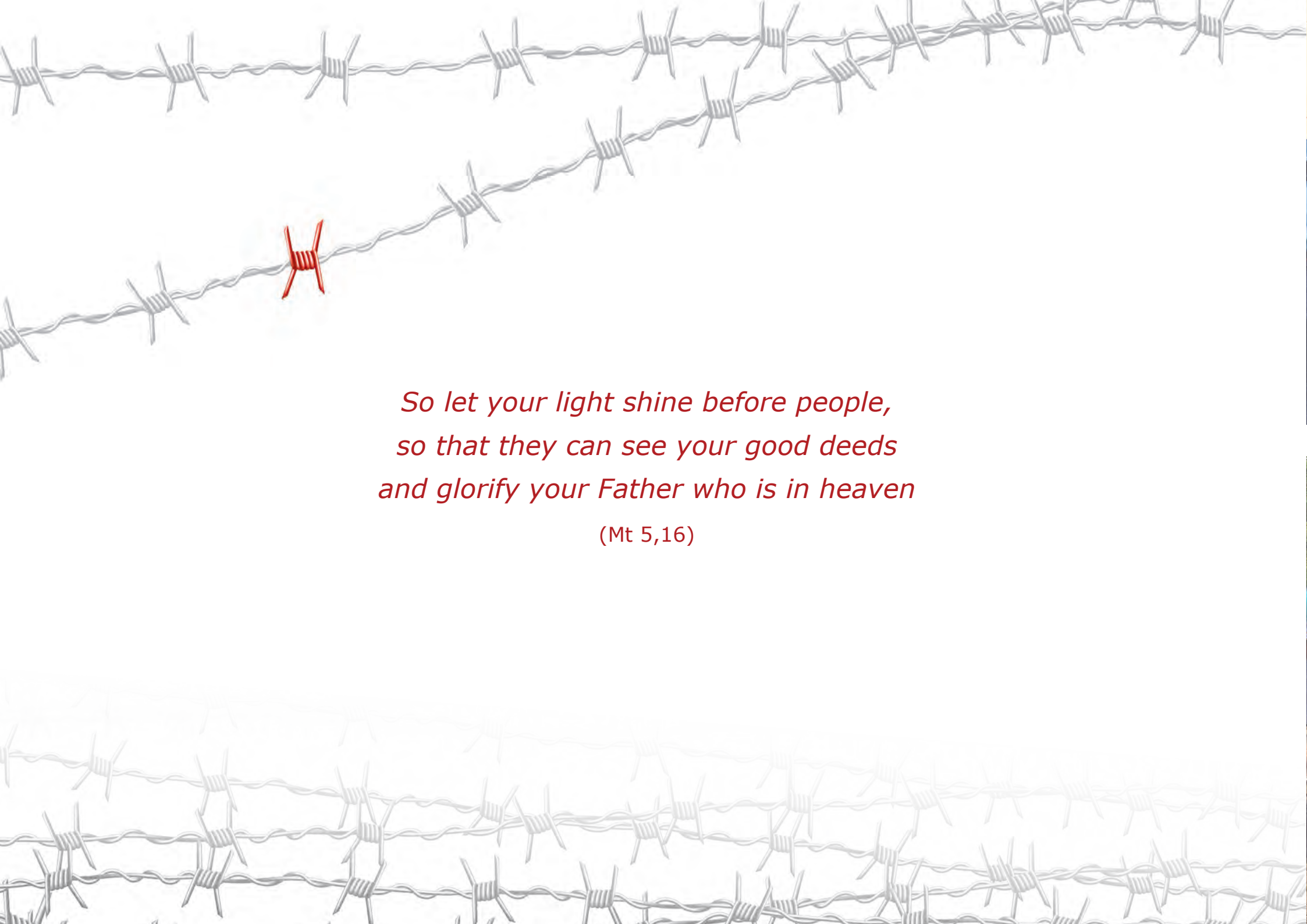




# Witnesses to the Word of God

BLESSED SVD MARTYRS



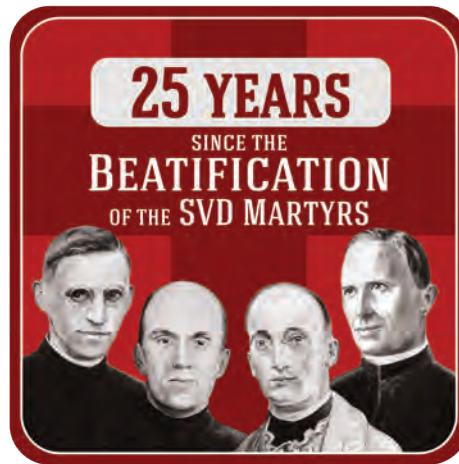
The background of the slide features several strands of grey barbed wire. One strand, positioned in the upper left quadrant, has a single clasp that is colored red, while all other clasps are grey. The text is centered in the middle of the slide.

*So let your light shine before people,  
so that they can see your good deeds  
and glorify your Father who is in heaven*

(Mt 5,16)

# Witnesses to the Word of God

BLESSED SVD MARTYRS



WARSAW 2024



Witnesses to the Word of God  
Blessed SVD Martyrs, 2024

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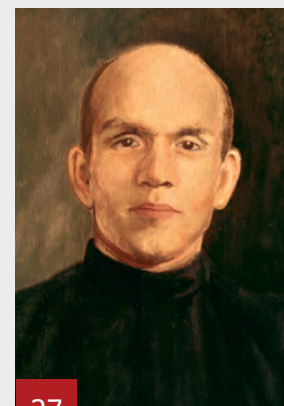


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**PAULUS BUDI  
KLEDEN SVD**

Superior General  
of the Society  
of the Divine Word

A significant prelude to the celebration of the historic 150th anniversary of the foundation of the Society of the Divine Word is the 25th anniversary of the beatification of our four martyrs: Louis Mzyk (1905-1940), Stanislaus Kubista (1890-1940), Aloysius Liguda (1892-1942), and Gregory Frąckowiak (1911-1943). Blessed Louis, Stanislaus, Aloysius and Gregorius represent the many confreres who generously gave themselves to the call to proclaim the Good News to the whole world since the beginning of our Society.

Arnold Janssen, the Founder of our missionary Society, stressed that for every missionary sacrifice is part and parcel of his call. The mission-sending ceremony and

the presentation of the mission cross for the departing missionaries reflect this noteworthy calling of sacrifice and commitment. The hostile and challenging environment in the missions, requiring sacrifice and patience is reflected in the Founder's wish to name after the Archangels the first three communities of the Society in Steyl (St. Michael), Rome (St. Raphael), and Möedling (St. Gabriel). To further elucidate the nature of our call to serve in the missions, the mission house in Nysa, the fourth community of the Society, was dedicated to the Holy Cross.

THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE OF HONORING THE MARTYRS IS TWOFOLD. FIRST, IT IS A WITNESS OF THE FAITHFULNESS OF GOD, who promises to be with us till the end of the world, and the faithfulness of the people who put their trust in God. We honor the martyrs because in them, we experience the presence of God, and we see the example of true discipleship. Their cost of discipleship is to bring the Light

of Christ and make a difference in a wounded society marked by violence, an unjust political system, and alienation.

SECOND, MARTYRS GIVE WITNESS TO THE FRAGILITY OF ALL TOTALITARIAN GOVERNMENTS AND THE FAILURE OF THE LOGIC OF VIOLENCE. People are martyred by those obsessed with the ideology that by putting them to death, they would be silenced; their history would come to an end. However, the logic of violence does not work. The totalitarian regimes fail to silence their victims because their deaths resurrect hope and nurture motivations for others to continue what they have died for.

"WITNESSING TO THE LIGHT. FROM EVERYWHERE FOR EVERYONE" IS THE THEME OF THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF OUR SOCIETY. Our martyrs have witnessed the Light and have remained faithful to their missionary calling. Their lives offered as sacrifices give meaning to the mission crosses they once received. As we honor them on the 25th anniversary of their beatification, they symbolically hand us their mission crosses to remind us that as we are called, we embrace that calling with commitment and openness to sacrifice.

THE MARTYRDOM OF OUR BLESSED MARTYRS SERVES AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND STRENGTH TO STAND FIRM IN DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES.

Louis, Stanislaus, Aloysius, Gregorius tell us that as people coming from everywhere, dedicating our lives to everyone is our prophetic response to our world, wounded because of the separations and divides caused by violence and arrogance of people and nations.

May this celebration of the silver jubilee of the beatification of our martyrs shower abundant blessings upon our Society and the Church. Let us remember their sacrifice as a beacon of hope and courage for our missionary journey ahead.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Paulus', with a stylized flourish at the end.



**SYLWESTER GRABOWSKI SVD**

Provincial of the Polish Province  
of the Society of the Divine Word

**W**ith this booklet we present the lives and testimonies of four Divine Word Missionaries who were elevated to the glory of the altar as blessed martyrs of World War II. This year marks the 25th anniversary of this important event for the Church, and for Poland and the Society of the Divine Word.

During his pilgrimage to his homeland, St. John Paul II beatified 108 World War II martyrs in Warsaw on June 13, 1999. Among them were four Divine Word Missionaries: Fr. Louis Mzyk, Fr. Stanislaus Kubista, Fr. Aloysius Liguda and Br. Gregory Frąckowiak. They gave their lives for Christ,

testifying that they were His faithful witnesses.

Since the beginning of the beatification process, many confreres and lay faithful have prayed through the Martyrs, thanking God for their witness and asking for their intercession with God.

This publication is an expression of gratitude for the witness of the Martyrs and an invitation to reflect on the path to holiness, which, in their case, led through martyrdom.

**Discover the life stories of the Blessed Martyrs:**

- Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD – zealous formator of religious life
- Fr. Stanislaus Kubista SVD – editor of magazines and mission animator
- Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD – a renowned teacher and youth pastor
- Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD – a printer and distributor of missionary publications; he, like St. Maximilian M. Kolbe, died a martyr's death, sacrificing his life for others.

**The booklet includes:**

- biographical notes about the Blessed Martyrs
- descriptions of their martyrdom

- photos and historical documents related to their lives
- prayers through the intercession of the Blessed Martyrs.

**The following beatification processes of Polish SVD confreres are currently underway:**

- Fr. Henryk Szuman and 70 Companions, martyrs during World War II, which includes 19 Divine Word Missionaries from the Polish Province.
- Fr. Józef Steinki and 27 Companions, victims of Stalinist persecution, which includes three Divine Word Missionaries belonging to the then-German Province.
- Fr. Marian Żelazek SVD, missionary and "father of lepers" in India.

We hope that the four already Blessed Divine Word Missionaries will soon be joined by above-mentioned confreres who will intercede for us in our missionary ministry.

**I also encourage you to get involved in the missionary endeavor we are carrying out around the world – by joining our Society or supporting us in other ways. More information can be found by following the QR codes in the publication or on the Internet.**

*O. Sylwester Grabowski*

# The Divine Word Missionaries in Poland until World War II

**T**he Polish structures of the Society of the Divine Word were established after Poland regained its independence in 1918. The first group of confreres included priests and brothers of Polish origin, who had earlier belonged to the German or Austrian Provinces.

In the interwar period, 1919-1939, the SVD in Poland managed to establish thriving centers of religious life and missionary animation in Górna Grupa in north-central Poland, Chludowo near Poznań, Bruczków in west-central Poland and Rybnik, a city in southern Poland. In three of these places (with the exception of Chludowo) there were Minor Seminaries, where many vocations to religious and missionary life were born.

At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, there were 29 priests, 61 brothers and 42 novices on Polish territory. The seminarians, numbering 26, were based in Sankt Gabriel near Vienna, where there was also a seminary for candidates from Poland.

Out of a total of 132 confreres ministering on Polish territory, 48 of them passed through prisons and Nazi Germany's concentration camps, while 23 suffered martyrdom. If these figures are supplemented by eight confreres who died of natural causes during the Second World War, it becomes apparent that almost every fourth Divine Word Missionary belonging to the Polish Province did not survive that tragic period! In this sad statistic, we do not include the several-month periods of internment of confreres in our mission houses, which was also a form of persecution.

## WHY DID OUR CONFRERES BECOME MARTYRS?

After the occupation of Poland by Nazi Germany in 1939, most of the territory was incorporated into Germany, and out of the rest a separate administrative unit for the Poles was created under the name of the General Government (a German zone of occupation). In the Polish territories incorporated into Germany, the campaign to destroy everything associated with Poland began very quickly. Tens of thousands of teachers, military



Painting of our Blessed from the SVD Novitiate in Batu, Indonesia

personnel, academics and social activists were executed. Priests also suffered a similar fate. The only way to save themselves was to accept German citizenship. The SVD's superiors, at the time comprised mainly of Germans and Austrians, tried to move our confreres to Vienna. However, the Nazi



German authorities did not agree to this. The ultimate reason for deporting the clergy to Nazi concentration camps was the German authorities' preconceived plan, as explained by Fr. Eduard Gehrman SVD in a letter to Fr. Josef Grendel SVD, then Superior General. He wrote that "whoever feels Polish and has claimed to be such cannot live in Germany; after peace comes, he must go to the General Government zone. But at present the authorities do not want to direct Polish clergymen there, because they could stir up much unrest; therefore, they must temporarily stay in seclusion, especially our priests – as I was explicitly told – who 'turned out to be ardent patriots' and even now have declared that they want to work only in former Poland, as Catholic priests, Poles."

Our confreres sided with Poland, although it did not have to be that way at all. Many of them had strong ties to German culture. Confreres from the Prussian partition area went to German schools, they did their formation at the German-speaking St. Gabriel Seminary in Mödling near Vienna, and Blessed Fr. Stanislaus Kubista even served in the German army. They were not enemies of the German Reich. It was the Reich that considered them its enemies because of their religious and national affiliations.

Signing a declaration of loyalty (The Deutsche Volksliste or German People's List), i.e., declaring themselves on the side of Germany, could have saved their lives. This, however, would conflict with their moral choice of defending human and Christian freedom and dignity. It would also have been a great act of disloyalty to confreres who had no such choice.

### OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

Martyrdom in the Society of the Divine Word is not limited to Poland and the Second World War. Our Society has been blessed with confreres who have received the grace of martyrdom, suffering and wholehearted dedication in serving the poorest. The beatification processes of many of them are underway. Suffice it to mention the heroic bishop, Jorge Novak SVD of Argentina, Fr. Wilhelm Finnemann SVD, auxiliary bishop in Manila, and the Polish missionary to India, known as the father of lepers, Marian Żelazek SVD.

We admire them and all the other witnesses to the faith who, despite ongoing perils, remain at their missionary outposts when all others leave. Why do they stay where there is war, persecution or genocide? There is only one answer – love for God and others, because only love gives the strength and motivation necessary to bear witness,

even to the point of martyrdom. The SVD Constitutions capture this point explicitly: "Active though our commitment must be, nevertheless, we will not choose the path of violence but follow the gospel principle of overcoming evil with good" (112.3).

We want to remember all those of our confreres who, in prisons and concentration camps in Germany, Poland, Papua New Guinea and the Dutch East Indies, in China and the Philippines, and many other places, laid down their lives in the service of God's Word and God's mission. With their sacrifice of blood and health, they gave witness to their religious, missionary and priestly vocation: "His life is our life, his mission our mission. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we follow him, glorifying the Father and bringing the fullness of life to others" (Prologue to the SVD Constitutions).

We hope that the testimony of the four Blessed Divine Word Missionaries, the witnesses of the Word of God, will inspire us, who are often caught up in today's consumerism, to reflect on the meaning of life and the missionary vocation. We trust that the courage of the Martyrs will inspire especially young Christians to follow Jesus on the path of a religious, priestly, or missionary vocation.







Spoken words have enormous power – they can awaken peace or turmoil in the heart of another person. Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD made sure that regardless of the circumstances, his attitude would bring peace. However, the path of his priestly vocation, crowned in martyrdom, began with a spark of light that flashed in his heart when he was listening to the sermon of a missionary.

## Angel of goodness

**I**t was 1917, in the St. Mary Magdalene Parish Church, whose tower overlooked the industrial center of Silesia, an area historically and currently in Poland but at that time, under German rule. A parish mission retreat was underway, preached by one of the SVD missionaries. Twelve-year-old Louis came to the church every day and, as an altar boy, served at Mass. Probably many times his gaze wandered to the soaring arches of the church, as if checking whether it was possible to look above them, up to heaven. His heart was beating faster and stronger as he listened to the missionary's subsequent homilies. He was filled with anxiety, but also with the certainty of the decision that had dawned on him. From a human perspective, this parish retreat turned Louis's life upside down, or perhaps just set him and his life on the right track.

Louis was very much impressed by the preaching and personality of the missionary, so when the parish mission retreat was over, he told his parents of his desire to proclaim the Word of God

as a missionary. However, his parents, in view of Louis's young age, did not take his words seriously. They knew that teenage dreams, after all, can be very elusive, and their son still had enough time to make life decisions. Not discouraged by his parents' lack of enthusiasm about his future life plans,



Baptismal font at which Louis Mzyk was baptized, April 29 1905

Louis still nurtured his desire to become a missionary. Eventually the young boy began also to talk to his aunt and uncle about his mission dream, complaining about his mom's and dad's reluctance. Seeing the teenager's sheer determination, the relatives interceded on the boy's behalf



The shaft of the „President” mine, where both Louis and his father worked

and talked to his parents. The support of relatives proved to be helpful, and on top of that, sometime later Rev. Karol Namysło, then the parish priest in Chorzów Stary, also expressed his support. Issuing a Good Conduct Certificate to Louis, he wrote: "His parents, as well as his large family, have the best reputation here. His conduct has always been impeccable, his actions calm and considerate. For the past year or so, he has served willingly and diligently as an altar boy. He regularly partakes of the Holy Sacraments." In this way, beginning in September of 1918, Louis became a pupil at the Minor Seminary of the Divine Word Missionaries at the House of the Holy Cross in Nysa.

### THE SEED OF FAITH

The seed that the missionary sowed with his words fell on the fertile soil of the young heart, and was fostered by the spirit of faith learned in the family home. Would it bear equally beautiful fruit under other circumstances?

Louis's parents, Franciszka and Ludwik, were blessed with ten children, although two of them sadly died within a few months of their birth. Louis, the fifth child, was born on April 22, 1905. Seven days later he was baptized in a nearby parish church, receiving the name Louis Paul. At the age of six, he began his education at Catholic Primary





Louis Mzyk's primary school

School No. 3, not far from where the Mzyk family lived.

Louis's father was a coal miner in Królewska Huta. He was known as a hardworking man and after a few years of work he became a supervisor and then was promoted to foreman. In 1908, there was a methane explosion in the mine. Louis's father was one of those involved in the rescue operation. As a result of the gas poisoning, his health later began to deteriorate. It was then that Louis took over some of the household duties to help his mother.



Louis Mzyk, probably in Nysa (second from the right in the middle row)

However, not too much time passed until news of his dad's death reached Louis, who was studying in Nysa at the time. As his sister Magda recalled, after arriving at the family home before the funeral, he prayed all night at his father's coffin, even when others had already gone to bed. From that time on, he tried all the more to ease his mother's burden of supporting the family. That is why he and his brother Wilhelm worked as miners underground during the summer vacation, in the same mine where their father used to work.

### BUSY STUDENT

It may seem that Louis made up his mind to become a priest early in life, yet it was a mature decision in which he grew stronger over the years. He finished his studies at the Nysa Minor Seminary with a matriculation exam passed on February 22, 1926. After a short vacation, he went to the Divine Word Seminary in Sankt Augustin, Germany, to complete his novitiate and begin further education. Superiors recognized Louis's diligence and ability, so after completing his philosophical studies he was sent to Rome to study theology.





Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD with his mother and siblings

Likewise, Louis himself had set a very high standard for himself. While still a young man, he joined the "Quickborn" Catholic youth association pledging abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes. And when he was in the Novitiate, he made a personal pledge of allegiance to Mary Immaculate, which he signed with his own blood. He remained faithful to the end to his commitments.

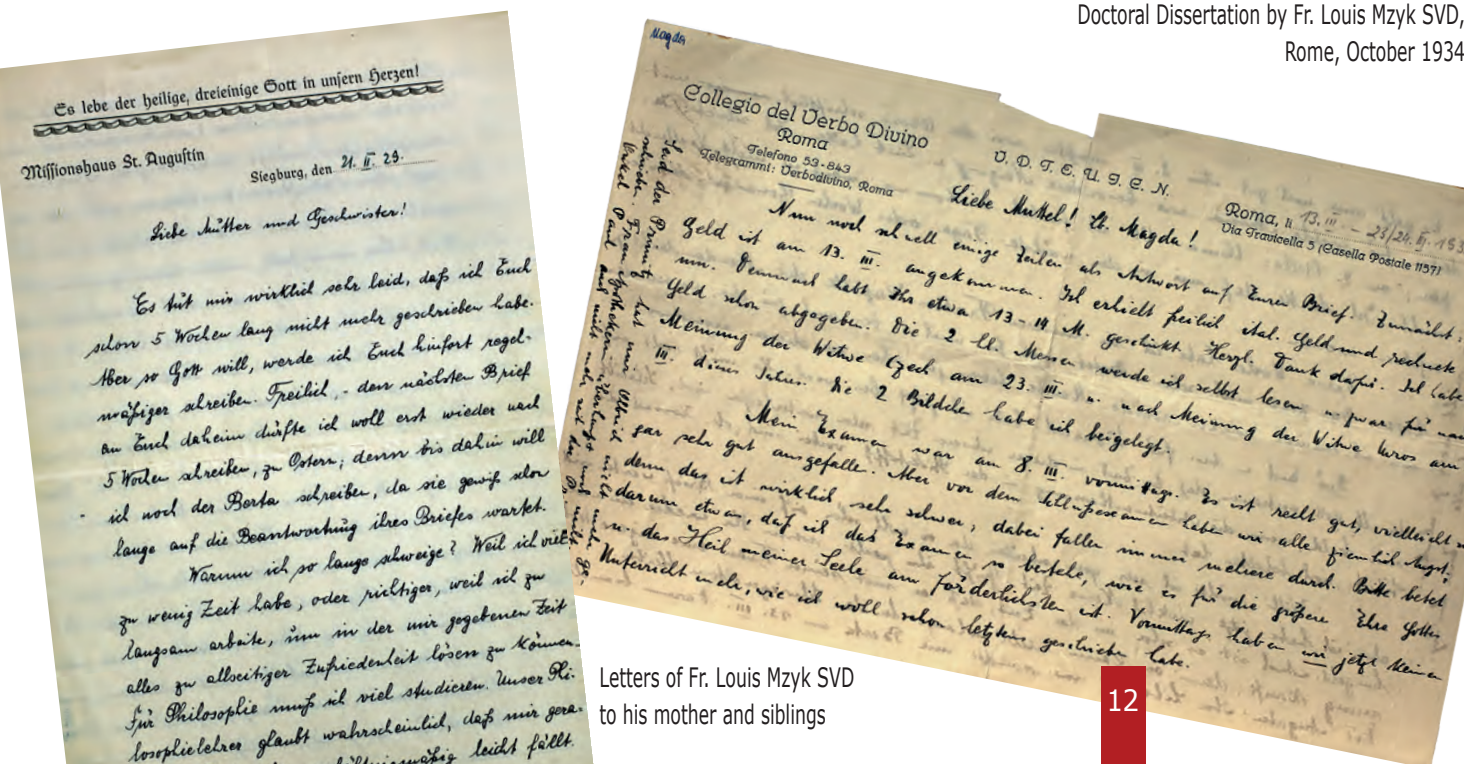
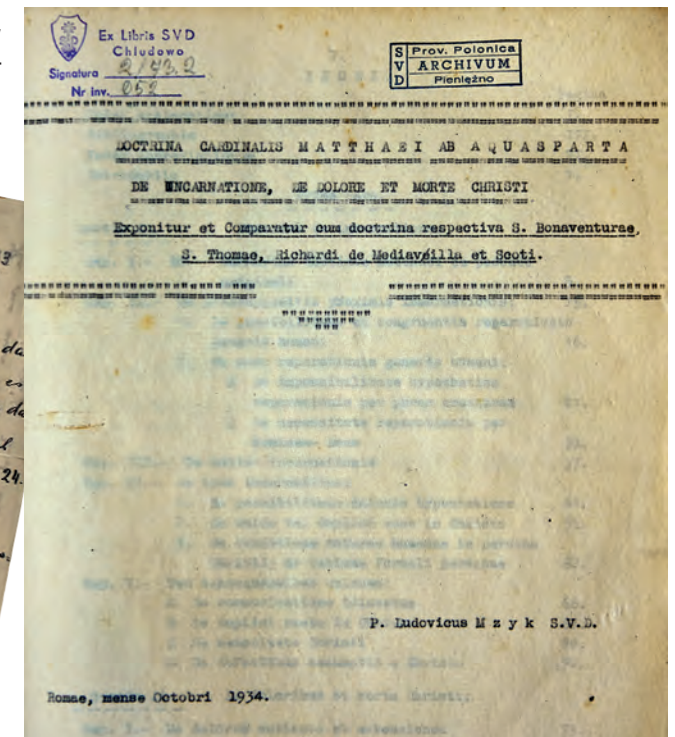
However, Louis remained modest when evaluating his own abilities. "Why have I not written to you for so long? Because I have far too little time, or rather, I work too slowly (...). I have to study philosophy a lot. Our philosophy

professor probably thinks that philosophy just comes easily to me. (...) Simply put, this opinion of me by my teacher sometimes makes me work more than the others. And since I am slow in learning and comprehending, I must indeed work hard," – he wrote to his mother. In addition, he greatly valued prayer, which can also be read in his letters, when he thanked his family for spiritual support during his exams, but also comforted his mother after the death of his brother, Anthony.

### CHINA? BRAZIL? POLAND!

While studying in Rome, Louis was ordained a priest on the Feast of Christ the King,

Doctoral Dissertation by Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD,  
Rome, October 1934

Letters of Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD  
to his mother and siblings





Fr. Louis Mzyk SVD as Novice Master, Chludowo 1935

on October 30, 1932. His brother Wilhelm attended his ordination. Two days later, on All Saints Day, November 1, he celebrated the first Eucharist in the SVD Generalate Chapel. Shortly thereafter, in 1935, he defended his doctorate in theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. It was then that a decision was made about his future ministry. Instead of going to China or Brazil as was his dream, Fr. Louis was

appointed to Poland, and while waiting for his doctoral diploma, he spent several months at St. Gabriel's SVD House in Austria, where he was gaining pastoral experience as a newly ordained priest.

In the summer of the same year, Fr. Louis took charge of the first SVD Novitiate in Chludowo, near Poznań, Poland. The Mission House in Chludowo provided a good environment



Fathers Mzyk, Liguda and Kubista with General Superior Fr. Joseph Grendel SVD, Górna Gurpa 1935

for all its residents to learn from each other. The novices, under the guidance of their novice master, learned about religious and missionary life, and Fr. Louis, among other things, was learning the literary Polish



**MORE INFORMATION**  
[svdmartyrs.com](http://svdmartyrs.com)

language, as he spoke the Silesian dialect that he learned from childhood.

As recalled by Fr. Marian Żelazek SVD, then one of his students and now a Servant of God, Fr. Louis had something of the angel in him. He was calm and balanced, yet firm. "He was an ardent devotee of Jesus present in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar, (...) we could find him there at any time of the day, as he knelt, barely touching the pew with his arms, immersed in deep adoration." With all his heart he was devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and whenever someone knocked on his door, he would invite them in with a quiet "Ave." He also had a deep devotion to the Holy Spirit, which he promoted even when he was imprisoned in a Nazi German death camp.

### FROM BEHIND BARS TO HEAVEN

When the war broke out on September 1, 1939, and the Germans invaded Poland, the seminarians had to leave their religious House in Chludowo. However, at the end of September they returned, and in October learning began almost as usual. At that time, Fr. Louis tried unsuccessfully to transfer the novices to other Houses. The apparent peace was short-lived. On January 25, 1940, a group of captive local priests was brought to Chludowo. On that day, the Gestapo – secret police of Nazi



Commemorative beatification medallion

Germany took away Fr. Mzyk who had earlier dared to criticize the brutality of German soldiers in the presence of a German citizen, not knowing that he was a Gestapo agent. Fr. Louis Mzyk, wearing only a cassock girded with a belt, was taken to Fort VII a Nazi German death camp in Poznań. Interventions from the Church and family did not help.

The camp guards had no mercy. Limited food rations and constant physical exhaustion were draining for the prisoners. Moments of communal prayer and discussions about faith provided respite. Such was the camp Calvary of Fr. Louis, which ended on February 20, 1940. That night ominous noises signaled the intervention of the guards in the camp. Everyone was called out into the corridor from Fr. Louis's cell, except for the blind Rev. Olejniczak. Here it must be added that it was not only SVD clergy who were imprisoned

in the camp. The guards then pointed out Rev. Kazimierz Gałka, Rev. Sylwester Marciniak, and Fr. Louis Mzyk, and the rest were allowed to return to their cells. The selected prisoners were told to run along the corridor. As he ran, Fr. Louis, sensing what was to come, asked a fellow priest for absolution. At the end of the corridor, Rev. Gałka and Rev. Marciniak stopped at the stairs, and Fr. Louis incautiously began to run upstairs. This provoked the fury of the guards. For allegedly trying to escape, Fr. Louis was cruelly beaten and then brought to one of the gates. There he was killed with a shot to the back of the head. His death was kept secret for some time. It was not until April that the family was given the false news that he had died of pneumonia. In official documents, "low blood pressure" was cited as the cause of his death. However, thanks to witness testimonies, the whole truth has come to light.

How significant in the face of these events are the words that Fr. Louis Mzyk had inscribed on a commemorative picture on the occasion of the first Mass: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God – be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen! (1 Tim. 1:17)." Fr. Louis wanted to give glory to God with his whole being: with his life, and ultimately through his death as a martyr.





In some self-help books one can find such a phrase: "Be the master of your life", which paradoxically can lead us to more chaos. Fr. Stanislaus Kubista SVD has taken the words "May God's will be done" as his life motto, and he is a shining example that if God comes first, everything will be in the right order.

## God's editor

**I**t was already getting dark when the young Stanislaus read another book under the table by candle flame. He wanted to have read as much as possible before his mother summoned the whole family to pray together, which was their daily practice. The Kubista family had an unusual atmosphere of peace and gratitude, despite the fact that everyday life brought both good and less fortunate moments.

### FRANCISCAN FAMILY

Stanislaus was born on September 27, 1898, in Kostuchna, then a small village and now a district of the city of Katowice. He was the fifth child in the family, and his parents Franciszek and Franciszka bravely had to face daily challenges, which was not easy with a large family and low income.

Stanislaus's dad, as a woodcutter, spent whole days working in the forest. He would start each morning with a prayer, and in the evening he and the whole family would kneel down to thank God for the passing day. His mother, in turn, despite her many





Stanislaus Kubista's mother

household chores, often came to the 6 a.m. morning Mass at parish church in Mikołów, which was almost a two-hour walk away. Franciszka was also a Franciscan Tertiary, and she had a strong devotion to Our Lady of the Rosary and St. Francis. As she and her husband were both named after the saint



St. Wojciech Church in Mikołów, where Stanislaus Kubista was baptized, October 2, 1898

of Assisi, they did not want that name to be given to another person in the family. However, when one of their sons was just born on October 4, the Feast Day of St. Francis of Assisi, they considered this fact an intervention from the Patron Saint himself and changed their minds, naming newly born boy Francis.

### MISSIONARY SEEDS

The parents of Stanislaus passed on to their children not only a strong faith, but also a love for their homeland. Although in the public school in Kostuchna, which Stanislaus was attending, the imposed German language was in force, but in the Kubistas' home the children learned to speak Polish from an early age. Literature became a passion for Stanislaus, but he also took a keen interest in missions. This germinating seed of young Stanislaus's interest in the missions was soon noticed by the pastor's assistant, Rev. Paweł Michatz, in the Mikołów Parish. So, he closely watched over Stanislaus's spiritual growth at this early stage and also supported him later in his studies.

In April 1912, Stanislaus began his education at the SVD Minor Seminary in Nysa. He took his studies very seriously and dedicated



The house in which Stanislaus Kubista was born





The Kubista family

a great deal of time to them, but he was also always willing to help his classmates, and in his free time he would immerse himself in more reading. His humility and hard work were matched by a deep sensitivity. This is probably why he was so fascinated by descriptions of nature and texts portraying the depth of human feelings

### SNOW ... IN A THERMOS BOTTLE

The lives of Nysa seminarians changed significantly after the outbreak of World War I, and many of them were conscripted into the army. 18-year-old Stanislaus was also drafted into the German army, where he was

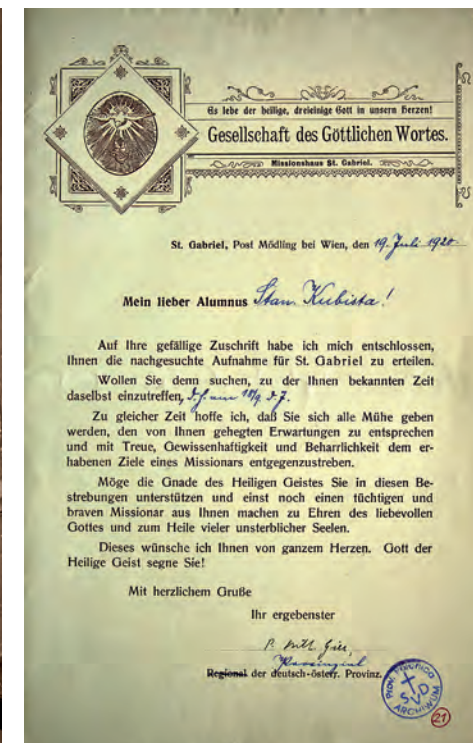
trained as a radio operator. This fact later saved his life. One day his company was sent into military action, but Stanislaus himself was turned back to headquarters, where a radio operator was urgently needed. As it later turned out, only one soldier returned from that action, and the others were killed.

After the war, Stanislaus returned to Nysa to catch up on his studies and prepare for the high school final exam, which he passed on June 30, 1920. Three months later, he entered the Novitiate at the Divine Word monastery in St. Gabriel near Vienna, although he got there... without a cassock. Stanislaus's studies at the seminary were a big financial challenge for his parents. This problem was solved by Stanislaus's own brother Józef. When they came to Vienna together, he surprised his brother by buying him a cassock.

The two brothers had a special relationship. They loved spending time together, playing chess or going on trips. From one trip to the mountains, they even brought back... snow in a thermos



Stanislaus Kubista in the German army uniform



Approval for admission to the novitiate at the SVD Mission House in Sankt Gabriel

bottle and an edelweiss flower. They gave that to their younger sister Gertrude, who was very happy, and the flower was even displayed in a biology lesson, as her class was just learning about different flowers. Józef also expressed brotherly love for his brother by supporting him financially as much as he could. For this reason, he postponed many personal plans, including his wedding, which took place only after Stanislaus's ordination and first Mass.





Fr. Stanislaus Kubista SVD (first from left in the third row) and Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD (fourth from left in the sixth row) St. Gabriel 1927

After spending a year in St. Gabriel, Stanislaus took his first religious vows and began philosophical and then theological studies. The students' lives were very intense because, in addition to regular study, they were involved in events organized in the Mission House, such as conferences, missiological events and retreats. In his free time, he wrote

articles and stories for the "Kalendarz Słowa Bożego" (Calendar of the Word of God) and "Nasz Misjonarz" (Our Missionary), published by the SVD. Stanislaus enjoyed everything that was going on around him and shared his experiences in letters to his family. Throughout his studies, he also would visit the grave of his sister Anna, who belonged



Fr. Stanislaus Kubista SVD

to the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and died in Vienna.

### WITH PEN AND HEART

The day of making his final vows, September 29, 1926, was a great experience for Stanislaus. As he wrote in a letter to his parents: "(...) And now the door is closed behind us and we no



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longer look back, but forward, following the path of our Savior, with gratitude and perseverance for the whole of life. I felt happiness and joy on this great day of ours, may only the Lord God now give us grace in present-day and future difficulties. Pray for me too." What followed was a time of preparation for priestly ordination, which Stanislaus received on May 26, 1927, in the presence of his mother Franciszka and brother Józef. Three days later he celebrated his first Mass in the Church of the Holy Spirit in St Gabriel.

At the beginning of his priestly journey, Fr Stanislaus wanted to go on a mission to China, the Philippines or Papua New Guinea. However, his superiors decided to send him to St Joseph's Mission House in Górna Grupa, located in north-central Poland. Initially, he was entrusted with the duties of house treasurer, and soon afterwards with those of the provincial treasurer.

Over time, Fr. Stanislaus began to take over new tasks, this time closely related to editorial work. In 1929, he became the editor-in-chief of "Mały Misjonarz" (The Little Missionary), addressed to children and youth. When preparing subsequent issues, he showed great imagination, always ensuring that the content was not only full of humor, but



Fathers Stanislaus Kubista SVD and Aloysius Liguda SVD in Górna Grupa



Fr. Stanislaus Kubista SVD (second from left) with interned priests in Górna Grupa, January 1940



also wise. He prepared numerous illustrations and photographs himself and responded to letters sent by children; his short stories were also published in this monthly magazine. As a surprise for his young readers, Fr. Stanislaus arranged for the publication of the "Kalendarz Małego Misjonarza" (Little Missionary Calendar), which was initially a supplement to the monthly magazine. Of course, it was also edited by Fr. Stanislaus, who had a great talent for reaching directly into children's hearts and awakening missionary zeal in them. In the meantime, he also took over the position of director of the SVD printing press in Górna Grupa.

Fr. Stanislaus realized that the press is an extraordinary tool that can shape people's conscience and transmit knowledge. He called the apostolate of the Catholic press "the most important apostolate of the present day." Therefore, when in 1933 he became editor of "Skarb Rodzinny" (Family Treasure), he put all his heart into its preparation. A year later, he took over the editorial office of the "Kalendarz Słowa Bożego" (Calendar of the Word of God), and having a strong devotion to St. Joseph he also started publishing "Posłaniec św. Józefa" (St. Joseph Messenger). Despite his numerous duties, he served students as a confessor and spiritual director, and he also found time to write mission stories.



Commemorative beatification medallion

### HE TRUSTED UNTIL THE END

Instead of a peaceful end to the summer, August 1939 brought moments of uncertainty for everyone. There was more and more talk about the impending war, and the Mission House in Górna Grupa was preparing for the possibility of air raids. Unfortunately, on September 3, the House was occupied by German troops. In October, a group of priests from the archdiocese of Gniezno and Włocławek diocese were transported to the SVD House, and a week later some of them were moved to other places. Until November, the inhabitants made a living by working on their own farm, but later they were banned from entering the farm, and the management of the farm buildings was taken over by the Germans. Despite such a difficult situation, Fr. Stanislaus did not lose heart. He was happy that even though the chapel was made smaller, he still could celebrate the Eucharist.

Shortly thereafter, the situation deteriorated significantly. On February 5, 1940, all priests were taken from Górna Grupa to the Nazi German concentration camp Stutthof. Fr. Stanislaus Kubista was also transferred there. The harsh conditions caused his health to deteriorate rapidly. On April 9, 1940, Fr. Stanislaus, along with other prisoners, was taken to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin. His exhausted body was further weakened by pneumonia. Three days before his death, he was separated from his fellow prisoners and thrown into a toilet to die. Aware of his impending meeting with the Lord, he made a confession and waited with hope and peace. "My God, I would have been so happy to return to Górna Grupa, but the Lord God has different plans. May God's will be done," these were the last words he whispered. His earthly journey ended with a brutal attack by a German soldier who entered the barracks on April 26, 1940. While shouting the words "You have nothing to live for," he stepped with a heavy boot on the chest of the lying Fr. Stanislaus, and with the other on his throat, suffocating him and crushing his bones.

Despite this cruelty, Fr. Stanislaus knew that he had something to live for, and that his life did not end on earth. He knew that only total trust in God gives peace, which no one can take away. ■





It is said that saints stand firmly on the ground, but with their eyes riveted on Heaven. Similarly, Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD always responded to the challenges of reality with serenity and his typical humor, but never lost sight of his goal, which for him was Heaven.

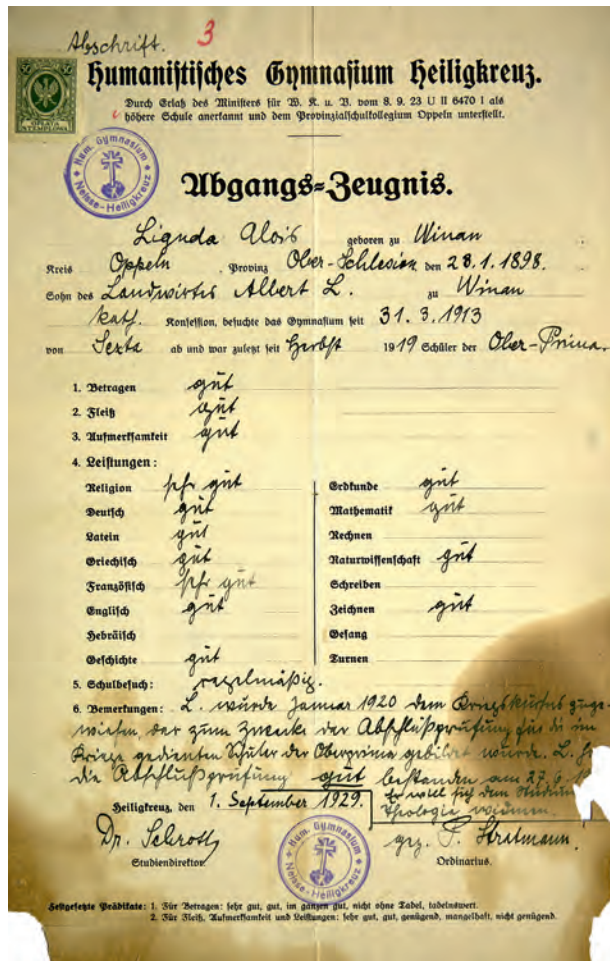
## The One Who Gazed Into Heaven

**I**n general, most of us are not much inclined to turn our eyes to Heaven. On the contrary, our eyes are fixed on the ground to such an extent that we find it difficult to look away from it. We don't talk about Heaven, we don't read about Heaven, we don't marvel at Heaven. We just barely believe in the existence of heaven. Shouldn't we rather be encouraged with a constant *Sursum corda* (Lift up your hearts) to loosen our ties with the earthly world in order to remind ourselves that we are destined for Heaven?" – Fr. Liguda once preached these words on the Solemnity of the Ascension.

### AMIDST FIELDS AND MEADOWS

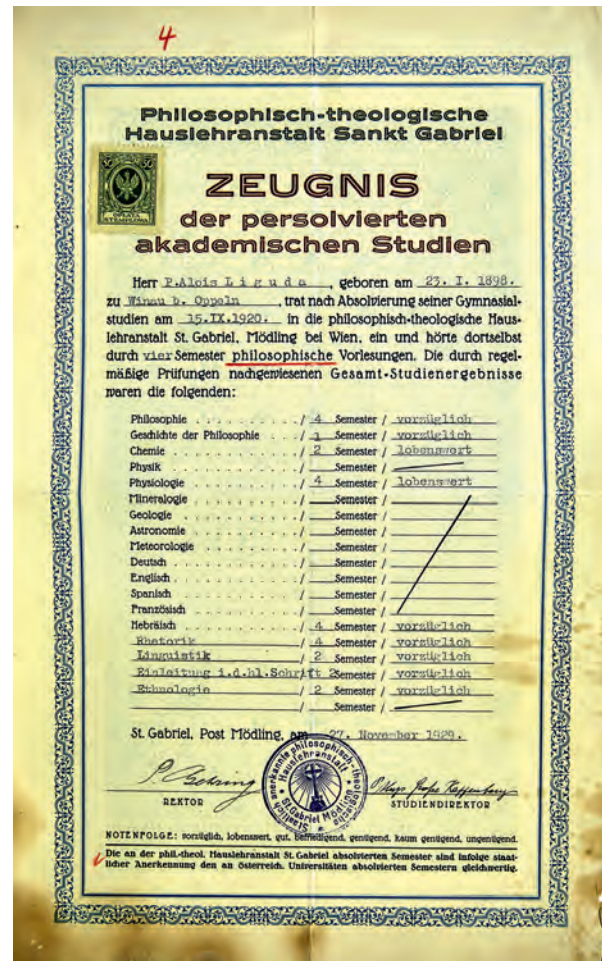
Fr. Liguda, as a young boy, most likely pondered heavenly matters many times. Such reflections were fostered by the atmosphere of his family home. Aloysius was born on January 23, 1898, the seventh child of Wojciech and Rozalia Liguda in Winowo, now within the boundaries of the city of Opole. His parents ran a small

farm. While not shying away from childish antics and pranks, Aloysius was always eager to help his parents. At the age of six, he started elementary school in Górki and, like most schoolchildren, attended school



Middle school graduation certificate of Aloysius Liguda, Nysa 1919

in the morning and, in the afternoon, grazed domestic animals in the meadow. These moments brought him much joy. He enjoyed the riverside views, and also had time to play, swim in the river, study or pray.



Graduation certificate in philosophy from St. Gabriel, 1929

Watching his parents, Aloysius learned his faith from them. His dad Wojciech was an active pilgrimage guide to various shrines, including Wambierzyce, Bardo Śląskie, Góra Świętej Anny, Częstochowa, Kraków and Gniezno. He was also involved in promoting Polish culture. Aloysius' mother Rozalia took care of the children's religious upbringing by teaching them their first prayers and the Truths of Faith. Every Sunday the whole family went to church twice: first in the early morning for the Eucharist, and in the afternoon for Vespers. As Aloysius enjoyed reading religious magazines, deep in his heart there began to germinate a desire to become a missionary

"GOD WILLS IT!"

The boy's dream soon began to come true. When he was 15 years old, he began studying at the SVD Minor Seminary at the Holy Cross Mission House in Nysa.

As a student, Aloysius was always cheerful, and his loud laughter in the school corridor could be heard from afar. When he considered that something was of great importance, he was very eager to do it. "I remember the scene when Rev. Dr. Strehler gave a lecture to us seminarians about the merits and blessings of not drinking alcohol, urging us to join the abstinence movement. Dr. Strehler had not yet finished his encouraging





Aloysius Liguda in the artilleryman's uniform, 1918-1919

words well when Aloysius Liguda exclaimed in a loud thunderous voice to the entire class: "GOD WILLS IT!". He was also the first to step up to the lectern and sign his name on the list of abstainers," – so wrote Rev. Dominik Pyka in his memoirs.

Aloysius's seminary education was interrupted by World War I. He was drafted in 1917 and spent two years in the army as an artilleryman. Upon his return, some doubts arose. Many of his classmates were killed, while others dropped out of the seminary. His two brothers also were killed, and the paternal farm was left without a male heir. In the end, he decided to return to Nysa and finished his education.

In 1920, he began his novitiate at St. Gabriel SVD House, near Vienna, followed by philosophical and theological studies. He especially liked dogmatics and church history. On May 26, 1927, he was ordained, becoming a priest of the Society of the Divine Word. He celebrated his first Mass on July 6 at the Holy Cross Collegiate Church in Opole. Initially he wanted to go to China or Papua New Guinea, but his superiors assigned him to Poland. He accepted the decision with enthusiasm. He was well aware of the fact that with the end of World War I and after Poland regained its independence, the country needed generous hearts and hands to work.



Aloysius Liguda as a seminarian in St. Gabriel (seated first from the right)

### THE SCENT OF HOLINESS LIKE THE SMELL OF PERFUME

Shortly thereafter, Fr. Aloysius was directed to further studies, as there was a great need for qualified professors in the SVD Province. He chose Polish philology at the University of Poznań. He was very meticulous about his studies. As Rev. Alojzy Kowalkowski, a fellow student at Poznań University, recalled, Fr. Liguda enjoyed the respect of professors and was well-liked among the students.



Student book of the University of Poznań

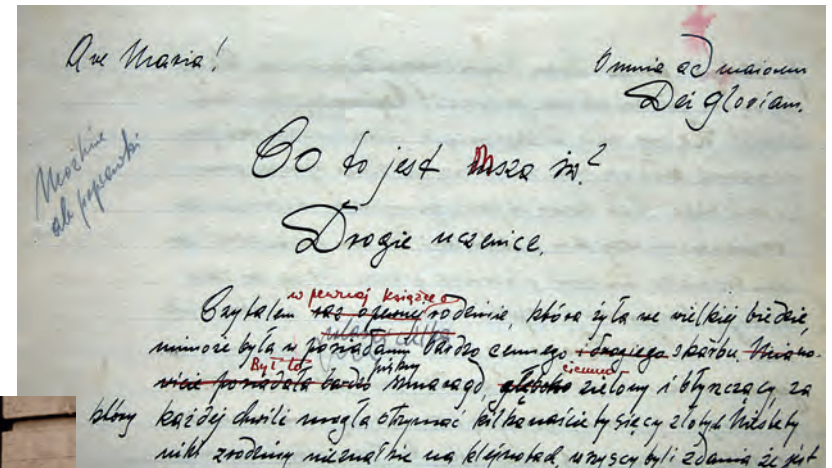


Commemorative picture from the first Mass of Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD



"His sincere friendliness often showed itself in the 'wrapping' of a supportive advisor who helped where his help was needed and illuminated the camaraderie with an inimitable wit. Inimitable – because it was only he who was known for his 'jokes made by Father Liguda'. He was also able to characterize accurately some female classmates, giving them amusing nicknames, such as 'wacky archangel' or 'modern saint lady'".

During his studies, Fr. Aloysius Liguda also served as a catechist and chaplain at the Ursuline Sisters' high school in Poznań. With exceptional talent and humor, he reached the girls' hearts, awakening their faith and apostolic zeal. In one sermon, he said that a Catholic girl should be a good Christian, because her life may be the only advertisement for Christ that



One of the spiritual talks for girls by Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD

people will notice. And in another sermon, he stressed that modern saints "will no longer stand on pillars or whip themselves in public. Modern holiness must be able to accommodate not only holy water, but also eau de Cologne perfume." At other times he stressed that "the globe is not a soccer ball, hence it must be conquered with the head." All of these 'sayings' were in line with his guiding motto: "Not away from the world, but away from sin."

The sermons and conferences he delivered were published in a book under the title "Audi, filia...!" ( "Hear, O Daughter"), and more were published in the book "Onward and Upward!" Both collections enjoyed favorable reviews, especially by female readers. Later on,



Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD while he was chaplain at the Ursuline Sisters' high school in Poznań





Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD with students in Górna Grupa



Fr. Aloysius published a collection of homilies titled "Bread and Salt."

### YOUTH CHAPLAIN, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND...

After graduation, in August 1934, Fr. Aloysius began his ministry as a professor of Polish language and history at the Minor Seminary in Górna Grupa. In a short time, he won the hearts of his students. While being demanding of them, he also encouraged them with a good word, and he embellished his lectures with stories from the wartime. The young people flocked around him, and he enjoyed their company. "He often came to sports matches as a fan, and afterward

he would mock our indolence or rejoice in our successes. There was always a circle of young people around him. He knew how to laugh sincerely and rejoice with us. Looking back, I see him as a great youth priest," described Rev. Edmund Chrzanowski, one of Fr. Aloysius's students

Although he valued working with young people, he also willingly took on the role of chaplain at the nearby military barracks and celebrated the Eucharist there every Sunday. He was well acquainted with the toils of a soldier's life and knew which words would best reach their hearts. This ministry also resulted in his acquaintance

with the Lieutenant General of the Polish Army, Józef Haller, with whom he often held discussions on the purpose of life or the duties of a good Christian.

Fr. Aloysius had a great passion for photography. He would often wander the countryside with his camera, taking pictures of landscapes, working farmers and domestic animals in the pastures. When he visited his parents, he would write

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down phrases from the Silesian and Opole regional dialects to compile a manual of this vernacular.

### DO NOT QUENCH THE SPIRIT!

In June 1939, Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD assumed a new assignment as rector of the SVD House in Gorna Grupa. However, the German invasion of Poland changed everything. After having reached Górna Grupa, German soldiers began seizing the buildings of St. Joseph's House, taking



Fr. Aloysius Liguda SVD just before being taken to a Nazi concentration camp, Górna Grupa, February 5, 1940



Commemorative beatification medallion


away the more valuable equipment and livestock. The residents of the House, in turn, faced further restrictions until, on the Feast of Christ the King, they were forbidden to leave the place. Arrested local priests were also brought to Górna Grupa. However, Fr. Aloysius did not lose heart, trying to make sure that the people under his care were safe. Because of his position as rector, he often had to have talks with the Gestapo – the secret police of Nazi Germany – and without ever losing his courage, he always sought the welfare of all the residents of the House.

After Christmas, for two months, an unknown old man would come to the House every Wednesday morning, bringing supplies of food. Fr. Aloysius was convinced that it was the supernatural help of St. Joseph, the Patron Saint of the House. However, in early February the mysterious visits stopped, and a short

time later everyone from the House was transported to Gdańsk. First, Fr. Aloysius was put to work in the Grenzdorf quarry, and later he was transported to the Nazi German concentration camp in Stutthof. From there he was taken to the Sachsenhausen camp and then to the Dachau concentration camp. Even in the midst of the camp's hardships, he shared his theological knowledge and faith in heavenly life, as recalled by fellow prisoner Rev. Roman Zientarski. In 1942, his health deteriorated more severely. The malicious capos took advantage of this fact and he was transferred to the disabled block, which in that case meant but one thing. In the early morning of December 8, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Fr. Liguda was taken out of the camp. "When you learn of my death, know that a healthy man was murdered," these were his last words uttered to his comrades.

A few days later, Fr. Aloysius' mother received a message about her son's death from tuberculosis. It is certain, however, that the real cause of death was quite different. Fr. Liguda, along with other prisoners, died drowned under the ice, as a result of experiments carried out by German army doctors who tested the endurance of the human body to low temperatures. In the end, however, he remained faithful to God and his homeland. To the end he gazed at Heaven, which was his ultimate goal in life. ■





Sometimes we find it difficult to face everyday life and its responsibilities with serenity. The life of Br. Gregory Bolesław Frąckowiak SVD brilliantly shows that accepting what fate brings can be a sure path to holiness, as long as we don't miss the simplest and most difficult thing at the same time: Love of God and love of neighbor.

## Simplicity of holiness

**L**owęcice, on the Obra River, is a small village in west-central Poland. It was there that on July 18, 1911, Bolesław Frąckowiak was born into the family of Andrzej and Zofia. He had eleven siblings; unfortunately two sisters died in childhood. Bolesław's parents had a farm and worked on the land.

Bolesław from an early age was raised in a patriotic spirit and had a great love for his homeland and the Polish language. He did not want to study in the local school, where German was spoken. So, his parents decided to send Bolesław to the nearby Polish school of Wanda Koczorowska in Bruczków. His education was going very well, and it was there that he met the Divine Word Missionaries for the first time.

### A BIG DREAM

Involved in the life of the local parish, Bolesław often served Mass as an altar boy. Perhaps it was already then that deep in his heart



he was considering whether to join the path of the priesthood. His older brother Wincenty recalled that Bolesław, as a young boy, was always occupied with something and it was difficult to get his help with household chores. Sometimes little Bolek, as he was called, "organized prayer services with the children, and at other times he preached or 'distributed communion.' (...) he performed these with great seriousness and fervor, even though that was just children's fun and games," recalled his brother Wincenty.

Conversely, following family custom, on Sundays before lunch Papa would gather his

children and ask them what were the main lines of the sermon during the morning Mass. Sometimes he deliberately did not direct his questions to Bolek, as he would be ready to repeat the entire sermon without giving his siblings a chance.

Bolesław was very receptive to matters of faith, and during his school years he had a desire to devote himself to missions. When a Minor Seminary was established in Bruczków, he enrolled there, following the advice of the parish priest, Rev. Marcin Poczta. However, his studies did not go well, as he suffered from persistent headaches. Thus, he gave up his studies, but deep in his heart the dream of being a missionary was still strongly alive. With the approval of his superiors, he was admitted to the Postulancy for the Brothers of the Society of the Divine Word in Górna Grupa.

### BE A REMARKABLE SAINT!

As of November 16, 1929, Bolesław Frąckowiak was already at St. Joseph's Mission House in Górna Grupa, where he was learning the precepts of religious life and gaining skills for his ministry as a religious brother. Less than a year later, on September 8, 1930, he received the habit and took a new name, Gregory. Time will show that September 8, the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary was a special date in Brother Gregory's



SVD Minor Seminary in Bruczkow, where Gregory Frąckowiak began his religious formation



The parish church in Cerekwica Stara, where Gregory Frąckowiak was baptized, July 25, 1911



Home of the Frąckowiak family in Łowęcze



life. Two years later, Br. Frąckowiak, also on September 8, took his first religious vows; he was the only one out of five postulants who had started their Novitiate together to do so.

The next six years in the life of Br. Gregory were marked by work and prayer. The enthusiasm that accompanied Bolesław when he was still a young altar boy did not fade, but even increased when, already as a mature man, he joyfully carried out all the tasks, while getting prepared for his final vows. He always fulfilled the assigned jobs with diligence and

serenity, which is why the superiors had great confidence in the young confrere.

He kindly helped the poor who knocked on the monastery's gate when his ministry was as a doorman. He would then say that he saw Christ himself in them. He often stopped by the monastery's kitchen, where there was always something to be done. He also helped in the sacristy. Above all, however, Br. Gregory fathomed the arcana of bookbinding. The demand for professional people in this field was high, as since 1931, a printing press had been running in Górna

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Grupa. Later on, he willingly shared his knowledge with the Mission Seminary confreres.

The character of Br. Gregory was also distinguished by his sincere zeal and piety. When the clock struck the set hour, he and the others would pause from their work or recreation to delve into the Quarter Hour prayer, which he always regarded with great zeal.



First vows of Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD, Górna Grupa 1932



Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD with his family on the day of his father's funeral, April 9, 1937



Br. Grzegory Frąckowiak SVD; final vows, Górna Grupa, September 8, 1938

The Novice Master at the time was Fr. Jan Giczal SVD, and it was he who formed and nurtured the spirituality of Br. Gregory. He knew him very well and, just before his final vows, gave his opinion that Br. Gregory was an "exemplary religious," thus recommending him for final vows. Though, there were some fathers who objected

to this, yet the House Council of Górna Grupa gave its consent for Br. Gregory's final vows. Meanwhile, still one of the fathers at the Provincial Council objected, so the final decision – positive for Br. Gregory – was made in Rome. Thus, on September 8, 1938, Br. Gregory took his final vows and committed his life to God's service forever. Earlier, in his



Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD with his mother on the day of taking his final vows, September 8, 1938

notebook he had written: "I do not want to be just a regular saint, but the greatest saint after the Mother of God."

### CATECHIST AND FAITHFUL STEWARD

The ministry of Br. Gregory in Górna Grupa was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. In the first days of September 1939,



the German troops occupied the SVD buildings, leaving only a few rooms for the local residents. Meanwhile, on the third Sunday of October, all the fathers and brothers were put under internment. However, the religious brothers were allowed to return to their family homes. Notwithstanding, Br. Gregory stayed, devotedly helping the imprisoned confreres as well as the diocesan priests. On February 5, 1940, a great void filled the St. Joseph House in Górna Grupa as all interned priests were deported to the Stutthof Nazi German concentration camp.

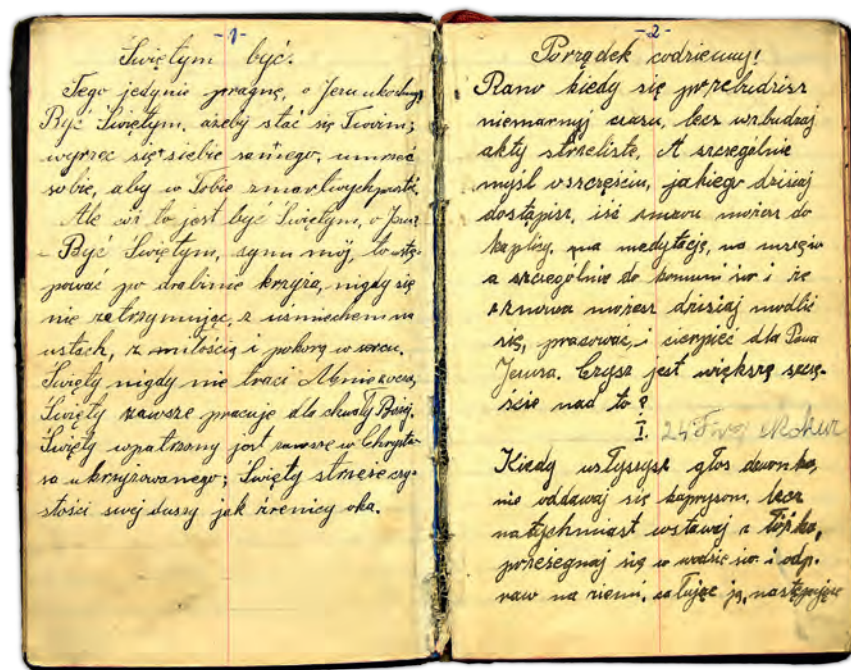
Br. Gregory also had to leave the religious House, deciding to go to his home village of Łowęcice. On the way, however, he stopped in Poznań with his brother Zygmunt and began working for a friend in a confectionery. He attended daily Mass, receiving Holy Communion, at St. Martin's Church, a fact quickly noticed by the local churchwarden, who invited Br. Gregory to help in the sacristy. Br. Gregory accepted the offer with great joy. However, due to the impossibility of obtaining registration of residence, he had to leave Poznań and finally came back to his home

village. There, with his brother Wincenty, who had a farm, he got employment as a farm laborer and thus was able to get a registration of residence document.

At that time, in Br. Gregory's home village of Łowęcice, pastoral ministry was carried out by Fr. Jan Giczal SVD, former Novice master and spiritual director of Br. Gregory. Pastoral care at that time was not an easy endeavor, but Br. Gregory, being officially registered there as an agricultural worker, had considerable freedom of movement, and while keeping



A group of children prepared by Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD for their First Holy Communion



Notebook with spiritual exercises of Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD

a low profile, he was able to help with pastoral ministry. He regularly visited the elderly and sick throughout the area. He also catechized children and prepared them for the first Holy Communion. All these activities, however, were done in a clandestine manner due to punishments from the Germans, who forbade such activities. Franciszek Pawlak, one of Br. Gregory's students, recalled that "He was always smiling, cheerful and well-balanced. We saw him as a very holy man, close to God and the people. (...) At the same time he was principled, but gentle. He always spoke in a low voice. He was never easily angered."

Br. Gregory also baptized children, meticulously recording their first and last names. On October 7, 1941, Gestapo soldiers came to the Noskowie presbytery and arrested Fr. Jan Giczek SVD; they scattered over the table the consecrated hosts kept at the presbytery. After the soldiers left, Br. Gregory, who was then staying in a nearby organist's house, came to the rectory and took care of the Blessed Sacrament. He carefully picked up the hosts and carried them to his room, where on the next day he adored the Blessed Sacrament with a group of the faithful. In the end, he gave Holy Communion to everyone present.

### THERE IS NO GREATER LOVE...

Before long, Br. Gregory was ordered to work in a nearby printing press in Jarocin. At that



Commemorative beatification medallion

time, he got involved in the distribution of the newsletter "For You, Poland," produced by the Jarocin underground resistance, "to keep the spirit of the Polish people alive," as he put it. However, he quickly gave up this dangerous activity, on the advice of his confessor Fr. Paweł Kiczka SVD. Nonetheless, in 1942 the Gestapo police tracked down the news-sheet authors and their helpers. Mass arrests were set in motion. The Germans also had Br. Gregory on their list of people to arrest. Being warned of this fact, he went on September 8 to Fr. Kiczka for confession and to receive Holy Communion. He also revealed his intention to take all the blame on himself. The next day the Gestapo came to arrest Br. Gregory, who had already instructed all those involved in the case to put all the blame on him. As a result, the rest of those arrested were allowed to return to their families.

From Jarocin prison, Br. Gregory was taken to Środa Wielkopolska, and from there to the Fort VII a Nazi German death camp in Poznań. Based on the accounts of his fellow prisoners, Walenty and Antoni Kaczmarek, we learn that Br. Gregory led daily rosary prayers and recited litanies. At first the Germans did not know he was a religious brother, but when they discovered a holy medal sewn into his cap, they began to treat him with extreme cruelty. Tortured in Poznań's Military Barracks and interrogated about the newsletter, he did not betray anyone.

In January 1943, he was taken to the harsh prison in Zwickau. The death sentence was passed on March 30 in Dresden. There, in the prison courtyard, Br. Gregory was beheaded by guillotine, having written a farewell letter to his family a few hours earlier. As Scripture says: "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:13). Br. Gregory Frąckowiak SVD was always ready to make sacrifices for others: this was while ministering in Górna Grupa, serving secretly as a Eucharistic Minister and catechist, all the way to his last days, when he made the greatest sacrifice to save the lives of others. Besides Br. Gregory, nine other people suffered the death penalty on account of the distribution of the newsletters.



### WHERE DO WE COME FROM?

The Society of the Divine Word (Latin: *Societas Verbi Divini*), abbreviated SVD, was founded by Saint Arnold Janssen in 1875 in Steyl, the Netherlands, just across the border from Germany. After just four years, the first two missionaries were sent to China. They were Joseph Freinademetz SVD – now a Saint, and Fr. Johann Anzer SVD, both were sent to do missionary work in Southern Shantung.

In 1889, the St. Gabriel Mission House was established in Mödling, near Vienna. In the same year, two more missionaries went to work in Argentina. In 1892, the SVD established their mission in Togo and opened another high school in Nysa, which then belonged to Germany. Soon more missionaries went to Ecuador, Brazil and New Guinea.

The SVD grew rapidly. After 25 years of existence, it had 200 priests and more than 250 seminarians; beyond that, there were almost 400 brothers in temporary and final vows. By the year of the founder's death (1909), these numbers had doubled.

Today the Society of the Divine Word has nearly 5,800 missionaries serving in 79 countries around the world on six continents.



Coat of arms of the Society of the Divine Word

### OUR CHARISM

The Society of the Divine Word is a missionary religious order. We are also popularly called the Divine Word Missionaries – from the Latin *VERBUM*, meaning *WORD*. Our charism is to preach the Word of God in places where it has not yet been preached and to prepare local Church leaders for independent evangelization work. Bearing witness to a truly Christian life, both individually and in communities, is the first step of our missionary ministry.

### WHAT IS OUR MINISTRY?

- We serve where the Gospel has recently arrived; we are often its first heralds.
- We provide pastoral ministry in communities that are already established.

- We engage in the biblical apostolate.
- We run parishes, universities, scientific institutes and schools.
- We cooperate and share our mission with the laity, organize courses for catechists and lay animators, and conduct mission animation.
- We minister among migrants, refugees and marginalized people.
- We are active in mass media.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SVD MISSION IN POLAND

Polish confreres were present in the Society of the Divine Word almost from its inception. The SVD missionaries came to Poland after World War I, first to Poznań in 1919, and a year later to Bytom. In 1921, the Minor Mission Seminary was established in Rybnik. Two years later, the SVD acquired property in Górna Grupa and launched another Minor Seminary.

In September 1935, the Mission House in Chłudowo opened the SVD Major Mission Seminary, in which the Polish Province of the Society of the Divine Word was also established, with St. Joseph as its patron saint.

World War II interrupted the dynamic growth of the Province. All the houses were closed, and 45 confreres were put into

prisons and Nazi German concentration camps; 23 of them died a martyr's death. Among the martyrs were 4 confreres who were beatified in 1999: Fathers Louis Mzyk, Stanislaus Kubista, Aloysius Liguda and brother Gregory Frąckowiak.

Due to the post-war change of the western borders, the Polish Province included houses in Nysa, Bytom and Pieniężno. A year after the war, the Minor Missionary Seminary was reopened in Nysa, and in 1948, the Major Seminary was transferred from Chludowo to Pieniężno.

As a result of repression by the communist authorities in the late 1940s, the Minor Mission Seminaries were liquidated; mission houses in Górna Grupa and Nysa were confiscated; and farm property was seized.

The major task around which the efforts of the SVD in Poland concentrated in the post-war years was the formation of future missionaries. A significant role in this endeavor was played by the Major Mission Seminary in Pieniężno, which educated more than 600 missionaries. An important event in the history of the Polish SVD Province was the first official departure of a large group of missionaries for missions in 1965; 20 went to Indonesia and one each to Argentina and Brazil.



St. Arnold Janssen, founder of the Society of the Divine Word

### MISSION STATEMENT OF THE POLISH PROVINCE OF THE SOCIETY OF THE DIVINE WORD

We, members of the religious-missionary international community of the Polish Province of the Society of the Divine Word, dedicated to *missio ad gentes*, continuing the legacy of our founding father St. Arnold, having as models and intercessors St. Joseph and the Blessed Martyr confreres, declare that, faithful to the teachings of the Church and guided by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to pursue the following goals:

- to form within ourselves a new man after the example of Christ in the fraternal community through contemplation

of the Word of God and the Eucharist, prayer and asceticism, basic and ongoing formation;

- to engage ourselves directly in the missionary ministry of the universal Church by:
  - formation and education of missionaries
  - concern for missionary vocations
  - ministry to migrants
  - spiritual and material support of missions and care for returning missionaries
  - creative presence in places of cultural and scientific endeavors
  - being open to new missionary challenges;
- to be involved in the local Church in Poland, Ukraine, Latvia and Norway by:
  - running parishes in the SVD spirit
  - mission animation
  - helping people, especially the young, to seek and discover the meaning of life in the spirit of the Gospel
  - specialized ministries stemming from our charism, such as preaching retreats, care for the poor, the marginalized, and those enslaved by addictions.

MORE INFORMATION  
[werbisci.pl](http://werbisci.pl)







**More information about  
the Society  
of the Divine Word:**

[www.werbisci.pl](http://www.werbisci.pl)

FB/misjonarze.werbisci

Platforma X/werbisci

YouTube/werbisci

Instagram/werbisci

**A site dedicated  
to the SVD Martyrs:**

[www.svdmartyrs.com](http://www.svdmartyrs.com)



**The Divine Word  
Missionaries in numbers**

- Number of SVD missionaries in the world – 5754 (as of January 1, 2024)
- SVD missionaries minister in – 79 countries
- SVD missionaries are present – on 6 continents
- Number of SVD confreres in the Polish Province – 209
- Number of mission houses in Poland – 15
- Number of parishes run by SVD in Poland – 18







Painted by Karolina Brzozowska. The original is in the Chapel of the SVD Mission House in Lublin, Poland

## PRAYER TO THE BLESSED SVD MARTYRS

(June 12th)

God, our Father, we thank you and praise you for your servants: Louis, Stanislaus, Aloysius and Gregory. You called them in their youth to work in your vineyard. They accepted your divine call to join the Society of the Divine Word and became zealous religious and missionaries.

We are deeply moved by their love for the Eucharist and their total trust in you. Their humility, kindness, gentleness, diligence, faithfulness and patience enabled them to place themselves completely in your hands. These servants of yours became victims of the cruelty of war. They all shed their blood to remain faithful to you.

Blessed Martyrs, Louis, Stanislaus, Aloysius and Gregory, intercede for us so that we may also respond to our missionary vocation with zeal and devotion. Be a constant inspiration to us that we may be able to face the difficulties and trials of life without complaint and to work and suffer steadfastly for others.

Pray for us that we persevere in our missionary service to all, especially to the poor and needy. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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