

Polish Spring

‘See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come.’ (SS 2:11, 12)

Amid abuse and cover-up, confusion from Pope Francis regarding homosexuality and Irish citizens overturning their abortion ban, the Spirit of Pentecost enveloped a hundred of us in Krakow Poland who gathered for our second Living Waters Training there.

We couldn’t stop singing, and the Spirit kept raining on us as we offered our brokenness to the Crucified in tears and joy. Surrounding our songs was a chorus of birds that worshipped day and night in huge trees that flanked us on every side.

Trainings are just that: arduous, messy, shame and glory, revelation amid hard reality. Why now after seven 16-hour-days am I refreshed? All I know is that I was buoyed, as if I caught a current of the Kingdom and knew intuitively how to navigate the waters. Extraordinary.

It is easy for an outsider to idealize this land of St. John Paul II and St. Faustina. Traditional values are evident (Poland is not sympathetic to ‘reproductive rights’ and LGBT+ aspirations) and create a kind of moral clarity not evident in America or Western Europe. The Church here is cohesive, a national rallying point amid devastating historic batterings. To many Poles, Jesus through His Mother (Church) sustained the nation’s hope and dignity throughout centuries.

Yet good ethics and history can become prison bars unless the Spirit liberates wounded lives. The Poles may be clearer in their devotion to Christ than many Europeans today but they are no less broken by their bloody history, which gave rise to deep patterns of family disorder, including disordered church dynamics.

For these reasons, I take heart that many Poles are facing their wounds forthrightly with each other. I am in awe of men and women we have now walked with for three years who are different people today: joyful, not glum, with a new well-being in their gendered, bodily humanity. They no longer avoid others’ gaze. One young woman whom I first met in Lithuania couldn’t walk unassisted due to the oppression of her sin and wounds. During this training she bounded around the site, taught better than I did, and will return refreshed to her hometown to lead a Living Water group which is changing the culture of her church.

Most importantly, the nine Polish priests who attended the training taught and shared openly about their wounds and sins against chastity. They honored their office by making clear they live through the wounds of Jesus discovered in His broken merciful members. They released deep drafts of mercy for all of us. We exhausted them and each other in laying bare our need for ongoing conversion.

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Wearied in doing well, we welcomed the Spirit's refreshment. He is accomplishing in the Polish Church what we can only hope for. A Polish Spring, welling up with song in the Spirit of Pentecost: He will have His way with His Church.