

Memorial Mass for the Victims of the Smolensk Catastrophe

Memorial Mass for President Lech Kaczyński and the Victims of April 10th 2010 Plane Crash

Program

- 6:00 PM Procession to the Church by Abp Thomas Collins
and concelebrating priests
- 6:05 PM Welcome by:
Fr. Janusz Blazejak, Provincial of Missionary Oblates
Fr. Andrzej Sowa, Pastor of St. Maximilian Kolbe Parish
- 6:08 PM Address by The Right Honorable Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada
Address by His Excellency Zenon Kosiniak-Kamysz
Ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Canada
Address by Mr. Jerry Barycki
President of the Canadian Polish Congress
- 6:15 PM Memorial Mass celebrated by Archbishop Thomas Collins

After Communion and Prayer:

1. Last Post and Revelry by Bugler
2. Lament by Lone Piper

Final Blessing by Archbishop Thomas Collins



Memorial Mass for the Victims of the Smolensk Catastrophe

A solemn Holy Mass for the victims of the TU-154M airplane crash, which occurred on April 10, 2010, near Smolensk, was celebrated at St. Maximilian Kolbe Church in Mississauga at 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 15. In the tragedy perished the President of Poland Lech Kaczyński, his wife Maria Kaczyńska, and the accompanying politicians, military representatives, clergy, members of the Katyn Families, officers, and the airplane crew — a total of 96 people. They were on their way to ceremonies commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. The Mass was organized by the Conference of Polish Priests for Eastern Canada, chaired by Fr. Janusz Błażej, OMI, and by the Consul General of Poland in Toronto, Mr. Marek Ciesielczuk.



Even before five o'clock, it was announced that there were no more seats left in the church. Some people managed to find space in the church basement and in the John Paul II Centre, where audiovisual equipment had been installed. Soon, only standing places remained outside the church, near the loudspeakers. Before the arrival of official guests, soft tones of funeral music filled the air. At six o'clock, the prayer and national intention were announced: "Since ancient times, the Church has offered the Eucharistic sacrifice for the dead, and Poland has been wounded."

Accompanied by the Ambassador of the Republic of Poland, Zenon Kosiniak-Kamysz, Consul General Marek Ciesielczuk with his wife, and the President of the Canadian Polish Congress, Jerzy Barycki, the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, entered the church through a side entrance near the altar under security escort. Among the official guests were also members of the political opposition: Michael Ignatieff, Leader of the Liberal Party, and Jack Layton, Leader of the New Democratic Party. David Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, was also present, along with parliamentarians and city councillors.

A procession of priests entered through the main aisle, led by Archbishop Thomas Collins. All stood and sang the hymn “Under Your Protection” (Pod Twą Obronę). The opening remarks were delivered by Fr. Janusz Błazejak and the parish pastor, Fr. Andrzej Sowa, who concluded with words of comfort: “Through our participation in this Holy Mass, we hope to soothe our wounds and gain a deeper understanding of this tragic event, so that we may leave here with peace in our hearts.”



Prime Minister Stephen Harper, after greeting the congregation in Polish — “Dobry wieczór” — delivered his speech in English and French. He addressed the audience with the words: “Sons and daughters of Poland and Canada.” On behalf of the Government and the people of Canada, he expressed the deep sorrow Canada felt on this day of mourning.

“The loss of President Kaczyński, the First Lady, and so many national leaders is a devastating blow,” he said. He recalled his meetings with the President and his wife since 2006, describing President Kaczyński as a man who “stood proudly and steadfastly for democracy and Poland’s independence in the most difficult times.” To express solidarity with the Polish nation during its mourning, the Canadian government declared that day a national day of mourning. “The fact that this tragedy occurred near Katyn — the site of the 70th anniversary of the massacre of thousands of Polish officers, politicians, and intellectual leaders — is a cruel irony,” said the Prime Minister. He emphasized that few nations had suffered as much as Poland under the weight of history, and even fewer had shown such resilience afterward. “After decades of suffering under Nazism and Communism, a free Poland emerged — building one of the most prosperous post-Communist economies, and becoming a strong, independent member of the European Union and NATO.” Harper highlighted that the strength of the Polish people lies in their unshakable faith in God, devotion to family, and capacity for forgiveness. “The great Polish Pope, John Paul II, the nation’s most distinguished son, despite witnessing the horrors of the 20th century, never lost hope. ‘Do not be afraid,’ he said, for ‘We are the people of the resurrection, and Alleluia is our song.’” He added that the Polish nation also draws strength from the vibrant million-strong Polish-Canadian community. “For over a century and a half, Poles fleeing oppression in Europe have found refuge in Canada. They have made immeasurable contributions to every aspect of Canadian life. Today, they form a strong foundation of the deep and warm friendship between Canada and Poland.”



The Ambassador of Poland emphasized that the Canadian Polish community, particularly the large Toronto-area Polonia, still vividly remembered the visit of the First Lady, Maria Kaczyńska, less than a year earlier, at the nearby John Paul II Centre. “That joyful meeting was to be a prelude to the President’s visit,” he said. “Today, our hearts are filled with pain, but also with gratitude to the world that has shown us such compassion.” He thanked Prime Minister Harper, Canadian politicians, organizations, and citizens who came forward on Saturday with words of consolation. “The Polish-Canadian community will never forget this support. This is a day of solidarity. The word ‘Solidarity’ is known both at home and abroad — it is the power that unites a nation.” He recalled the words of Saint John Paul II spoken after the martyrdom of Father Jerzy Popiełuszko, victim of the communist regime: “From this death may good arise, just as from the Cross came the Resurrection.” “Let us preserve the memory of those who perished and live in hope, repeating the prayer that Poles have said for generations: ‘Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen.’”



Jerzy Barycki stated: "The Canadian Polonia is deeply shaken by this tragedy. The Polish nation and Polonia around the world mourn the immense loss — the deaths of President Lech Kaczyński, Mrs. Maria Kaczyńska, and the highest elite of a free and democratic Poland." He expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Harper and the distinguished guests for being present among the Polish community that evening. "The wounds of the Polish nation have not yet healed — the wounds of Katyn and other sites of mass murder, where 70 years ago Soviet executioners brutally murdered more than 20,000 members of Poland's elite. And now history records another tragic date — April 10, 2010 — as another calamity for our people. That land will forever remain the Golgotha of the East." "Those who perished were builders of democratic, free Poland — a nation that, thanks to them, stands today as a strong pillar of a united Europe and a respected partner in the world."

Barycki recalled that only recently, on March 6, President Kaczyński had opened the Polonia Winter Games in Zakopane, attended by athletes from 25 countries — including the largest delegation from Canada. "During our conversation, I conveyed greetings from the Polish community in Canada, and the President told me, 'I would like to visit Canada; I have cousins there.' Unfortunately, he will never make that trip." "The Polish community in Canada has lost many dear friends, but their legacy will endure, for we shall repay their deeds with memory."



Homily by His Excellency Thomas Collins, Archbishop of Toronto, last words:

"The glorious vision of the Risen Lord allows us to see through death to the ultimate destination of life's journey. In I Thessalonians, the earliest book of the New Testament, written about 20 years after the resurrection, St Paul teaches us: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him from the dead those also who have fallen asleep believing in him." The human person, so glorious a masterpiece of the divine artist, reaches fulfillment in the presence of the Risen Lord, who has gone before us through death to life. We are all filled with grief when someone we know and love dies, and we are filled with great grief at the sudden loss of so many good people. But the souls of the just are in the hands of God, and no evil shall touch them. Where they have gone, each of us will one day go, and in so doing find the Divine Mercy celebrated throughout the world on the day of their tragic death, and of the death of their great compatriot, Pope John Paul, who passed from this life five years ago.

We are consoled by the vision of the resurrection, and we gain wisdom from contemplation of the brevity of earthly life. But this evening above all we pray. We pray for God's blessing and consolation for all the Polish people, once more burdened with great grief. We pray above all for the repose of the souls of those who died so suddenly, that their sins be forgiven in the purifying presence of the divine mercy, and that in sure hope of the resurrection they be granted eternal rest.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen."



The Mass was concelebrated by 35 priests: Solo performances included "*Panis Angelicus*" (in Latin) and "*Ave Maria*" by Kinga Mitrowska. After the blessing, the pieces "*Last Post*," "*Lament*," and "*Reveille*" were performed — trumpet, bagpipe, trumpet. At the end, all sang the hymn "*God, Who Protects Poland*" (*Boże, coś Polskę*). This beautiful yet sorrowful Mass lasted an hour and a half. It was conducted with solemnity and discipline, supported by clergy, scouts, and lay volunteers. Reserved seating was arranged for official guests, veterans, and other dignitaries.



Approximately 6,000 people attended in the church, the lower hall, the John Paul II Centre, and outside, where about 2,000 stood. A commemorative photo of the Presidential Couple with a prayer for the victims was distributed. The church was adorned with flowers, and outside, under the tall cross, countless candles flickered beside Polish flags.

The event drew significant attention from Canadian media. Major television networks covered the national day of mourning and the funeral Mass the following morning.

Text: Krystyna Sroczyńska for the Canadian Polish Congress

Photos: Krzysztof Filaber

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Special Thanks:

Heartfelt thanks to Fr. Paweł Ratajczak, Director of the Catholic Youth Studio, for providing detailed information, and to Mr. Janusz Charczuk for sending the text of the homily.

My great friend Leszek Solski was aboard the plane on his way to Katyn.

The beautiful photos by Krzysztof Filaber capture the mood of this extraordinary, now historic — national Mass.

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