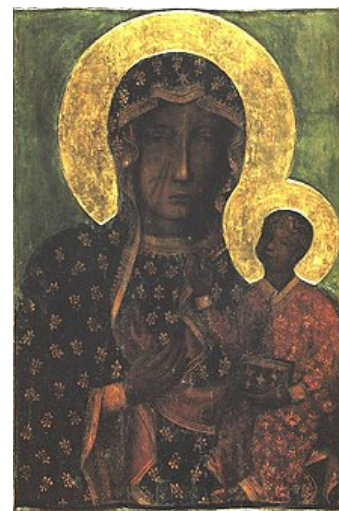


Marian Pilgrimage: Day Six: Tuesday 12 May 2020

The Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Poland



The **Black Madonna of Czestochowa** also known as **Our Lady of Czestochowa**, is a venerated icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary housed at the **Jasna Góra Monastery in Czestochowa, Poland**. Several Pontiffs have recognised the venerated icon, beginning with Pope Clement XI who issued a Canonical Coronation on 8 Sept 1717.

The Virgin Mary is shown as the "Hodegetria" ("One Who Shows the Way"). In it the Virgin directs attention away from herself, gesturing with her right hand toward Jesus as the source of salvation. In turn, the child extends his right hand toward the viewer in blessing while holding a book of gospels in his left hand. The icon shows the Madonna in fleur-de-lis robes.

The story of Our Lady of Czestochowa is somewhat of a mystery. According to tradition, the image of Our Lady was reportedly painted by Saint Luke, and later Saint Helena (mother of the Emperor Constantine) is said to have discovered the image in Jerusalem and taken it to Constantinople.

For five hundred years it is said to have remained in Constantinople, and in 803 the Byzantine emperor may have given the icon to a Greek princess as a wedding present. The narrative continues with the young woman placing the image in the royal palace at Belz where it remained until the 14th Century. When the Tartars conquered the city they looted almost everything—except for the portrait of the Madonna. A mysterious cloud was said to have enveloped the chapel where it was

being kept and so it was preserved. Later the story has an angel appearing to Ladislaus, the Prince of Belz, telling him to take the image to a small village named Częstochowa.

After doing so, he founded a monastery there, of Pauline monks, to care for the icon. A church was built on Jasna Góra (Bright Hill) in 1386. However, once again, the country was invaded, this time by the Hussites, who burned and looted everything in sight. When a soldier was unable to destroy the image, he struck the painting with his sword leaving two gashes on Our Lady's right cheek.

Later, in 1655 Poland was almost entirely over-run by King Karl X Gustav of Sweden. Only the area surrounding the monastery remained unconquered. The monks who lived there were somehow able to defend the portrait throughout a forty-day siege, and the Polish people eventually were able to drive out the invaders.

After these events which were described as 'miraculous', King John II Casimir Vasa crowned the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa as 'Queen of Poland', placing the entire country under her care and protection.

In 1919 Our Lady's intercession was sought again as the Russian army invaded the newly unified country of Poland, reaching the banks of the River Vistula. As a Russian victory seemed almost certain, priests carried the Blessed Sacrament in procession through many cities, and people prayed Novenas to Our Lady of Częstochowa. The Russians were then defeated in a series of battles known as "the Miracle at the Vistula". We should remember what 'miracle' means, events that cause us to be full of awe, wonder before God.

During World War II, Hitler prohibited pilgrimages to Jasna Góra, although some of the faithful did make them. Including young Karol Wojtyła, later Pope John Paul II.

There is little doubt that his papal visit to Poland in 1979 helped to bring about the fall of Communism. The Holy Father prayed before the image and made

subsequent visits in 1983, 1991 and 1997. When our present Holy Father, Pope Francis, visited here in July 2106, he bestowed upon it the Golden Rose, as had his predecessor Pope John Paul II.

The Monastery of Jasna Góra is now one of the most popular Catholic pilgrimage sites in the world. The Icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa is in the chapel of the Basilica. Masses are celebrated daily in Polish, English and many other languages.



In what is a contender to Łódź Ulica Piotrkowska (the longest shopping street in Europe), Częstochowa boasts one of its own gorgeous avenues. The Holy Virgin Mary Avenue (Aleja Najświętszej Maryi Panny) is lined with cafés, bars, restaurants and shops, and many more churches, including the Kościół Najświętszego Imienia Maryi. This long, straight boulevard is decorated on both sides with trees. It is said to look stunning in winter, but the cool sunshine of late spring is an ideal time to see it with the trees newly in blossom. The City Hall is also here, as is the city's main Museum and the beautiful Church of the Holy Zygmunt.



Stroll along the Holy Virgin Mary Avenueto find an excellent restaurant – have lunch before returning to the Basilica. I recommend the Beetroot soup, followed by roast duck {cooked to perfection in Poland}.



Our Lady of Czestochowa, Queen of Poland, Pray for us.