

A PEOPLE CARRIED BY MEMORY

Poland Before We Arrive

A PILGRIM'S QUESTION

*What have these people had to remember and endure in order to remain itself?
And what does that kind of memory and perseverance ask of us?*

I reckon that to come to Poland as pilgrims is to enter a land where faith, suffering, memory, family, and national identity have been woven together for more than a thousand years.

Poland's Christian story is traditionally traced to the baptism of Mieszko I in 966. From that moment, Christianity became deeply intertwined with the unfolding life of the Polish people. In later centuries, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth emerged as one of the great political and cultural worlds of early modern Europe. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century, Poland was divided among neighboring empires and disappeared from the political map of Europe for 123 years.

And still, the Polish people remembered who they were.... They remembered. They remembered through their language. Through the stories told at family tables. Through poetry and music. Through the Catholic Church. Through feast days, prayers, customs, and the quiet handing on of memory from parents to children. Long before Poland regained its independence in 1918, this nation continued to live in the hearts of its people.

The 20th century would bring wounds almost beyond imagining. In September 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland from the west, followed by the Soviet invasion from the east. The years that followed brought occupation, executions, forced labor, deportations, the Holocaust, and the destruction of entire communities and cities. Millions of lives were lost.

We must remember, especially as pilgrims, that Jewish life was never a small or peripheral part of Poland's story. Jewish communities had lived here for centuries and helped shape its cities, scholarship, commerce, music, and culture. Before the Second World War, Jewish people made up nearly one tenth of Poland's population. The destruction of Polish Jewry during the Holocaust is therefore not a side chapter in Poland's history. It is a profound wound at the very center of it.

After the war came another difficult chapter: Poland's borders changed, families were displaced, and Soviet domination brought decades of communist rule. During those years, churches, shrines, homes, and communities often became places where memory could still be spoken, where faith could still be practiced, and where human dignity could still be defended. We should resist the temptation to make any nation or institution appear flawless. Poland's history, like every human history, contains both courage and failure, holiness and sin, generosity and contradiction.

And yet grace continued to move.



In 1978, the world watched as the Archbishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyła, became Pope John Paul II. His return to Poland the following year awakened something profound in the people. His voice, together with the courage of countless ordinary men and women and the rise of the Solidarity movement, became part of Poland's long journey toward the democratic changes of 1989.

But Poland's story is not carried only in history books or monuments. It is carried in Warsaw's rebuilt streets, where a city once destroyed by war rose again. It is carried

through Kraków, where royal history, university life, parish churches, poetry, music, cafés, markets, and ordinary family life meet one another. It is carried in Marian hymns, cemetery candles, woodcarving, folk music, roadside shrines, and the prayers of generations.

Even the table tells a story: Potatoes and beets, cabbage and buckwheat, mushrooms, apples, poppy seed, pickles, preserves, smoked meats and cheeses speak quietly of the seasons, of the land, of hardship, of resourcefulness, and of celebration. In the Tatra Mountains, Góral traditions of timber, sheep farming, music, costume, faith, and hospitality are not simply performances preserved for visitors. They remain part of a living memory of Polish culture and history.

And so, as we travel through Poland, I would invite us to receive this country rather than simply observe it. Do not expect everything to be simple. Public expressions of faith do not mean that every Polish person believes in the same way. A cathedral may hold within its walls royal pride, family memories, the wounds of war, resistance to communism, prayers of the faithful, and the tensions of contemporary life all at once.

That is precisely why we come as pilgrims and not merely as tourists. A tourist may ask, "What happened here?" A pilgrim asks something deeper: "What has God been doing here, through the faithfulness and failures, the wounds and hopes, of a real people?"

Let Poland speak to us in all its complexity. Listen to its churches, and its silence. Listen to its beautiful music, and its wounds. Listen to the prayers of those who came before us. And perhaps, along the way, the story of Poland will help us listen more carefully to our own story as well.

For pilgrimage is never only about discovering another land. It is about allowing God, through another people's story, to enlarge our own hearts and enrich our own faith and life.

This is what it means for us pilgrims as we journey this path of God's mercy.

MUSIC PLAYLIST

BE NOT AFRAID

MICHAEL TALBOT

Catholic Hymn

Scan me!



Useful Polish Words and Phrases

Polish	Meaning
Dzień dobry	Good morning / good day
Dziękuję	Thank you
Proszę	Please / you're welcome
Przepraszam	Excuse me / I'm sorry
Szczęście Boże	May God grant success; a Catholic and miners' greeting
Jezu, ufam Tobie	Jesus, I trust in You
Pokój z tobą	Peace be with you
Do widzenia	Goodbye

A practical posture

- Carry water, a small umbrella, a light layer, comfortable walking shoes, and the whisper receiver each day.
- Dress modestly for churches; remove hats when appropriate; never cross roped sanctuary areas.
- Ask before photographing worshippers. At memorial sites, follow every museum rule and keep phones silent.
- At Wieliczka expect substantial walking, many stairs on the descent, and a cool underground temperature.
- At Gubałówka the ascent is normally by funicular and remains weather dependent.
- At meals, greet, give thanks and say grace, practice moderation, and remember that graciousness toward staff is a work of mercy.

MUSIC PLAYLIST

LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT

Audrey Assad

From the Album: Fortunate Fall

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DAY 1 | SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2026 | NEWARK • VIENNA • WARSAW

Departure: The Pilgrimage Begins Before Takeoff

GRACE TO ASK

To surrender the journey we planned and receive the pilgrimage Christ actually gives.

Morning Prayer with the Church

Morning Prayer, Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Psalter Week I. Liturgy of the Hours, Volume IV. Pray before leaving home if possible.

Additional pilgrimage intercessions

- For all who labor without recognition, and all who fear they have arrived too late to God's mercy.
- For our families, parishioners, and the intentions we carry across the ocean.

After the Liturgy of the Hour

Lord Jesus, receive this journey before we can manage it. Make our delays patient, our conversations generous, and our attention free. Lead us from tourism into pilgrimage and from self-concern into mercy. Amen.

BEFORE WE STEP OFF

Pilgrims, the airport will begin our pilgrimage. Delays, lines, cramped seats, and changed plans uncover the habits we usually hide. Let us make a first offering now: no keeping score, no contagious complaining, and no demand that grace arrive according to our itinerary. We travel together, and the peace of the group is part of each person's vocation.

The road we are receiving

Poland teaches us something very important about faith: we do not have to wait for ideal conditions before we become faithful.

For 123 years, Poland disappeared from the political map. Independence returned in 1918, only to be followed by invasion, occupation, genocide, shifting borders, and decades of communist rule. And yet, in the middle of all of this, faith endured.

The saints we will meet along the way were not spared the upheavals of their time. They were not holy because life became easy for them. They became holy because, in the middle of uncertainty, they learned to recognize Christ. They guarded prayer. They guarded conscience. They guarded the memory of family, faith, language, and what was true when so much around them could no longer be trusted.

That is a good place for us to begin. A pilgrimage begins with a little relinquishment. A tourist naturally wants the trip to go according to plan. We pay for the flight, the hotel, the meals, and the experience, and so we expect everything to work. Fair enough.

But a pilgrim receives the day as it comes. Some days will be beautiful. Some may be tiring. Some will console us deeply. Others may test our patience. And the pilgrim learns to ask, in each of these moments: “Lord, what are you teaching me here?”

That is the real difference between a tourist and a pilgrim. It is not the passport. It is not the hotel. It is not even the itinerary. *It is the posture of the heart.*

Even today’s Sunday worship asks us to surrender our habit of measuring and comparing. God’s generosity does not operate according to our little calculations of who deserves more, who received less, whose seat is better, whose room is bigger, or whose plans worked out perfectly.

So before we even board, let us entrust the details to God: the rooms, the meals, the seats, the schedules, the weather, the delays, and all the expectations we are carrying with us. If an inconvenience comes, perhaps let it become an offering for someone else in our group. If anxiety comes, let it become a reminder to pray. If something does not go according to plan, perhaps that very moment will become part of the grace.

We have not yet arrived in Poland, but the pilgrimage has already begun. It begins right here, in the heart, when we say: “Lord, I give you the journey. Teach me how to receive it.”

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## How we enter as pilgrims

- Name one person for whom you will carry this pilgrimage.
- Release one expectation that could keep you from receiving the actual journey.
- Offer one hidden inconvenience for the unity of the group.

**Polish for the day:** Pielgrzymka — pilgrimage.

## Today’s movement

- Attend Sunday Mass in the parish before airport departure; no group Mass is listed in the working itinerary.
- Austrian Airlines OS 038: Newark to Vienna, departing 5:40 p.m.
- Overnight flight; connection onward to Warsaw the following day.

### MUSIC PLAYLIST

#### NO GREATER LOVE

Music by: Michael Joncas

*No Greater Love Album*

Scan me!



**CATHOLIC DAILY MASS**

**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Before departure • Time and parish according to each traveler's schedule

*Schedule marker only • Use the separate worship aid for Mass*

**Evening Prayer with the Church**

*Evening Prayer II of the Sunday, Psalter Week I. Pray before settling for the overnight flight.*

**Additional pilgrimage intercessions**

- For travelers, flight crews, airport workers, and all who are separated from home tonight.
- For reconciliation with anyone from whom we departed carrying resentment.

**After the Liturgy of the Hour**

*God of every road, watch through the night when we cannot. Let our bodies rest, our fears quiet, and our hearts cross the greater distance toward trust. Amen.*

**Evening examen and pilgrim notes**

**What am I truly seeking on this pilgrimage?**

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**What do I need to stop controlling?**

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**MUSIC PLAYLIST**

**EVERYDAY HALLELUJAH**

Music by: Phil Wickham

*Everyday Hallelujah*

Scan me!

