

entertained us because they got up and started to dance. The restaurant musicians had a good time getting the boys to do different embarrassing things which had us in stitches. It was a great day in Poland, and several of us stayed in the hotel lobby, drank a beer from the bar, and talked about the highlights of the trip thus far.

Friday, October 20th--Shrine of the Divine Mercy / John Paul II Center

I can't sum it up better but to say that this was the highlight of the trip for many people, but especially for Danelle Richardson. In the words of Danelle, "everything after the Shrine of Divine Mercy will be a bonus for me." After breakfast, we boarded the bus and took a short ride to the grounds of the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. I remember it being a very foggy morning, so you couldn't even see the massive basilica church of the Divine Mercy until you walked right up to it. We bypassed the basilica and headed straight to the convent chapel, where St. Faustina Kowalska's remains are buried to the left of the sanctuary. You can pray at her tomb and venerate a relic that is under glass. We were one of the first groups of the day, so it was a nice and quiet celebration in the chapel. Danelle read the first reading, and you could tell that she was so overwhelmed to be there—this is why she wanted to come on our Poland trip. It reminded me a lot of Mr. Ronnie Perault who cried when he got off the bus in San Giovanni Rotondo and kissed the ground—he was so happy to be near his prayer buddy—St. Padre Pio. After Mass, we had an appointment with Sister Maria Jean Vianney. She spoke about God's love for us, St. Faustina's life, and the great mystery of Divine Mercy. Sister spoke with such conviction, peace, and joy. All of us felt as if St. Faustina herself were talking to us. After our meeting, several of our group stayed to speak with Sister about joining Faustinum, which is a group of lay people and religious who wish to spread devotion and become apostles of the Divine Mercy. Julia and I went to the convent where I was scheduled to meet with Sister Maria Norberta concerning the acquisition of a relic of St. Faustina. While I had sent the paperwork via priority mail two weeks beforehand, the mother superior approves relic requests once every two months, and the nun who actually prepares the relics was recovering from surgery and in a rehabilitation hospital. The young Sister Maria Norberta looked at me cheerfully and said, "Father, you will just have to plan another trip to Poland to come get Sr. Faustina's relic if you are approved for one by Mother Superior." To tell you the truth, that was my lesson in humility for the trip. I left the convent a little disappointed, but after returning to the basilica and speaking with Sister Maria Jean Vianney about Faustinum and telling her about my appointment with Sister Norberta, I felt a great peace. Sister Maria Jean Vianney told me that I should have no problem obtaining the relic, she felt in her soul that one day, part of Sr. Faustina's earthly body would reside at St. Stephen, where we have our Divine Mercy celebration each year.

After our visit with Sister Maria Jean Vianney, it was time for one of our group's favorite activities: shopping! I went to the store to shop for vestments for St. Stephen. The rest of the group was quite interested in obtaining rosaries with a third-class relic of St. Faustina in the centerpiece. I have to give the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy a lot of credit—they are quite the business ladies. The nuns work in the gift shops, and they even supervise the cafeteria operations where we had lunch. They have a large number of women in the convent, and the vocations keep coming in. During the early afternoon, most of us made our way "across the valley and up the hill" to the brand-new Pope St. John Paul II Center, which was a brisk 20-minute walk. The basilica was finished just in time for World Youth Day last year, and it contains some of the most beautiful mosaics. Also, John Paul II's white cassock, which he was wearing on the day he was shot in 1981, can be found here in a side chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. We arrived back in the convent chapel at 2:30 to get seats for the 3:00 Chaplet of the Divine Mercy, prayed in five languages. It was so peaceful in the chapel—everyone was reverent as the Blessed Sacrament was exposed on the altar and one of the nuns carefully brought out a red box and placed it on the altar above St. Faustina's burial place. The red box contains St. Faustina's original diary, for which we have all the information describing Jesus' mercy. After the chaplet, we did some last minute shopping and we boarded the bus at 4:30 pm to return to our hotel. We walked over to the central square to eat dinner at Wenzl's, which was a first-class restaurant. Our meal was a drawn-out event with bread, a great salad, filet of beef, and a chocolate hazelnut dessert with berries' compote. All of us were quite tired and went straight to bed that night. It was a good thing that all of us slept soundly, because the next day would be difficult for all of us as we toured Auschwitz and the nightmare of the Holocaust would pervade our dreams the next night.

More on all of that next week in Part III of the Eastern Europe Travel Diary. Have a good week! Fr. Jason