

DAY 3 | TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2026 | WARSAW

Warsaw Remembers: Conscience, Reconstruction, and Resistance

GRACE TO ASK

To remember truthfully, speak without hatred, and protect those made vulnerable by contempt.

Morning Prayer with the Church

Morning Prayer, Tuesday of Psalter Week I, Liturgy of the Hours, Volume IV.

Additional pilgrimage intercessions

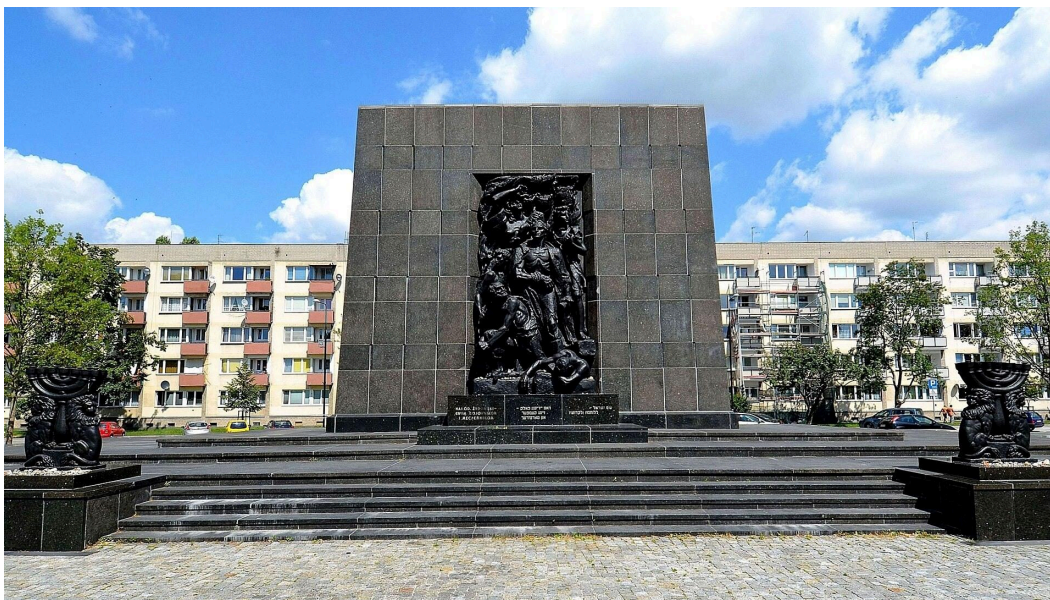
- For journalists, teachers, clergy, public servants, and citizens whose vocation requires truthful speech.
- For the Jewish people and for the defeat of antisemitism in every form.

After the Liturgy of the Hour

God of truth, purify our memory from nostalgia, denial, and self-exoneration. Give us the courage of Blessed Jerzy: a conscience without hatred and a patriotism disciplined by the Gospel. Amen.

BEFORE WE STEP OFF

Today Warsaw will place two kinds of memory before us: the memory of a city rebuilt with its hands, and the memory no reconstruction can repair. We will pray at the church of Blessed Jerzy and later stand near the story of the Warsaw Ghetto. These histories must not be flattened into one lesson. Let each speak in its own integrity. Our work is to listen, until remembrance becomes a responsibility.



The Ghetto Heroes Monument stands within the landscape of Jewish Warsaw, deportation, resistance, and murder. Photo credit

The place we are entering

Today, we journey to remember; and Warsaw's Old Town invites us to look beneath appearances.

Its beginnings reach back to the medieval castle settlement of the thirteenth century. Yet much of what we see today is not simply something ancient that survived. After the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, German forces systematically destroyed most of the historic center. What rose after the war was an extraordinary act of recovery. Poles rebuilt from surviving fragments, old architectural records, the historic street pattern, and even paintings of the city by Bernardo Bellotto, known here as Canaletto.

That is why Warsaw's Old Town is so moving. Its beauty is not the beauty of something left untouched. It is the beauty of something remembered. Stone by stone, street by street, people said: you may destroy our buildings, but you will not decide what deserves to be remembered. In that sense, reconstruction itself became an act of resistance.

There is a spiritual lesson here for us. Memory can be holy. We remember not because we wish to remain trapped in the past, but because love refuses to let what was precious disappear without witness. Christian memory works in much the same way. Every time we gather for the Eucharist and hear the words, "Do this in memory of me," we discover that remembering can become a way of keeping faith alive.

Not far from here stands the Church of St. Stanislaus Kostka, which carries another kind of memory. Father Jerzy Popiełuszko served ordinary workers during the difficult years of communist rule and became closely associated with the Solidarity movement and the Masses for the Homeland. His preaching was courageous because it was rooted in the Gospel. He spoke against lies, injustice, and violence, but he refused to make hatred holy.

That distinction matters.

Christian courage is not proven merely by having an enemy. It is proven by whether we can oppose what is wrong without surrendering the dignity of the person who stands against us.

Father Jerzy was abducted and murdered by officers of the communist security services in 1984. His death remains a powerful witness, but his witness should never be reduced to political victory or ideological triumph. The Gospel asks more of us than simply choosing the correct side of an argument. The Gospel asks whether truth has made us more courageous and, at the same time, more human.

Then Warsaw asks us to enter an even deeper memory.

The Jewish history of this city cannot be reduced to the ghetto or to the Holocaust. Jewish men, women, and children had been part of Warsaw for centuries. By 1939, roughly 375,000 Jews lived here, making Warsaw home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the world.

They prayed here. They studied here. They raised children here. They argued, worked, celebrated weddings, buried their dead, opened shops, wrote books, composed music, and called this city home.

Then came the Nazi occupation.

Jewish families were forced into the sealed Warsaw Ghetto. Hunger, disease, terror, deportation, and murder followed. Most were eventually sent to Treblinka and killed. And yet even in those terrible circumstances, human beings resisted.

In 1943, during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Jewish fighters and civilians rose against the machinery of destruction. Their resistance could not save the ghetto, but it declared something that evil always tries to deny: these were persons, not numbers; lives, not statistics; people whose humanity could not simply be erased. The Ghetto Heroes Monument, unveiled in 1948 while ruins still surrounded it, asks us to remember that.

But there was another form of resistance as well, quieter and in some ways just as astonishing.

Historian Emanuel Ringelblum organized what became known as the Oneg Shabbat archive. Teachers, rabbis, laborers, writers, artists, young people, and ordinary families recorded what was happening around them. Diaries, letters, drawings, documents, and testimonies were hidden in metal boxes and milk cans beneath the ground.

They understood something profound. If they could not control what was being done to them, they could still fight for the truth about what had happened. They wrote so that the murderers would not be allowed to write the final version of the story.

For us as Catholic pilgrims, this is sacred ground. Here, prayer must begin with listening. Before explanation, there must be silence. Before easy words, there must be lament.

And our prayer must also carry repentance. We cannot stand before the memory of the Holocaust without acknowledging the long and painful history of Christian antisemitism and the ways contempt, prejudice, and religious hostility helped create a culture in which Jewish lives could be treated as less worthy.

This is not about carrying a vague burden of guilt for sins we did not personally commit. It is about allowing history to educate conscience. Because contempt rarely begins with violence. It begins in language. In caricature. In the joke we permit. In the lie we repeat. In the group we decide is somehow less human than our own.

A pilgrim must learn to recognize those beginnings. So here in Warsaw, let us pray not only for the dead. Let us pray for a more disciplined heart. A heart that loves truth. A heart that refuses hatred. A heart that remembers.

A heart that will defend the dignity of another person before contempt has the chance to become cruelty. Warsaw teaches us that memory can rebuild a city. Perhaps, by grace, it can also rebuild the human heart.

PLAYLIST

ON THE WILLOWS

Music & Lyrics by: Stephen Schwartz

From the Broadway Musical: Godspell

Scan me!



How we enter as pilgrims

- At the Old Town, notice the seams of reconstruction; ask what fidelity required after ruin.
- At Blessed Jerzy's memorial, pray for courage that never borrows the methods of hatred.
- At the Ghetto Heroes Monument, give silence before any photograph that remembers Jewish suffering.

Polish for the day: Pamięć — memory.

Today's movement

- 7:00 a.m. breakfast.
- 9:00 a.m. Mass in the Lower Church Chapel of St. Francis at St. Stanislaus Kostka Church.
- Visit the museum and memorial of Blessed Jerzy Popiełuszko.
- Old Town, Market Square, and Ghetto Heroes Monument; lunch on your own and free afternoon.
- 7:30 p.m. included dinner; second night in Warsaw.

CATHOLIC DAILY MASS

TUESDAY OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH WEEK IN ORDINARY TIME

9:00 a.m. • Lower Church Chapel of St. Francis, St. Stanislaus Kostka • Warsaw

Schedule marker only • Use the separate worship aid for Mass

Evening Prayer with the Church

Evening Prayer, Tuesday of Psalter Week I.

Additional pilgrimage intercessions

- For all whose homes, cities, and cultures have been destroyed by war.
- For the dead of the Warsaw Ghetto and for those who resisted dehumanization.

After the Hour

Lord of history, receive what we have seen and what we could not comprehend. Save us from shallow remembrance. Make memory a covenant that protects the vulnerable and refuses the first language of contempt. Amen.

Evening examen and pilgrim notes

What did today help you see more clearly about yourself, your life, or God?

What does remembering today ask me to do differently?
