Krakow and Italy - religion

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Krakow is often referred to as "the other Rome", because there is no other place in this part of Europe where you can find so many tombs of people recognised by the Catholic Church as being saints or the blessed. Jan Mucante, the master of ceremonies in the delegation of the papal legate, Cardinal Gaetano, wrote in 1596: “If there was no Rome, Krakow would be Rome”.

Local churches (of which there are over 100 throughout the city) accommodate the earthly remains of nine saints (including St. Stanislaus of Szczepanow, St. Hyacinth and St. Faustyna Kowalska), seven blessed figures and many of God’s Servants (eight of them were elevated to the altars alone by John Paul II). The tombs of some of these, located in nineteen exquisite churches around Krakow, are now part of the Krakow Saints’ Route, highlighting how the history of the city has intertwined with the lives of holy bishops, missionaries, preachers, kings and dukes, as well as humble chaplains, nuns, monks and laypeople.

Krakow’s Dominican Church is the final resting place of St. Hyacinth – the only Pole among 139 saints depicted in the Bernini colonnade in St. Peter’s Square in Rome. Each Sunday at 3.30 pm, a Holy Mass is celebrated in Italian in the Franciscan Basilica (pl. Wszystkich Świętych 5). This is probably a reference to the times when the Italian Brotherhood was active within the church. Today, the Basilica accommodates the Chapel of St. John the Baptist, called the Italian Chapel, in whose crypts the defunct members of the Brotherhood were buried.

Only in Krakow is it possible to find places connected with the entire life of Pope John Paul II. Some of them saw Karol Wojtyla as a student of Polish Philology, a workman and an actor. Others saw him as a theological seminary student and a young priest celebrating his first masses. He was very much attached to many of them as a university lecturer, a chaplain for students and families or as Krakow’s metropolitan bishop. Finally, Krakow is also a city full of places beloved by the late Pope, ones he always returned to as the head of the Catholic Church (he visited Krakow seven times as Pope).

The Bishops’ Palace at ul. Franciszkańska 3 became the home of Karol Wojtyla when he was a student at the underground Higher Theological Seminary of the Krakow Archdiocese on the 10th of August 1944. There, in the private chapel of Duke Cardinal Adam Sapiecha, he was ordained by him as priest (on the 1st of November 1946). In the Metropolitan Curia in Krakow he served as bishop (from 1958) and then as Krakow’s Metropolitan Bishop until 1978, when he was elected for the Holy See. Even after he left for the Vatican, he always thought about these places as his home. Everybody still remembers the words uttered by John Paul II during one of his pilgrimages to Poland: “If anyone asks, it’s Franciszkańska 3”. The Holy Father stayed at the palace during all of his visits to Krakow, and it is thanks to him that the window overlooking the entrance to the Bishops’ Palace in Krakow has become one of the most recognizable windows in the world, where the Pope’s chats with the young people crowding outside the “papal window” quickly became a fixture of all his visits.
to Krakow.

In the underground part of Wawel Cathedral in St. Leonard’s Crypt, Karol Wojtyła, then a young priest, held his first holy mass on the 2nd of November 1946. On the 28th of September 1958, on St. Wenceslaus’s day – the holiday of the Patron Saint of the Cathedral – he became a bishop. St. Mary’s Church remembers Karol Wojtyła as a confessor and preacher between 1952 and 1957. The paths of John Paul II winding through Krakow also lead to the Dom pod Lipkami (ul. Księcia Józefa 55a). Before the war, as a student of Polish Philology he was a frequent visitor of the Szkocki Family, the owners of the house, where they often talked about the theatre. In the house at ul. Szwedzka 12, where the Szkocki Family moved during the war, “Granny Szkocka” (Irena Szkocka) nursed young Karol after he was hit by a German lorry in February 1944. Krakow’s Błonia meadow is also associated with the Polish Pope, as it was here that he celebrated his masses for hundreds of thousands of people. These unique meetings are commemorated in Błonia by a 26-tonne granite rock brought from the Morskie Oko Lake in the Tatra Mountains and adorned with a plaque saying, “You are the rock”. Then, in the Holy Sacrament Chapel of St. Florian’s Church where Karol Wojtyła worked as a vicar in the 1950s, there is a prayer desk where he used to pray before an image of Holy Mary. To commemorate that, there is a case incorporated into the desk with a papal skull-cap and a rosary donated to the parish church by the Holy Father himself in 2004.

Many important places and institutions in Krakow have been named after John Paul II, including the Krakow-Balice Airport, a specialist hospital and a university. The “Have no Fear” John Paul II Centre in Krakow-Łagiewniki promulgates the Holy Father’s teachings. Embedded in the altar of the church at the site is an ampoule of John Paul II’s blood, brought to Krakow by Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz, the Pope’s personal secretary and Krakow’s current metropolitan bishop. The Krakow-Łagiewniki Sanctuary, consecrated by the Holy Father in 2000, has become a world-renowned centre of worship of the Divine Mercy. During a visit to Krakow, the Mayor of Rome, Giovanni Alemano, wrote this in the city’s visitors’ book: “Giovanni Paolo II è il grande ponte spirituale che tiene unite Cracovia e Roma in una grande amicizia. (John Paul II is the spiritual bridge uniting Krakow and Rome with a strong bond of friendship).

The current Baroque Church of St. Anne in Krakow is modelled on the Roman Church of Stant’Andrea della Valle. Construction works were led by the well-known Italian architect Francisco Solari. The marvellous stucco adornments inside were created by the brilliant Italian sculptor and stucco artist, Baltassare Fontana (the main altar was also created according to his design). Two Italian brothers, Carlo and Innocente Monti, painted many of the church’s paintings.

Krakow’s Church of St. Peter and Paul the Apostles – both when it comes to the layout and the facade - was modelled on the II Gesu Church in Rome. Construction works were also headed by Italians: first by Guiseppe Britius and later by Giovanni Maria Bernardoni and the royal architect Giovanni Trevano.

St. Faustyna’s Chapel in the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Krakow-Łagiewniki is a
donation from the Italian episcopate. On the 100th anniversary of the baptism of the Apostle of Divine Mercy (27th of August 2005), it was consecrated by Cardinal Camillo Ruini, head of the Italian Episcopate Conference.