

Watch Your Step

I ran along the river in old town Kaunas, Lithuania. As I considered the convergence of streams most dear to me, my heart overflowed and I ran with abandon. Surging in me were 'currents' of St. John Paul II and St. Faustina, a European team of wounded healers who heal me, an American team par excellence, and a host of new friends from Poland who gathered to initiate Living Waters there.

Heaven on earth until my foot caught a crack in the path and I dove like a senseless animal into the then not-so-charming cobblestones. 'Watch your step,' intoned a still small voice.

I picked myself up, bleeding just a little, and took heed. We faced giants at our first Living Waters Training in Eastern Europe. Poland takes seriously its Catholicism—the authority of the Church, and that means defending the role of ordained priests in absolving sins. Living Waters takes seriously the role of the community in bearing one another's sins so we can be healed. The priests and parishioners who gathered with us had serious questions about our approach; many also had serious divides in their souls that could only be healed by a band of fellow sinners who fought in merciful humility for their chastity.

I battled confusion and suspicion then rose to testify of both the priestly pillars of forgiveness (on which I depend) and the continuous links of being known daily with my fellow 'lay priests' on whom I rely to overcome sin. Jesus forged a way for all concerned to say 'yes' to Living Waters for the Polish church; most importantly, sinners were set free by the experience of both priestly absolution and the healing power of the 'one another.'

I bounded out of our retreat center and somehow avoided stabbing my foot on a rusty spike protruding on the path. 'I know, I know,' I whispered heavenward: 'Watch my step.'

The next fight was harder. In preparatory prayer, we discerned that we had to emphasize one plank of Living Waters—breaking the spirit of despair--in these lands trampled by the bloody boots of Russia and Germany then choked by Soviet rule. Our friends had grown up in the shadow of violent inhumanity. Christ Crucified is easy for Eastern Europeans; they must fight to live expectantly in the light of Love, risen and bursting with life.

The Word came in power and delivered many from the spirit of death. Then despair rolled over the team like a fog. We struggled under a stifling heaviness for a few hours. Then we gathered and confessed our affliction to one another; Jesus broke through with hope and joy. Relieved, I ran back to my room and fell promptly into a pothole. I received only a gentle 'dusting', no harm whatsoever, as if an unseen being padded my accident. I laughed, brushed myself off, and pledged once more to watch my step.

'He will command His angels to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so

that you will not strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.'

(PS 91: 11-13)