

HOMILY
TWELFTH ANNUAL POLKA MASS
Saturday, November 4, 2006

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Niech bedzie pochwalony Jesus Chrytus y na wieki wiekow.

Amen

Praised be Jesus Christ both now and forever.

Amen

It's hard to believe that this is our Twelfth Annual Polka Mass and Polish Night—wow! Where does time go? Like you, I so look forward to our gathering—old acquaintances get together, new ones join us. It's like the feeling one gets at Midnight Mass...being and seeing people, the night seems to go by so quickly. The songs, the melodies, the costumes, the memories are so wonderful, who cares if it is cold outside, it's plenty warm inside. *Witamy!* Welcome to all!

And if that isn't enough, we really put our all into the Liturgy. We here at the altar have the best seats in the house. Your eyes are wide open, your faces beam with smiles and sometimes tears, your toes tap, and your bodies flow with the rhythm—a total immersion experience.

As I witness this, not just in you but also in myself, a true story comes to mind. A few years ago a radio station ran a contest. Disc jockeys invited their listeners to tune in their clock radios to their station. "Just for fun," they said, "when you wake up to the sound of FM-106, call and tell us the first words you spoke when you rolled out of bed. If you're the third caller, you'll win \$106."

It didn't take long for the contest to grow in enthusiasm. The first morning, the bubbly disc jockey said, "Caller number three, what did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?" A groggy voice said, "Do I smell coffee burning?" Another day, a sleepy clerical worker said, "Oh, no, I'm

late for work.” Somebody else said her first words were, “Honey, did I put out the dog last night?” A muffled curse was immediately heard in the background and then a man was heard to say, “No, you didn’t.”

One morning, however, the third caller said something unusual. The station phone rang. “Good morning, this is FM-106. You’re on the air. What did you say when you rolled out of bed this morning?” A voice with a Bronx accent replied, “You want to know my first words in the morning?” The bubbly DJ said, “Yes, sir! Tell what you said.” The Bronx voice responded, “Shema, Israel. Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” There was a moment of embarrassed silence. Then the radio announcer said, “Sorry, wrong number,” and cut to a commercial.

Try to remember. What did you say when you rolled out of bed today? Chances are, those words set the tone for the rest of the day. For the pious Jew, the first words of each morning are always the same, and they were the words spoken that morning on FM-106. They were first spoken by Moses, who said, “Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Teach them to your children and talk to them when you lie down and when you rise.”

No one knows that better than those who come from a Polish home. Polish culture is steeped in the way of the Lord—every holiday, every occasion, every gathering. The standard greeting upon entering any house is what we began with today, “Praise be Jesus Christ both now and forever.” Everywhere you go in Poland you’ll find roadside shrines to Jesus or Mary or one of the saints. Even when young people go on vacation, there’s always a trip to the Shrine of Jasna Gora, where this beautiful painting on our altar originated. Faith and culture go hand in hand. Prayers are said in schools, and crucifixes are in every classroom. Churches are not empty, but overflow with the faithful, especially the young.

On his last journey to Poland, several million people gathered with Pope John Paul II for mass close to his home. With Polish eyes that just sparkled, he called upon his fellow Poles and Catholics to keep the Faith, to not ever

forget that God and God alone is the main purpose for all that we have, all that we are, all that we do. Just like today's readings from the Scriptures! Let God be in our thoughts, words and deeds! He also called upon his fellow Poles to be true to the Faith and to be of service to the world. As he looked into the eyes of the young as well as the old, he called them to be a light to the world by living their Faith.

While the Catholic Faith is at an all time low in many European countries, the Faith in Poland is vibrant and alive. Since many European countries don't have enough priests of their own, priests from Poland are staffing many of the churches throughout Europe. Unlike here in our own country that is having a critical shortage of priests and church personnel, would you believe there are 7,000 seminarians studying for the priesthood in Poland? Poland is one-tenth of our population, yet they have almost as many candidates as we do in our country of 300 million persons.

Earlier, I asked what were the first words you spoke this morning upon getting out of bed. What about your words and actions since then? Do they reflect a total awareness of God and others? Remember the Gospel:

A Scribe asked Jesus, "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

The Lord our God is Lord alone!
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
with all your soul
with all your mind
and will all your strength.
You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

And Jesus said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom!"