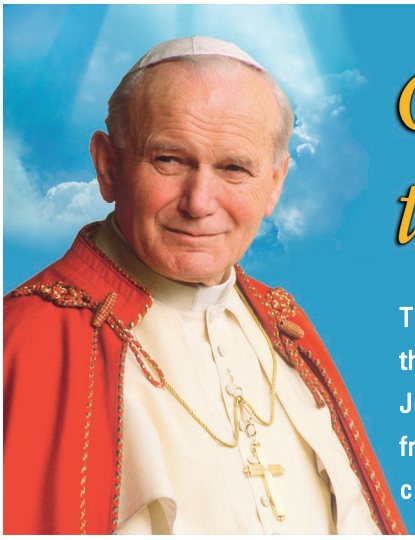
John Paul II FOUNDATION

♦ December 2014
♦ Newsletter No. 44

Christmas is a mystery of joy! The Church shares in this same joy, surrounded today by the light of the Son of God: the darkness can never obscure it. It is the glory of the Eternal World, who out of love has become one of us.

John Paul II, December 25, 2002 – Christmas "Urbi et Orbi"

Jesus was born as "the genuine Light" and He came to us as Emmanuel – "God-with-us." He is the most precious gift from God – a gift of Hope and Love. We are wishing You, Dear Friends of the John Paul II Foundation, that Christmas would open Your hearts for this Love; would be a time of joy and God's peace.



Canonization of John Paul II – the Founder of the Foundation

The canonization will be held April 27, 2014 on the day that was established by John Paul II as the Divine Mercy Sunday. That holy day is very closely related to the pontificate and death of John Paul II who died on the Divine Mercy Eve. We are cordially inviting all members and friends of the John Paul II Foundation for a special spiritual preparation for this holy celebration, as well as for participation in the celebrations through join prayer.

Meeting – Pilgrimage at Camp St. Malo

Pope John Paul II visited St. Malo on Aug. 13, 1993.

On Sunday, August 13, 1993, Blessed John Paul II was resting in the retreat center at Camp St. Malo, Allenspark, at the verge of the Rocky Mountains. In memory of that event, for the past three years, the John Paul II Foundation Colorado Chapter organizes a meeting – pilgrimage at that place. Similarly to the past years, also this year a group of hiking enthusiasts went on the John Paul II trail.

Some of us took the trail, so they could alone and in silence look at the world, the same way as the Holy Father did. (Upon arrival to the waterfall, we read the Holy Father's meditations about the beauty of the nature and its role in bringing God closer.)

Other participants of the meeting – pilgrimage stopped at the small church that is located at the trail to see a movie that was presented there – a report from the Denver's World Youth Days in 1993. The movie was very well received and prompted a great interest not only among our group but also other tourists who were taking the trail on that day.

Before 3 p.m. we all met in the church for the mass which was celebrated by the Chaplain of the John Paul II Foundation Colorado Chapter along with Rev. Andrzej Kukła from Kraków. Rev. Andrzej's interesting and pleasant teaching, warm smile of our Chaplain, Rev. Marek, good selection of songs and accompaniment provided by Mss. Anna and Mss. Jadwiga, deep voice of our lecturer, Szymon, unusual light of the sun that was setting down and which was penetrating through the stained glass, made an extraordinary atmosphere during the mass. We had a feeling of closeness and unity.

After the mass we had a dinner. Almost a camp side soup from a pot, sandwiches, cakes and other meals (ladies prepared much more than it was planned) served in this unusual scenery were disappearing fast. Finally, there was a time to start a camp fire. Having a camp fire in a wild area at the verge of the Rocky Mountain is considered as a luxury and as an exotic event not readily available to everyone; we were the lucky ones. John Paul II also loved meetings by a fire camp and He wrote about them the following: "When the Pope comes to His summer residency in Castel Gandolfo this place starts to thrive (…) the fire camp is set and all sit in a circle beside the Pope. Everyone has a feeling of closeness. An informal conversation is ongoing intermingled with singing. Once, hosting Polish young people, at ease, the Host said: "During the best times, I was evaluating vacations by the number of the fire camps (…) by the number of nights under the tent. If I was able to account for a sufficient number, then I was considering it a good vacation time. Now, the situation is different. Thus, I value more each fire camp which I have at Castel Gandolfo (…) A fire camp is extraordinary regardless the location, it always attracts people, attracts and people feels great in its circle."

And we felt that fire camp atmosphere. We were recalling our first pilgrimage on that trail, our evening prayer in the chapel with the John Paul II prayer book, seeing memorabilia, a night at the Center, breakfast in the dining room with a huge fireplace. Unfortunately, a fire from November 14, 2011 devastated a huge part of the Center. Only the lone fireplace sticks out from that place.

We are praying that responsible for the Camp St. Malo Center Diocesan's management made right decisions in this matter. Simultaneously, we are praying that the government of the Boulder district, on which the Center is located, could realize that the John Paul II's visit was an extraordinary event and a blessing for ten thousand people who live in this area and visitors from around the world. We are praying that this beautiful piece of Colorado, which to the Great Pilgrim, John Paul II, soon the Saint, recalled His homeland mountains and brought peaceful rest become to all who come here an oasis of peace, meeting and prayer.

Barbara Popielak

20 years of activities of the Stockholm Chapter

Photo: Iwona Kalinowska

Bp. Anders Arborelius at the St. John Church

Analyzing two decades of the John Paul II Foundation Stockholm Chapter activities, a reflection comes to mind that each initiative undertook by members of the Chapter was a preparation to a great spiritual experience which happened when the relics of Blessed John Paul II were brought to Stockholm.

Among many celebrations that preceded this extraordinary event we should point out the following:

Visitation of the Cross of John Paul II from Good Friday celebrated in year 2005 which the Holy Father carried during His last Stations of the Cross;

Exhibition of stamps: "Pope Pilgrim – John Paul II on stamps from around the world 1978-2003" brought from the Center for Documentation and Research of the Pontificate of John Paul II in Rome, and which Stockholm's Bishop Anders Arborelius during the inauguration named

as "the second arrival of the Holy Father to Stockholm";

Very important were also visits of our various guests:

Fr. dr Krzysztof Wieliczko, Administrator of the John Paul II Foundation in Rome, who visited us from May 19th through May 21st, 2013;

Msgr. Stefan Wylężek, Former Administrator of the John Paul II Foundation in Rome, who came for the celebrations of the Foundation's Day on May 18, 2009;

Msgr. dr Jan Główczyk from the Center for Documentation and Research of the Pontificate of John Paul II in Rome, and Rev. Prof. Waldemar Chrostowski Pope's stamp collector and author of the album "Pope Pilgrim" from 2005;

Msgr. dr Bronisław Piasecki, the last Secretary of Stefan Cardinal Wyszyński in 2001;

Archbishop Szczepan Wesoły, Former President of the Administrative Council of the John Paul II Foundation in Rome in 1997

All invited Priests celebrated a Mass and said a homily at the St. John Church and at the St. Eric's Cathedral in Stockholm.

During their visits in Stockholm they had a chance to meet with Benefactors and Friends of the Foundation and to have a cup of coffee.

A Rosary group is the permanent initiative of the John Paul II Foundation of the Stockholm Chapter. Since February 2, 2000, the group prays in the intention of the Holy Father, the Church, in all Papal's intentions and for the prompt canonization of Bl. John Paul II. We also need to mention various meeting, such as: Christmas Wafer meeting, doughnuts on the last Sunday of the carnival, blessing of eggs on the Divine Mercy Sunday, which provides an excellent opportunity to preserve traditions and share information of the John Paul II Foundation.

Bogusława Zaniewicz-Dybeck

Pilgrim of the Lund Chapter to Armenia and Georgia

(Part 2)

Legend states that when God was distributing the world to nations He gave the most beautiful piece designated for Himself to the Georgians, as they were not arguing like the others but were eating, playing and dancing joyfully.

Georgia is an old country with its history going back to Greek myths. Jason's voyage went to Colchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece as sheep fleeces became covered with gold when submerged in rivers rich in that mineral. In the 6th century B.C. this part of Caucasus was mainly populated by two organized tribes: the aforementioned Colchis in the Western part and the Kingdom of Iberia in the East. The King of Iberia, Mirian, converted to Christianity under the influence of St. Nino from Cappadocia was baptized in 337 and declared it the national religion.

The unification of Georgia started by King of Bagrat III in the 10th century ended during King David IV the Builder's rein in the 11th century. The "golden age" in the history of the nation occurred under the rein of Queen Tamar (12th-13th centuries), a great granddaughter of King David. Architecture and paintings, art, poetry, biological studies and medicine were thriving. Schools of philosophy were established. The Georgian language was probably distinguished from the Caucasus' languages in the 2nd century A.C. The oldest preserved written forms date back to approximately 430 A.C. Poet Shota Rustaveli, who lived during Queen Tamar's rein, was the author of the poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin" and is compared to Dante. Those names – King David the Builder, Queen Tamar, Shota – will be echoed throughout our pilgrimage.

Throughout the centuries, the country experienced repeated attacks by neighboring nations; Georgian people were giving up their lives for freedom and faith, sacred buildings were devastated. Religious and historical frescos were stripped, painted with lime or covered with writings in foreign languages. Fortresses scattered throughout the country testify about the past.

St. George, Martyr, the patron of knights and scouts, lived in the 4th century and is the patron of Georgia. In monuments and on paintings he is depicted fighting with the dragon, perhaps a metaphor of our own sin with which the fight may be the most difficult. The St. George's cross is reflected on the national flag since its independence in 1991; it resembles the Cross of Jerusalem.

The presence of humans in the territory of present-day Tbilisi goes back more than 5000 years. There is a legend about the establishment of the city at the Mtkwai River (KuraRiver) by the sulphuric hot springs. From the 6th to 8th centuries Narikala fortress has been there with a beautiful view on the entire city, including the president's palace, a suspension bridge for pedestrians and a new Orthodox Church with a golden dome that was a gift to the city from the prime minister. An enormous 20 meter tall monument of Mother Georgia, Kartis Deda 1960's appears above the city. The word mother has the highest respect in Georgia!

Anchiskhati Church from the 5th – 6th centuries, the oldest one in Tbilisi, is classified as one of the oldest monuments of the city. Above the entrance there is a fresco revealing the face of Christ. Catholic Patriarch of all Georgia, the Archbishop of Mtskheta-Tbilisi, Elijah II, is located on this same street. The Georgian Orthodox Church obtained its independence from the Antioch Church during King Vakhtang Gorgasalan's rule in the 5th century and from the Russian Orthodox Church in the 1940's.

The religious life of Georgian people is concentrated around the patriarchal Sioni Cathedral (the Dormition of the Virgin Mary) and the seat of Catholics. The most precious relic for Georgian people, the Grapevine Cross of St. Nino with characteristic dropping arms, is located inside the Cathedral.

Photo: Agnieszka Wiśniewska

Icon of St. Nino in Sioni Cathedral

On the way to Cappadocia, St. Nino not having any cross to spread Christianity, conjoined branches of grape vine with her own strand of hair. Jvari Monastery (Monastery of the Cross) is related to St. Nino as it was built on the place where, according to the legend, St. Nino put her grapevine Cross. From the monastery a gorgeous view spreads across the valley and the first capital of the country, 4th century B.C. Mtskheta. Due to its enormous historical and cultural values it is under UNESCO protection and well cared-for.

Svetitskhoveli Cathedral (the Living Pillar Cathedral) from the early 11th century, the seat of the Catholics-Patriarch of Georgia is the most significant monument of Mtskheta. The Cathedral was built on the wood remaining from the church of King Mirian's rule. According to the legend, the original church was erected on the tomb of Sidonia, a Georgian Jew who was buried with a piece of Christ's robe. Her brother Elias, a witness of Jesus' death, brought this piece with him. On the

tomb grew an enormous cedar tree from which columns of the church's foundation were made. One especially tall provided the necessary support to the others. In addition to the religious aspect, the Cathedral had many important state and cultural functions, such as coronations, weddings and Christenings, and it held a great library as well as the tombs of many of Georgia's leaders. In times of danger it provided asylum to people and was severely damaged by invaders and by an earthquake in 1283. Through the great efforts of citizens it was restored to the prior grandness.

Other towns on the banks of the Mithkvari River consist of two caves that provided shelter for people. Uplistsikhe, "the lord's fortress," is from the X-VI century B.C. and a former fortress of chiefs from local tribes. Vardzia, the other, is a stronghold from the 12th and 13th centuries. It is stated that the towns, along with king and court, could accommodate approximately 20 thousand people at Uplistsikhe and in the bigger Vardzia – approximately 50 thousand people. In both places there are Christian elements. In Uplistsikhe, on the place of a pagan temple St. George Orthodox Church was built in the 10th century. In Vardzia – at the time of the Queen Tamar's ruling a monastery complex was built on one of the levels. Both towns were eventually depopulated and in the 1900s reconstruction work was begun, preserving fragments of various chamber rooms, e.g. "Tamar's room", theater, pharmacy and other important chambers that proved both towns had an important political, cultural, educational and religious importance. Today monks have returned and inhabit the monastery.

Bagrati Cathedral, also known as Cathedral of the Dormition, from the early years of the 11th century in the ancient Colchida lost its splendor after devastation made by the Ottoman troops in the 17th century and Russian in the 18th century. From the beauty of the original cathedral only the impressive sized walls remained and from the rich interior paintings only a fragment of the fresco with Virgin Mary and icons of King David the Builder and Queen Tamar remain. The Gelati Monastery, also from the early 11th century, the heyday of the country was in better condition. The monastery was founded by King David the Builder. The monastery complex consists of St. George Church, St. Nicholas Church and the Church of the Virgin, the biggest sacred building. A mosaic fresco in the apse depicting Mother of God with Archangel Michael and Gabriel draws attention. Mural painting depicts King David the Builder who is holding in one hand papyrus and in the other model of a church – symbols of wisdom and faith.

Beside sacral buildings, there was a cultural and intellectual center, Academia, in which during the King's ruling, Georgian and foreign scientist, theologian and philosophers were employed. They offered arithmetical, geometry (necessary to build such magnificent buildings), grammar, rhetoric, astronomy, music and gold engraver classes. Philosophical and religious discussions were held. The Academia was named as a "Second Athos" and "New Athens." The Academy lasted to early 16th century. At the former entrance to the Monastery complex King David the Builder is buried and by the size of the stone we can assume that he was tall. The entire complex is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

The Caucasus - beautiful mountainous land with peaks covered permanent in snow above immense ravines, valleys, and magnificent forests. From the north the Greater Caucasus Mountain range (over 5000 meters above sea level) separates Georgia from Russia and from the south the *Smaller Caucasus* Mountain range (approximately 3000 meters above the sea level) separates Georgia from Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Caucasus is a region of migratory tribal groups with caravans passing by, but unfortunately it is also a place of numerous invasions, skirmishes and wars. Heavy battles were fought during the annexation of these areas to Russia at the beginning of the 19th century.

At that time the picturesque trade route known from the ancient times which led from Tbilisi through the Higher Caucasus Mountain range to north, to Vladikavkaz in Russia, was re-built and renamed to Georgian Military Road. From numerous fortresses that are located on this road, Anauri from the 16th – 17th century and located on a manmade lake is very well preserved. Inside tremendous fortifications the Church of the Assumption is located. The road continues through the Cross Pass at 2379 meters above the sea level; most likely a cross from the time of King David the Builder was standing here. The contemporary cross put by Russian dates back to 1824.

For us, the road ends at Kazbegi village. From this place alpinists go on trekking to the dormant volcano, Mount Kazbek (5033 m. above the sea level). That is one of the highest summits in Georgia with which a myth of Prometheus is related in which he was chained to the mountain as a punishment for having stolen fire from gods and giving it to people. The road leads to the Tsminda Sameba (Gergeti Trinity Church) from the 14th century, picturesquely located on the hill above the village at an elevation of approximately 2200 m. From this place, on sunny days, the snowy summit of the Mount Kazbek is visible, a photographer's dream.

Tsminda Sameba is not large or lavish inside. The icon of the Holy Trinity according to the 16th century conception depicts six characters: three angels that symbolize the Holy Trinity, hosts – Abraham and Sara who are serving the table and a servant who prepares food. Tsminda Sameba is a place of a religious cult and when a cable car was installed to enable easy access to the Church people considered it as a sacrilege to this sacred place and it was soon deconstructed. The path to God should be difficult…

The last supper in Tbilisi was enriched by a folk dance performance with fiery rhythms and sophisticated jumps of the dancers. On the Okecie airport Fr. Wiesław celebrated a farewell mass. We gave thanks to God for the successful pilgrimage, for His care and all wonderful experiences during this pilgrimage.

We went on the pilgrimage to Armenia and Georgia, the two first Christian countries of the world. In the past they were thriving with enormous land, developed knowledge, crafts and culture. The location sentenced Georgia as well as Armenia to continuous struggles to preserve national identity, religious, historical and cultural possessions, survival of faith and language. Since the beginning of the 1990's they are independent but still struggle with the same issues. Both countries have different languages, alphabets, religious rituals and historical events.

Our pilgrimage had a religious character. We focused on the sacred buildings and the history of both nations, but there was no way to disregard nature. Caucasus… the source of inspiration for poets and writers with sceneries worthy of the best painters. God created this imperishable beauty and gave it to these people.

Jadwiga Kurkus

I gave my thanks to Maria Płoszewska-Paulsson, chronicler of our pilgrimages, for the priceless remarks during preparation of this text.

♦ **John Paul II Foundation**

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