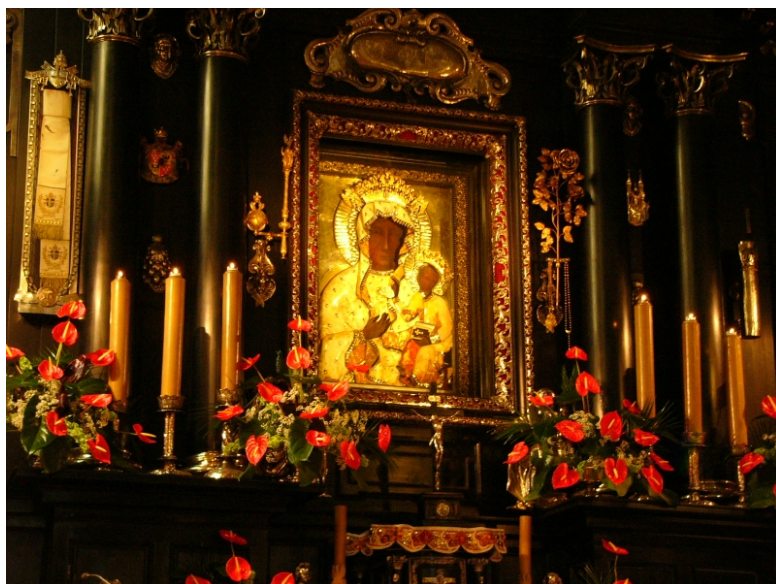
In the Chapel of Reconciliation facing the west door of the Basilica we enter to reflect on all that defaces humanity, as individual penitent pilgrims, and as human beings caught up in a world in which so much evil and pain seem to be entrenched:

*Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name: through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Reflecting on the purpose of our Pilgrimage, being closer to Our Lady throughout May, we seek the graces of the day at Czestochowa, by making the Prayer of Offering to Our Lady of Czestochowa.

This offering prayer, consecrating the entire day to the "Black Madonna," has helped many people during their darkest trials.

*Holy Mother of Czestochowa, Thou art full of grace, goodness and mercy. I consecrate to Thee all my thoughts, words and actions, my soul and body. I beseech Thy blessings and especially prayers for my salvation. Today, I consecrate myself to Thee, Good Mother, totally with body and soul amid joy and sufferings to obtain for myself and others Thy blessings on this earth and eternal life in Heaven. Amen.*



Entering the Chapel of the Icon of the Black Madonna one is struck by the sheer crush of people, as everyone strives to get near to the Madonna while the Icon is on display.

This surging of the faithful is a sign of the deep-seated longing to be close to the Holy Mother of God, especially to be perceived through the prayers of the Icon, which in its own history has been involved much suffering.

### **Before the Black Madonna**

One of Poland's greatest modern composers, Henryk Gorecki (1933–2010), once said: "Her image (*Our Lady of Częstochowa*) juxtaposes several ideals of womanhood: a powerful, heavenly queen, a suffering mother, a perfect nurturer...(the) scars a sign of suffering she shares with her worshippers. (Trochimczyk, 2003).

The Virgin Mary's suffering is the essence of the Polish soul, Polish culture, Polish Catholicism, Polish history and of all Polish mothers. She has been the most powerful symbol of "Polishness" since the painting was brought to Częstochowa in 1382 when Poland was coming into nationhood. Through Poland's very turbulent history (the Russian partitions, WWII, and Post-war Communism) *Our Lady of Częstochowa* has always stood as the epitome of perfect motherhood, loving and forgiving, protector of her children who shared her grief in losing her son to a violent death on the cross.

With the inspiration of Polish spirituality to accompany and encourage us we pray: for ourselves and our families; for all our fellow pilgrims, parishioners and other friends; for those with a special call on our personal prayers.

The Holy Father has invited us to pray the Prayers of the Rosary. The Gospel Message is contained within the sequence of the Rosary prayers: today our



Rosary Prayers are the Sorrowful Mysteries. Our Lady of Czestochowa is acquainted with Sorrow. Our Meditation on the Sorrowful Mysteries: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane- how much agony can a human being bear? The Scourging at the Pillar – how do we inflict pain on others? The Crowning with Thorns - how do we add insult to injury, and humiliate others we do not understand? The Carrying of the Cross – the Way of Sorrows, of failures, of falling and rising, of needing others and recognising that Mary has walked that journey. The Crucifixion – the cruel suffering, the mocking, the sense of dejection and abandonment, yet also the place of Forgiveness and the Lifting up in Majesty: how do we pray and live the mystery?



**A Prayer of Pope Francis for Our Suffering world>**

***We fly to your protection, O Holy Mother of God”.***

***In the present tragic situation, when the whole world is prey to suffering and anxiety, we fly to you, Mother of God and our Mother, and seek refuge under your protection.***

***Virgin Mary, turn your merciful eyes towards us amid this coronavirus pandemic. Comfort those who are distraught and mourn their loved ones who***

*have died, and at times are buried in a way that grieves them deeply. Be close to those who are concerned for their loved ones who are sick and who, in order to prevent the spread of the disease, cannot be close to them. Fill with hope those who are troubled by the uncertainty of the future and the consequences for the economy and employment.*

*Mother of God and our Mother, pray for us to God, the Father of mercies, that this great suffering may end and that hope and peace may dawn anew. Plead with your divine Son, as you did at Cana, so that the families of the sick and the victims be comforted, and their hearts be opened to confidence and trust. Protect those doctors, nurses, health workers and volunteers who are on the frontline of this emergency, and are risking their lives to save others. Support their heroic effort and grant them strength, generosity and continued health. Be close to those who assist the sick night and day, and to priests who, in their pastoral concern and fidelity to the Gospel, are trying to help and support everyone.*

*Blessed Virgin, illumine the minds of men and women engaged in scientific research, that they may find effective solutions to overcome this virus. Support national leaders, that with wisdom, solicitude and generosity they may come to the aid of those lacking the basic necessities of life and may devise social and economic solutions inspired by farsightedness and solidarity. Mary Most Holy, stir our consciences, so that the enormous funds invested in developing and stockpiling arms will instead be spent on promoting effective research on how to prevent similar tragedies from occurring in the future. Beloved Mother, help us realize that we are all members of one great family and to recognize the bond that unites us, so that, in a spirit of fraternity and solidarity, we can help to alleviate countless situations of poverty and need. Make us strong in faith, persevering in service, constant in prayer. Mary, Consolation of the afflicted, embrace all your children in distress and pray that God will stretch out his all-powerful hand and free us from this terrible pandemic, so that life can serenely resume its normal course.*

*To you, who shine on our journey as a sign of salvation and hope, do we entrust ourselves, O Clement, O Loving, O Sweet Virgin Mary. Amen.*

Before we return to the Car Park we take our farewells of The Black Madonna of Czestochowa and the Paulite Fathers we say the Memorare:



**REMEMBER, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.**





*Queen of Heaven, rejoice. Alleluia.  
For He, whom thou wast worthy to bear. Alleluia.  
Has risen as He said. Alleluia.  
Pray for us to God. Alleluia.  
V. Rejoice and be glad, O Virgin Mary. Alleluia.  
R. Because the Lord is truly risen, Alleluia.*

*Let us pray*

*O God, Who by the Resurrection of Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, hast been pleased to give joy to the whole world, grant we beseech Thee, that through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, His Mother, we may attain the joys of eternal life. Through the same Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

*Our Lady of Czestochowa, Pray for us.*