

# WITH A HEART OPENED TO GOD AND PEOPLE

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**SAINT JOSEPH SEBASTIAN PELCZAR**  
***1842-1924***

*Bishop of Przemyśl, Poland*

*Founder of the Congregation of the Sister  
Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus*



## **SAINT JOSEPH SEBASTIAN PELCZAR**

"God Himself mercifully directed my steps. I can only ascribe this to myself insofar that I prayed and worked so as not to bury the talents given me by God but rather to use all of them in the service of God, the Church, and my native country."

*(List of Episcopal Activities, p. 22)*

## **A WORD FROM FRANCIS CARDINAL MACHARSKI**

*Metropolitan Archbishop of Kraków*

The Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus are publishing a biography of their Founder, the Bishop of Przemyśl, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, former Professor of the Theology Department and Rector of the Jagiellonian University.

This Congregation, devoted to the Heart of God, was founded in Kraków. It was here with the support of the Bishop of Kraków, Albin Cardinal Dunajewski, that the Sisters began their activity.

With joy, I join with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart, who desire that Blessed Bishop Pelczar may once again speak to us, and that the sanctity, love, and wisdom of his life may open our hearts to God and people.

I wholeheartedly wish that all readers of this small book will find their own place in the Heart of Jesus and serve God and people. I wish the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus that AGod bless you on your spiritual journey, with the blessed Bishop and under the protection of Our Lady!”

**†Francis Cardinal Macharski**

Advent 1990

## INTRODUCTION

The search for authentic examples is noticeable in every period of human history and in the life of each individual. Even if someone seems to be self-sufficient he will instinctively find another who, in his opinion, shows himself to be perfect. The origin of this process can be found in human nature and in its capacity for perfection, so deeply expressed God's revelation, "Be holy for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). These words directed to the Chosen Nation, as well as the call of the Lord Jesus to His disciples, "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48), can be found on the first pages of the renowned book, *The Spiritual Life*, by Blessed Bishop Pelczar.

In a very convincing way, the book presents the Triune God as the main source of every existing perfection and the author himself challenges his readers to follow Jesus Christ, His Most Holy Virgin Mother and the Saints. Moreover, he not only writes of the necessity of following Christ, but he also lives it himself. This spiritual life led him to a degree of sanctity worthy of declaration in the act of beatification (June 2, 1991).

Although, his writings reveal little about his inner life --with the exception of his Diary (from December 3, 1865 to July 17, 1868), and his letter to his spiritual director, Father Peter Semenenko-- it is easy to see his great eagerness to "change my life to resemble Jesus' life" (quote from his retreat resolutions). Listening intently to the Lord's voice, and subsequently following Christ and obeying God's will, he not only opened his heart to God, but also to people B helping them find temporal and eternal treasures.

Beatification is God's gift for the whole Church. AThe Saints and Blessed are those people in whom God has crowned His own gifts," said Bishop Pelczar. Thus we can say that in the act of beatification of Bishop Pelczar, God "crowns" one or more of His works, giving us a new advocate and shining example for priests, for people of letters and science, for social and charity activists, for tutors, for all people who are overwhelmed by too much work and for all people of prayer. Therefore, honoring and following in the steps of the saints is an act of worshiping God. Let this short biography of the Blessed be an act of homage to the God of any existing good, especially of our Father Founder.

S. Fidelisa Gorczynska  
General Superior  
Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Kraków, November 25, 1990  
Solemnity of Christ the King

# I.

## CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

### (1842-1860)

#### FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Saint<sup>1</sup> Joseph Sebastian Pelczar was born in Korczyna, Poland, a small town at the foot of the Beskid Niski Mountains (part of the Polish Carpathians). The town was built in the 15th century at the crossroads of the old trade routes from Russia to Hungary and from the southeast to the west to Tarnów, Kraków and Silesia. The inhabitants of Korczyna held larger or smaller plots of land and engaged in weaving also. Their religious life revolved around the large, wooden parish church with seven altars, each associated with different religious societies such as the Confraternity of the Guardian Angels, the Confraternity of the Rosary, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and others.

Although, the Pelczar family did not belong to any of the illustrious family lineages of Poland it still had its own rich history and tradition, a history and tradition linked with that of the estate called “Zagroda Wielka.” In the past, this estate had belonged to the noble family Firlej but in 1807 was purchased by the grandfather of Joseph Sebastian. This grandfather of the future bishop was not only respected for his social position but also perhaps even more so for the social virtues that characterized him, particularly his solicitude for the needs of others.

The marriage of the parents of Joseph Sebastian, Wojciech Pelczar (1800-1877) and Marianna (nee Miesowicz) (1816-1889) took place in the parish church at Korczyna on November 16, 1831. The Pelczars raised four children. The eldest, Rosalia, married Franciszek Długosz and moved to her husband’s home. John inherited the land from his father. Their third child was Joseph Sebastian, and the last, Katarzyna, would later marry Franciszek Urbanek.

The large farm covered an area of approximately 120 acres and required a great deal of work from the entire family, which is why, as a bishop, Joseph Sebastian would reminisce: “I grew up in a home where hard work was an everyday guest.” Despite this hard labor, Joseph’s parents were able to find enough time to become familiar with their Polish cultural heritage. Wojciech was a wise and deeply pious man. He mastered writing skills, something uncommon in those days. He was deeply interested in the history of Poland. He collected many historical and religious books as well as artifacts of the past. Marianna, talented like her husband, was pious, economical and energetic, faithfully fulfilling her obligations as a wife and mother. According to the testimony of one of her grandsons, she had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and every day would sing the traditional Polish Little Office in honor of Our Lady, the *Godzinki*. She was naturally joyful and loved listening to music and singing. Because of her very good memory, she learned by heart nearly all the verses to the Church’s hymns, and many poems by Elizabeth Druzbacka and other poets. Gifted with poetic talent, she herself also composed poems. According to members of the family, what is most noteworthy was that she dedicated each of her children to the Blessed Virgin Mary in Lezajsk, a shrine to which she often went on pilgrimage.

In the patrimonial Pelczar family there existed a lively faith, fidelity to customs, fraternal charity, mercy towards the poor, and authentic hospitality; thus everyone was content. Even the servants felt united with this home and remained there for the rest of their lives.

Saint Joseph Sebastian was born on January 17, 1842. Two days after his birth, he was baptized and named for the patron saints of his birth and baptismal days: *Joseph*, since he was born on a Wednesday; and *Sebastian* as he was baptized on the vigil of this saint’s feast. As a bishop, he explained the significance of these two names in this way: “I must follow the love of St. Joseph, his love for Jesus and Mary in his humility and diligence; and imitate St. Sebastian, in his courage and steadfastness.”

In his *Autobiography* he described two important events from his childhood. The first event was inspired by the Austrian turmoil known as “the Galician Massacre.”<sup>2</sup> The second concerned a significant dream: “I saw Our

Lady descending from a picture, smiling sweetly and extending her hands to me as though she wanted to draw me to herself; since then, I have had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin.” His Marian devotion deepened still more when his mother confided a significant happening to him, as he recounted: “I know from my mother’s own lips that when she made a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Lezajsk before I was born, in September, 1841 my mother dedicated me to the Blessed Virgin’s protection.” From the moment his mother confided this, the Lezajsk Shrine with its miraculous picture of the Mother of God, became a special place, dear to him and one he visited on nearly every possible occasion. Many events from the life of the Saint clearly manifest that his mother’s dedication of him was wholly accepted by God, and devotion to the Mother of God profoundly marked his entire spiritual life.

The deep piety of the surroundings led the boy to consider becoming a priest. Eyewitnesses of the life of the Saint attest that he had many beautiful qualities of character such as natural goodness, kindness, modesty, joyfulness, and compassion toward the suffering and poor. Yet he admits some of his bad inclinations, particularly to vanity, inclinations with which he had to contend regularly in order to gradually interiorly develop that foundation of the interior life, the Christian virtue of humility.



**DREAM OF JOSEPH PELCZAR**  
(Illustration by Sister Bernarda Sidelko, SSCJ)

“From my boyhood, I also remember also a remarkable dream: I dreamed that the Blessed Virgin descended from the picture as a living being, looking at me sweetly, and offering me her helpful hands, in order to draw me to herself. From that time on, I have had a great devotion to the Blessed Virgin.”

(Diary a, p. 2)

## AT THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL

The education of Joseph Pelczar began fairly early. In the year 1848, he and his older brother, John, began schooling at the Korczynna parochial school conducted by the organist Francis Ragowski. The Pelczar brothers had different approaches to education. Joseph was noted for his eagerness and bright mind, receiving always the highest marks and every year being awarded a prize at the end of the year; he did not show any interest in farm work. John, on the other hand, put forth no effort for study but was drawn from his earliest years to work on the farm. Mr. Ragowski, the teacher, quickly noticed Joseph's outstanding gifts and urged the parents to consider in future sending Joseph away for his education.

Joseph Pelczar, possessed a very good memory, especially for events and dates, which is why he was especially interested in and loved history. Yet, above this, he was drawn more to the study of religion. He eagerly absorbed the truths of God imparted to him by three consecutive catechists, memorizing them at home through reciting them and speaking of them at home. The one most influential on Joseph's interior life was Father Francis Jabczynski, who enkindled in the boy's soul love for the Most Blessed Sacrament, and advised him to make frequent visits to the Lord Jesus hidden in the tabernacle. He also prepared Joseph for his First Confession and First Holy Communion, which he received in the spring of 1850. There is a noteworthy remark that the Saint wrote in his *Autobiography*: "Even now, I can still remember the moment I was going home following my First Holy Communion." It certainly must have been a special moment of grace which left a deep, permanent impression upon his soul.

## IN THE RZESZÓW SCHOOLS

Upon the advice of the teacher, Mr. Rogowski and Father Jabczynski, Joseph's parents took their eight-year-old son to Rzeszów in 1850 where he was accepted into the third grade of the public elementary school. He soon took the first place in studies there.

According to his memoirs, the situation then in the school was not pleasant. The Austrian system of discipline was practiced there and its adherent was the teacher, Mr. Lechowski. About him we read: "Mr. Lechowski taught very well but could beat far better, so much so that he would practically be sick if he could not give some students a whipping. The stick was the supreme lord at school and even the best student could not escape it. I myself, when I only wrote the German letter 'r' a little crookedly got three lashings, although all my classmates stood up for me since I had a fever at that time. Still no one was ashamed when he was paddled."

Joseph Pelczar went through a harsh school of life in Rzeszów. The honesty of the landlord where he stayed left much to be desired. Therefore before he had learned to dispose wisely of the money and food sent from home, he had to endure many difficult situations, including hunger and cold. No wonder then that he longed for the warmth of the family home and, despite the distance of thirty miles, he used to go there on foot, even for short holidays. "My heart was always drawn to my parents' home," he wrote.

Joseph spent every summer vacation among the family, helping his parents with the farm, reading good, beneficial books, making excursions and pilgrimages to the local shrines of Our Lady such as Krosno, Kombornia, and Stara Wies. He was always among friends, because he was by nature sociable, joyful, and had a good heart. Still the most important thing for him was prayer and participation at Holy Mass during which, as a server, he always took the privileged place at the altar.

In September of 1852, Joseph Pelczar began his studies at the Rzeszów Gymnasium<sup>3</sup>, which, at this time, because of its use of Polish in the lectures, attained high educational standards.

The brilliant and courageous director of this school at this time was Father Anthony Bielikowicz, and catechist was Father Felix Dymnicki. Pelczar always took first place in studies, and he engaged in a friendly competition for the palm of victory with Stanislaus Madejski, the future Galician minister.

There were two main centers for the students' religious life: One, the school's church, where an image of the Crucified Lord was venerated. "This church," reminisced Bishop Pelczar, "was the trusted friend of our secret thoughts and desires. There we used to look for consolation and comfort in difficult moments, which were not lacking at our young age." The other was the church of the Bernardine Fathers, with its miraculous statue of the Mother of God. Joseph Pelczar went there often. He was sure that Our Lady was the one who had protected his faith as well as chastity, that precious gift of the Lord's grace in his soul. He writes: "Thank God, I have never allowed myself to feel the least doubt about the faith. I have never been involved in any romance, and have not lost virginity, due to the protection of the Holy Virgin, before whose image I used to pray in the Church of the Bernardine Fathers."

He also mentioned that in 1854 he was confirmed by Bishop Francis Wierchlejski, then Ordinary of the Diocese of Przemyśl and future Metropolitan Archbishop of Lvów.



### **THE STUDENT'S PRAYER**

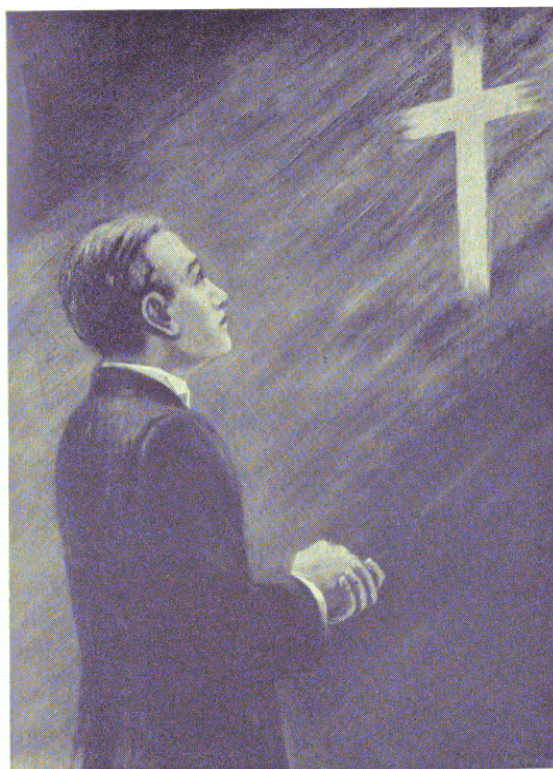
*(Illustration by Sister Bernarda Sidelko, SSCJ)*

"I learned very easily...This awakened my imagination...but, thanks be to God, I never allowed myself even the slightest doubt against the faith; I was never involved in love affairs; and I did not lose chastity... This was certainly brought about by the care of the Blessed Virgin, before whose miraculous statue I had many a time prayed in the Bernardine Church in Rzeszów."

*(Autobiography, pp. 11-12)*

## AT THE PRZEMYŚL HIGH SCHOOL

Completing 6th grade in September, 1858, Joseph Pelczar moved to Przemyśl, where he resided at the seminary while attending the local high school. In July, 1860, he passed his matricular examination<sup>4</sup> perfectly. The ideal of being both priest and an historian that had attracted him so very much during his high school studies, proved to be scarcely realizable. Joseph was confronted with the decision to become either a priest or historian. His historical interests increased greatly during the trip to Kraków. The view of the monuments of the former Polish capital city, especially the Jagiellonian University, caused a struggle in his soul. Returning home, he was sad and silent. His father was concerned and his mother redoubled her prayers on his behalf. Only at the end of August did Joseph himself relieve the tension. When the household sat down to supper, he stood up and solemnly intoned the priestly greeting: “Dominus vobiscum,” Latin for “the Lord be with you.” All members of the family understood what this meant –an end to hesitation and a firm decision to serve the Lord as a priest.



### THE INTERNAL STRUGGLE OF YOUNG PELCZAR

*(Illustration by Sister Bernarda Sidelko, SSCJ)*

“Earthly ideals are fading away. I see the ideal of life  
in sacrifice and the ideal of sacrifice in priesthood.”

*(Autobiography pp. 17-18)*

## II

# STUDENT OF THE PRZEMYŚL SEMINARY AND NEW PRESBYTER (1860-1865)

### THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

In 1860, when Joseph Pelczar was admitted to the seminary at Przemyśl to study theology, the seminary was in the process of being reorganized. The rearrangement of personnel favorably affected the development of the institution. The great friend of youth, Father Marcin Skwierczyński, became Rector, and Father Ignacy Lobos, future bishop of Tarnów, was named spiritual director. Both men gained Joseph Pelczar's complete confidence and had a great influence upon his intellectual and spiritual formation.

The lectures were delivered in the same seminary building that exists today on Zamkowa Street in Przemyśl. Pelczar had no difficulty in studying theology, which is evident from his certificate from 1879, which shows that all Joseph Sebastian's examination marks received from 1861 to 1864 were the same, that is, *eminenter* (outstanding). It is no wonder that in addition to his mandatory classes, he used to diligently study elective subjects and read major theological writings. At that time, he was learning French at the command of the Rector Skwierczyński who intended to send Joseph for additional study at the University. Thanks to Joseph Sebastian's outstanding gifts and diligence, the theological knowledge he gained at the seminary was deep, and, as it was integrated by proper readings, it was a very good foundation for his future studies at the Collegium Romanum.

### SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Although Joseph Pelczar entered the seminary, his uncertainty had not come to an end. He himself attests to this in his *Autobiography*: "In the beginning, light and cheerfulness were not in my soul, because science, especially history, was very attractive to me, and lured me to work in another field. I soon realized, however, what great honor and unutterable happiness there is in being a priest, and I wrote then in my diary, "Earthly ideals are fading away. I see the ideal of life in sacrifice and the ideal of sacrifice in priesthood."

In that moment of inner struggle, a wise spiritual director came to the young student's rescue, as he describes thus: "Prayer and confession heard by the new spiritual director, Father Ignacy Lobos, purified my vocation." He acknowledged, "The Rector, Father Marcin Skwierczyński, by his wise counsel, by his own example, and by encouraging me to read good books, showed me the right path."

Joseph Sebastian had carefully cultivated the grace of vocation since his younger days. When he was at school, the thought of becoming a priest caused him to avoid everything incompatible with the ideals of this future ministry. At the seminary, under the influence of God's grace and due to his cooperation with it, his priestly vocation was purified and strengthened. He wrote in his *Autobiography*, "By the grace of God, the spark of vocation was fanned during retreat and enkindled the flame of faith and love...The vocation of a priest, of a Polish patriot, fascinates me, and my main ideal becomes pious work for the people."

Already during seminary, the signs of the gifted preacher, zealous devotee of the Virgin Mary and patriot were evident, as seen in his memoirs: "As early as the second year of my theological studies, on August 29, 1842, I preached for the first time in honor of Our Lady. Afterwards, I would preach very often, since pastors practically pushed the young seminarian into the pulpit, and he did not refuse."

“When there was an uprising in the Russian partitions, myself, together with some of my friends, decided to give our lives for our country. The rector, Father Skwierczyński, restrained us, however, saying: ‘My dear men, what are you going to do during the uprising, since none of you knows how to use a gun? Your sacrifice will be wasted. But if you work honestly throughout all your life, you will do your country a good service.’ So we limited ourselves to giving our clothes and money away for the insurgents, and, from time to time, we harbored them in our rooms.”

## **PRIESTLY ORDINATION AND FIRST PARISH**

The long-expected day finally came when Joseph’s hopes were at last realized. On July 17, 1864, he was ordained in the Przemyśl Cathedral by the Ordinary, Bishop Antoine Monastyrski. This became possible only upon obtaining papal dispensation due to his age, as Joseph Sebastian was only twenty-two and one half years old, and according to the regulations of the Council of Trent the ordinand had to be twenty-four years or older. He describes his feelings in these words: “I was very much moved, when, on the 17th of July, before the moment of ordination, I lay [prostrate] at the foot of the altar with my eight friends and my elderly father looking at me, weeping profusely.” One week later, his first Mass was celebrated in Korczyna with his first priestly blessing and a great banquet for his family and relatives. The following month, the neo-presbyter went to his first parish at Sambor where he served from August 20, 1864 until December 4, 1865. His attributes as a priest became apparent B zealously, gentleness, and eloquence, and gained him popularity among the people. He was a good preacher, confessor, and spiritual director. The Sambor parish was one of the largest parishes in the diocese and the people were very devoted to the church so an overabundance of work overwhelmed the zealous priests. In the midst of constant commotion, the Saint longed for a deeper interior life and a better knowledge of God.

Going to this first parish, Father Joseph Pelczar knew that he would not stay there for long, as he had been chosen to study theology in Vienna. He made no secret that the Vienna University was not to his liking. He wrote openly of it to Father Semenenko: “I cannot conceal my aversion to the Institute and the entire Vienna School of Theology, which I find theoretical and cold, while I have always had a passion for Rome as a source of light.” Consequently, his hopes were realized. On December 4, 1865, Father Pelczar bid farewell to his parish at Sambor and went to the Eternal City to enrich his mind and heart. In union with Mary, in gratitude he was singing the *Magnificat*.

## SCHOLASTIC AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION IN ROME (1865-1868)

Father Joseph Sebastian Pelczar was the first priest of the Diocese of Przemyśl to study in Rome after the partitioning of Poland. On December 19, 1865, he came to Rome, as the Polish College was beginning to be organized. Pope Pius IX called for the opening of the College March, 1866. It was conducted by the Polish Resurrectionist Fathers. In the beginning, there were six students, two from each Polish partition. Besides Joseph Pelczar, it should be noted, was Joseph Dabrowski, the future founder of the Polish seminary in the United States.

Studies in Rome had a great influence on the spirituality and the entire future of the Saint. He describes his distinct emotions in his memoirs: "Even to this day, I give thanks to God for leading me to Rome, because there I gained much for my mind and my heart. I attended the Jesuit College Romanum<sup>5</sup> in 1866 as a student of theology, and from 1867-1868 was a student of canon law at the Institute of St. Apollinary.<sup>6</sup> During that time, by the grace of God, I passed five exams and two examination papers with a mentor, and obtained the titles of doctor of theology and canon law. I sought to take each opportunity to talk with such wise and saintly men as Father Jeremiah Kajsiewicz, Father Peter Semenenko, Father Alexander Jelowicki, Father Julian Felinski and others.

During my free time, out of piety and interest I used to visit famous Roman churches, catacombs, museums and ancient monuments. The tombs of the apostles and martyrs particularly impressed me very much. While visiting the tombs of St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and St. Stanislaus Kostka, I was seized with a desire to enter the Society of Jesus in order to devote myself entirely to the apostolate and mission of this Order. However, when I made a special retreat to know what I should do, I understood that it was not God's will, and I took the prescribed oath at the College that I would return to my diocese.

I used to attend services either led by the Holy Father, Pius IX himself or at which he was present. This was a great consolation for me. I was even able to kiss his feet several times. His angelic bearing, his unyielding steadfastness during all the hostilities and his special kindness towards Poles, appealed to me. He visited that Polish haven as early as May 16, 1866, and showed himself peculiarly kind. And I will never forget the words he wrote beneath his photograph: "Domine regit vos et nihil vobis deerit," ("Let the Lord rule over you, and you shall lack nothing") since they have proved true at various times of my life.

In 1866 and 1867, I spent the summer with my friends in the pleasant town of Genzano, where I used not only to prepare for my exams but also to read a great number of profitable, especially spiritual, books. That was the place where *The Spiritual Life* originated. However, I must reproach myself, since I used to work too strenuously, and I passed exams too quickly, hence my nerves, especially those in my stomach, suffered from it. Regardless of this, I used to study during sweltering days and did not drink wine despite the Roman custom.

The celebration of the canonization of St. Josafat (1867) was a nice break from hard work. Two Latin Polish bishops, Bishops Wierchlejski and Monastyrski together with many priests (among them my former pastor from Sambor, Father Jedlinski and my friend, Father Krementowski) came from the Polish territory for that celebration. I served them willingly, but it was at that point that my health broke down. On April 17, 1868, I left the Polish College with many fond memories."

We should also add to this description that from the moment of the foundation of the Polish College, Father Pelczar was the dean of students; later the duty of prefect, with the responsibility for taking care of discipline both in and out of the college entrusted to him. These duties required of him both close cooperation with superiors, and friendly relations with the students. Cooperation with superiors was beneficial. Father Peter Semenenko, rector of the College, was characterized by holiness of life, profound knowledge, and eloquence. His deep ascetic conferences, lectures on philosophy and his whole personality had a strong impact upon the spirituality of the students. He was also the spiritual director and advisor to Joseph Pelczar.

As a lover of history, he used to keep the Polish College Annals. In the introduction of that chronicle, he described his vision of a Polish priest-student of the College. He wrote: "The Father of Christianity, Pius IX, decided to gather around himself the dispersed young Poles, in order to educate them in his presence, to water them from that healthy spring of teaching which courses down from the bedrock of Peter, to inspire them with a great love and inflexible courage, and then to send them to the Polish nation as new missionaries, who, like St. Adalbert and St.

Stanislaus, would awaken it, warm it with love, heal its wounds by pouring on them the balm of God's grace, and point to the Cross and the Rock of Peter as the one only salvation, and to become the heralds and instruments of future benefit."

This vision of a devout priest was confirmed by the Holy Father, Pius IX, who on his visitation to the Polish College on June 1, 1866, told the students, "You must revive the Catholic spirit and be as bearers of torches burning in the fog." Father Pelczar fixed his eyes upon this clearly outlined ideal of the priest, and tried hard to realize it in his own life. First of all, he led a profoundly interior life, carefully listening to God's requirements, ready to follow His will. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, on April 12, 1868, in the Chapel del Crocefisso above the Mamertine Prison, he made two vows before the image of Our Mother of Sorrows: "Until the moment of my death, except where sickness or unavoidable obstacles stand in the way, I will spend at least half an hour daily in meditation; and will pray five mysteries of the holy rosary. Lord, give me strength to fulfill my vows." Witnesses of his life say that Pelczar was faithful to these vows to the end.

During his retreat in October, 1867, he resolved "to work zealously in the confessional and the pulpit, urgently propagating devotion and love for the Most Blessed Sacrament and of the Virgin Mary, fidelity to the Church and the Holy Father, and encouraging other priests to do the same. I will devote all my time, money, and labor for the glory of God, namely, to convert sinners, to visit the sick, to educate future priests and youth. I will perform my duties for the sake of God's love and as faithfully as possible. I desire to undertake all crosses willingly."

Not only a zealous apostolate, but also every act of love, however small, contributes to progress in the life of prayer. Because of this, Father Pelczar promised: "I shall perform each of my home duties conscientiously, even the least." He also adopted the following principle in his intellectual work: "I shall study, not to know more, but to draw nearer to God."

On April 17, 1868, the day of Father Pelczar's departure from Rome, the student who assumed the duty after him of keeping the Annals, gave the following portrayal of him: "When he lived in the College, he won the confidence, love, and respect of the superiors, whom as prefect he had assisted with the difficult task of directing the youth; and that of his friends, for whom he was a good example. We therefore take leave of him with heart-felt sorrow, losing our good friend and diligent companion in our works and spiritual life, and also our leader."

## **IV RETURN TO HIS HOMELAND**

(1868-1877)

## THE CURATE AT WOJUTYCZE AND SAMBOR

Father Pelczar tells in his *Autobiography*: “I was going to my homeland with the blessing of the Holy Father, which I had received during the private audience. On the evening of April 24th, I kissed the hands of the venerable rector, Father Skwierczyński. On May 1st, I greeted my relatives who wept for joy, and after proclaiming from the pulpit the blessing the parish had received from the Holy Father, during May devotions, I began to deliver a number of sermons about the life of piety. At the same time, I used to spend much time in the confessional since many penitents came to obtain the Roman absolution.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, on May 16th, I fell ill; I caught the acute disease, smallpox, from a sick woman to whom I had given the sacraments. After two weeks of extreme suffering, I got eagerly out of bed to preach the last May sermon however the great weakness of my stomach remained and has not left me for the rest of my life. On June 13th, I went to Przemyśl. Because there was no job for me, I asked to be sent as a curate to Wojutycze, near Sambor, the poorest parish (in the diocese).”

In Wojutycze, he had the opportunity to fulfill the hopes he had in Rome for living a poor life. There he had an opportunity to experience poverty both in spirit and in fact. Of Father Kalikst Gross, the pastor of the parish, Father Pelczar recalls: “Though he was poor himself, he shared his frugal meals with me. I got a total of three kronas,<sup>8</sup> four for Masses said. There were large holes in the walls of our wooden, dry-rotted house so that we had to shield the candle from the wind with cardboard.” The condition of the parish left also much to be desired. “People went to church unwillingly, seldom confessed, and did not even know how to pray the rosary, yet they liked drinking vodka. We had to begin religious education for children and youth.” There was little for a priest to do except say Mass and teach catechetics. As a result, the young curate had plenty of time for studying spiritual literature, especially Holy Scripture and ascetical books.

In January, 1869, Father Pelczar transferred to the Sambor parish where he had worked prior to his studies in Rome. Father Jedlinski was still the pastor. He was helped by two young priests and, as Father Pelczar wrote, he lived with them in good friendship.

In this large parish, no priest was without work. Father Pelczar drove himself too hard. In his words: “At Sambor, I worked so intensely for nine months, such that my poor health was seriously impaired.” Besides the regular duties of the priest, which included preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching, Father Pelczar was very active within the social field, urged on as he was by an inner flame enkindled by his studies in Rome and being naturally sensitive toward people in need. He noted: “Since I wanted to help the poorest and the most abandoned social class, with God’s grace and not without many troubles and difficulties, I founded the St. Vincent de Paul Women’s Society.” The primary aim of this Society was to aid the poorest people from the town and its vicinity by works of charity. This organization developed satisfactorily and significantly served society.

## THE PREFECT AND PROFESSOR OF THE SEMINARY IN PRZEMYŚL

Father Pelczar took up his studies as prefect of the Seminary in Przemyśl, in October, 1869. This kind of work did not consume too much time. Consequently, he was able to devote himself to preaching, writing ascetical books, and giving spiritual direction to people who wanted to reach spiritual perfection. He worked with good results. According to witnesses of his life, his bearing, elocution, as well as his simplicity, kindled God’s love in the hearts of his listeners. To neutralize liberal influences, the young prefect also used to have Sunday evening religion classes for organized workers belonging to the *Gwiazda (Star)* union.<sup>9</sup>

“In September, 1870,” Joseph Sebastian reminisces, “I assumed the Pastoral Theology Department, which was the last thing I had ever expected, but I later grew very fond of it, for it afforded me the opportunity to develop a priestly spirituality in the souls of the young seminarians.”

On first sight, Pelczar seemed content working as a scholar, preacher and tutor. However in a letter he sent to Father Semenenko, we can perceive his interior uncertainty. “My stay in Rome resulted in many good resolutions and ardent desires, for example the longing to devote myself completely to God, yet within the everyday clamor, among so many exterior temptations and inner weaknesses, I have to fight to not lose sight of God and to keep my soul in innocence, that is, free of self love. This is the source of my confusion and disharmony of spirit, as I desire perfection

and everything which surrounds me and is in my heart, does not correspond with my desires. I am pursuing the ideal, but I cannot grasp it. I often feel disheartened and plunged into darkness. This dissatisfaction with myself urges me to separate myself from the world in a cloister and I would willingly take the habit, however my duties for the diocese and my family, as well as the oath I took in Rome, chain me to the world. Sometimes I struggle to break this chain but then I regain my peace again and wait to see what the good Lord will do with His poor servant. I only wish I did not impede the grace of God.”

As he was passing through these difficulties, Joseph Pelczar decided to go on pilgrimage to implore light from heaven. His plans were realized in the spring of 1872, after which he described his impressions in his book, *The Holy Land and Islam*. Actually, the profound experiences associated with his visit to the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary restored his inner peace and equanimity. He mentioned it in his letter to Father Peter Semenenko, dated March 23, 1873: “I have now decided not to look curiously to the future but to make use of each [present] moment for the glory of God.” This is a clear sign of the decision to strive for perfection, to heroically sacrifice himself to God. He used to pray, asking for the strength to persevere on this difficult way: “Let me, devote to you, O Lord, each moment of my life. May my whole life burn for your glory.”

Despite all his inner struggles, Father Pelczar was able to help others effectively. He distinguished himself as a very sensible person therefore he was given more and more duties in the diocese. In 1871, he became the ordinary confessor to the Benedictine Sisters in Przemyśl-Zasanie; in 1872, the pro-synodal examiner; and, in 1873, he was appointed to the Departments of Church History and Canon Law at the Seminary at Przemyśl. In 1874, the duties of official in charge and councilor of the bishop’s consistory fell to him. At the same time, he continued his regular priestly duties of hearing confessions and preaching. As an eminent preacher, he was charged with preaching on feasts and during other special celebrations.

On June 16, there were jubilee devotions at the Przemyśl Cathedral Church to mark the 200th anniversary of the Apparition of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. Saint Joseph Sebastian preached ardently during this celebration, having prepared for it by careful studies. “Since that time,” he states in his Autobiography, “my love for the devotion to the Divine Heart increased.” Later, he would infuse that love in the Congregation of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart, which developed under his direction.

In the spring of 1873, Pelczar published in Rome his first and most popular book, *The Spiritual Life or Christian Perfection*. In the introduction he wrote: “Jesus Christ is for many people nowadays like that ‘Unknown God’ of the Athenians; and the spiritual life, real Christian life, is like the apocalyptic mystery ‘sealed with seven seals.’ Naturalism becomes widespread in the lives of Christians, and religious indifference appears soon afterwards.

Although in every period of time the Christian life should be supernatural, that is, shaped in the image of Christ and immersed in Him, our times especially demand a deep knowledge of Jesus Christ and a more fervent taking His Spirit to heart. Therefore, in order to be reflected in human life, Christ’s life must first be known. The needs of our time outweighed the feeling of inadequacy, and prompted me to write systematic works for the general public, which I am giving for Polish piety.”

God blessed the author’s plans. The work sold well and had eight editions. It was eagerly read by both the simple and the well-educated. In seminaries and novitiates, it was used for many years as a textbook of asceticism.

“In July of 1873,” he noted, “my liver and stomach illness grew more acute, so that I had to receive the Karlsbad<sup>10</sup> treatment. Yet I experienced no relief; on the contrary, during the fall of that year, a gastric fever developed and troubled me every night. There were some moments when it seemed to me that I was near to death. Despite all this, the good God gave me an unusual strength to work during the day.” His poor health prompted Pelczar to seek a village rectory in a nearby parish. However, after some unsuccessful attempts, he directed his attention to Kraków.

## **V. IN THE KRAKÓW CIRCLE (1877-1899)**

## **A PROFESSOR AT THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY**

In his autobiographical notes, Bishop Pelczar makes mention: "On March 19, 1877, I received the nomination for full professor of Church History and Canon Law at the Jagiellonian University. On April 12th, I left Przemyśl and began a new period of my life. I took up my residence at the Franciscan Monastery. I offered Mass before the image of Our Lady of Sorrows and heard the confessions of devout persons. My position there was not easy."

Before he came to Kraków, the Jagiellonian University managed to find a way out of a crisis which had lasted for more than 20 years. From 1870, when the process of the Germanization of the University had completely ceased, and the Polish language had replaced the German, the Kraków University was on a level with the world famous universities. Only the Theology Faculty was unable to keep up with the progress of the other faculties, causing interdepartmental conflicts. When Father Pelczar began to work there as a professor, there were only two full professors on the Theology faculty and twenty students (mainly religious.) The Theological Faculty did not have the right to confer doctor's degrees, and because of this the Faculty scarcely mattered, and, as a rule, did not participate in the election of a rector. Such were the circumstances under which Father Pelczar passed his first academic years.

As a professor of History and Canon Law, Father Pelczar did his best to improve relations between the University and the Holy See -- among other things, preaching about the support which Pius IX rendered Poland, and sending the Pope a letter of congratulations on his twenty-fifth anniversary of episcopal ordination. He was also the official delegate of the Jagiellonian University during several pilgrimages to Rome, organized on various occasions during the following years.

In 1880, as Vice-Rector of the University, Father Pelczar suggested a proposal to Bishop Dunajewski to send to the Austrian Emperor Francis Joseph a petition to expand the departments in the Theology Faculty from four to seven, and to grant the right to confer degrees. The answer from Vienna was favorable. The following year, as Dean of the Theology Faculty, Pelczar had to appoint the proper persons to these posts. At that time, the University obtained seven new academics. He himself took over the Department of Pastoral Theology since it gave him more opportunity to influence the hearts of the students.

One of the students of the Saint, Father Mateus Jez, gives the following opinion about his professor: "As a professor, he edified us with his ardent faith, loyalty to the Holy See, and love for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. He was the professor who had the greatest influence upon the development of our priestly spirituality. He was always well-prepared for his lectures, teaching us with feeling and fluency. He never made us bored. The lectures were illustrated by interesting examples from Church History and priestly life. For homework, he used to give us compositions which he carefully corrected. We had to preach mock sermons in the lecture room which he at once evaluated, correcting mistakes and showing us the proper way. We, therefore, loved him with all our hearts and were sincerely attached to him."

During the academic year 1882-1883, Father Pelczar strove as Rector of the University, strove to obtain new land for the erecting of new university buildings. On May 26, 1883, he laid the cornerstone for the University's new edifice, Collegium Novum, completed four years later. As a professor of the Jagiellonian University, Father Pelczar published several popularized scientific and ascetical works, as well as many sermons and speeches.



**FATHER PELCZAR IN THE ACADEMIC ROBE OF PROFESSOR  
OF THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY, KRAKOW**

“At a meeting of the writers, I suffered a public offence from one of the professors of Lwów. This neither broke my pen nor paralyzed my spirit, for I did not speak and write for miserable human glory. To my soul, humiliation and disappointment have always been like a heavenly call: “Sursum Corda!”<sup>11</sup>

*(Autobiography, p. 72)*



**FATHER PELCZAR IN THE ACADEMIC ROBE OF RECTOR  
OF THE JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY**

“Who would not be saddened in seeing so many people deprived of faith, and unhappy, despite their strenuous search for happiness ... Aware also of the dangers threatening the students of the Jagiellonian University, I considered it my duty to warn some of them and to fortify others in the faith. For this purpose, I undertook a series of apologetics<sup>12</sup> conferences.”

*(Apologetics Conferences, Kraków, 1885, Preface)*

## PRIEST

Father Pelczar's scientific work was supplemented and crowned by his vast priestly activity in many circles of Kraków society. He was an eminent preacher, a good confessor, spiritual director, and retreat master. With the approval of the Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Krakow, Bishop Jan Puzyna, and until he was appointed a bishop, he promoted and led the Priests' Sodality for Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament in order to prepare zealous priests for the Church. After moving to Przemyśl, he still remained an active member of this Sodality, remaining faithful until the end of his life to the practice of an hour of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament daily. From 1895-1899, he also directed the Priests' Marian Sodality, whose aims were to intensify Marian devotion and to spread the devotion to the Virgin Queen of the Polish Crown. He was convinced that through priests devoted to the Mother of God, devotion to Our Lady, Queen of Poland would spiritually restore the entire nation. Preaching to devotees of Our Lady, he used to challenge them to contest against national sins which had caused the decline of the state. He insistently exhorted them to perform the duties of their state, to sanctify family life, and to educate children and youth according to the Catholic faith.

During that time, Kraków was the converging point of all social classes. Apart from small groups of prosperous nobles, well-to-do scholars and scientists, moderately wealthy clergy and middle class, there were many day laborers who lived in the basements and attics of city apartment houses. A great number of young people who had come looking for a job, as well as crowds of vagrants who used to fill railway waiting rooms and city hospitals, belonged to the poorest stratum also. According to Saint Joseph Sebastian, social work is an integral part of a priest's ministry and a requisite of its efficiency. Thus, he dedicated himself to it zealously. He used to donate money to the soup kitchen run by the Felician Sisters for poor students and he cooperated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society as Vice-President of its Board of Directors. With his own money he supplied this organization and collected money campaigning for it. It was there that he had the opportunity to meet Adam Chmielowski, Saint Brother Albert.

Participating in inspiring and organizing cultural and educational institutions was another kind of Father Pelczar's social work. He initiated the publication of the Catholic newspaper *Prawda (Truth)*, for working classes, edited by a team of the priests and lay people of Kraków. In 1833, he was chosen to be Chairman of the Society for People's Education. Joseph Sebastian gave society a Catholic and patriotic character, and obtained support for the Church. During the sixteen years of his chairmanship, the Society founded more than 600 reading rooms and libraries, organized free classes for craftsmen, published several new books and pamphlets, promulgated over 100,000 good books, organized many patriotic celebrations and, in 1890, founded a school for servants. Father Pelczar was actively engaged in the management of the school and cared for the spiritual welfare of its students.

Art was one object of Father Pelczar's interests. It was he, who, together with some other art lovers, organized the St. Luke Society to uphold the proper standard of art in churches, chapels, and Catholic houses.

## FOUNDER OF A NEW RELIGIOUS CONGREGATION

Several years after the moment of the foundation of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Father Pelczar wrote in his *Autobiography*: “May the Lord forgive my boldness, because until now the founders of religious orders had been saints, but I can be somewhat justified, because, in the strange course of events, I saw God’s Will.” Yet just what were those “strange course of events” to which he alludes?

In 1891, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the declaration of the Polish Constitution, (the May 3rd Constitution), Father Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, then a professor at the Jagiellonian University, came forward with the project to erect the Sodality of Our Lady Queen of the Polish Crown in Kraków to engage in social works. The organization, established on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1891, had among its various religious and charitable works to care for working youth, that is, apprentices and servants. The Sodality set up in Kraków an Association of Apprentices and shelter for servants, the primary aim of the shelter’s establishment being to secure rent-free apartments, moral guidance, and theoretical as well as practical education for servants who were temporarily unemployed or weakened by sickness. A lay headmistress ran the shelter, supported by some women from the Sodality who were in charge of education.

The Saint wrote in his *Autobiography*: “Since a lay headmistress for the servants’ shelter did not meet all its requirements, I came to the conviction that it would be best if a new religious congregation were established in Galicia that would take care of servants and nurse the sick in their homes, since up to that time, no religious Sisters had taken up this work.”

Upon the encouragement of Cardinal Albin Dunajewski and having some candidates at that time applying, on April 15, 1894, Father Pelczar founded the Congregation of Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. “All these matters required considerable effort, “ he declared several years later, “I not only had to write the rules, instructions and *Meditations on the Religious Life*, lectured and led retreats, but also, every day, I used to spend hours conferring with the Sister Superior or candidates and dealing with thousands of affairs of a spiritual and material nature. Besides work, generosity was necessary, for the Congregation was poor. Many worries and anxieties were joined to work and sacrifice, for not everything succeeded as I would have liked and I was disappointed many times and reproached by people. Yet I do not regret any labor, sacrifice or suffering, since I feel certain that God required this work of me to expiate my sins, sanctify myself and help others. On the other hand, the virtues and devotion of some Sisters, particularly of their superior, Mother Klara Szczęśna<sup>13</sup>, who truly led the Congregation, working in union with me, were rather sweet consolations for me. Moreover, the sick and servants, for which I always feel pity, owed the Congregation much.”

Besides the pursuit of sanctity of life on the path of the evangelical counsels, the main aim of the new Congregation was to propagate worship of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially among those whom the Sister would meet every day, while taking care of girls, the poor and sick, children and elderly people. Every Sister, by virtue of her own vocation, should be an apostle of love of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, striving to reflect in her life His virtues, especially meekness and humility, and performing the works of mercy recommended by the Constitutions according to the spirit of evangelical service.

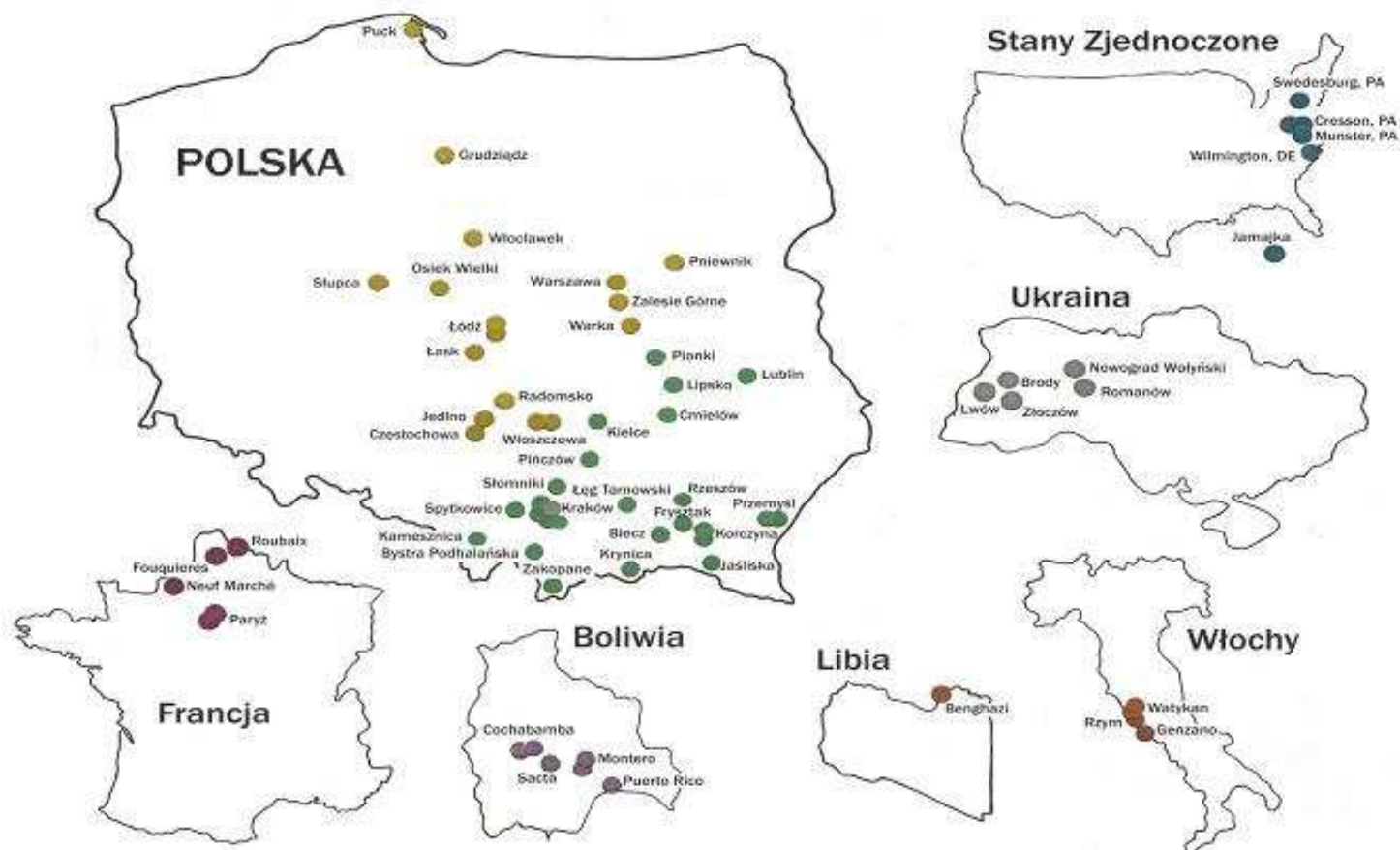
Mother Klara Louise Szczęśna (1863-1916) was the first superior of the Congregation and a shining example of the true servant of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Congregation developed quickly, and, as early as during the Founders’ lifetime, spread throughout the territory of Poland and in France, and also in Italy, the United States, Libya, Bolivia and the Ukraine.



# **PICTURE ON THE CEILING OF THE CHURCH OF THE SISTER SERVANTS OF THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS, KRAKÓW**

“May God forgive my boldness, for until now the founders of religious congregations have been saints; yet I can be somewhat justified, for in the strange course of events, I saw God’s will.”

*(Autobiography, p. 87)*



# VI

## BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF PRZEMYŚL (1899-1924)

### 1. EPISCOPAL CONSECRATION AND ENTHRONEMENT

Joseph Sebastian arrived in Przemyśl on March 3, 1899. We read in his *Autobiography*, “Divine Providence returned me here to work for the benefit of my home diocese in the last years of my life, as I was already fifty-seven.”

“March 19, 1899. This day is as important in my life as June 17, 1864 B the day of my priestly ordination,” he records. “Bishop Lukas Soleck<sup>14</sup>, although weak, conferred the act of consecration with solemnity. Bishop Jan Puzyna<sup>15</sup> and Bishop Konstanty Czechowicz<sup>16</sup> were concelebrants.”

The ordination ceremonies were met with a joyful response in the Przemyśl Diocese and throughout all Galicia, and Father Pelczar was famous for his spiritual works, as well as his fruitful and extensive activity in the cultural, educational, charitable and social fields. Press articles connected with this event give evidence of it. One can read, for instance, in the local newspaper, *Echo Przemyskie (Przemyśl Echo)*: “The eminent post of Przemyśl Auxiliary Bishop was taken by a superior man who brings great treasures of intellect and heart.” The article published in the newspaper, *Czas (Time)*, emphasizes the services Father Pelczar rendered to the Jagiellonian University and his work in Kraków. In the following sentence, the author of this article explains the problem of reconciliation between the bishop’s outstanding diligence and his deep piety. “People of great labor, especially those who spend more time with God than with people, have time for everything.” A similar opinion about the bishop was given in the newspaper, *Prawda (Truth)*: “Untiring work, deep knowledge connected with exemplary piety, as well as a heart open for everyone and everything that is respectable and profitable, make the name of the new Prince of the Church not only well-known, but also worthy of the deepest respect and affection.”

Bishop Pelczar was the associate of Bishop Solecki for only a short period of time. Due to the serious sickness of the Ordinary, all decisions had to be made by him from February 15th to March 2nd, 1900, and, after the death of the Bishop (March 2, 1900), Bishop Pelczar was unanimously elected the capitulary vicar.

On December 17, 1900, the Holy Father Leo XIII appointed him Ordinary of the Diocese of Przemyśl.

The new Ordinary was enthroned on January 13, 1901. The faithful of the Przemyśl diocese had high expectations for him, as expressed in numerous press articles. Here is an excerpt from the *Echo Przemyskie (Przemyśl Echo)*: The Arch-pastor, who, thanks to the singular attributes of his mind and heart, assures us that he not only will maintain the old splendid traditions [...] but will also cast a new glamour over it [...], is mounting the bishop’s throne -- for he is well-known throughout the whole country as a man of extensive knowledge; an excellent spiritual director; an expert in Church history and life; a sophisticated writer; and a very eloquent preacher. We know well that his noble heart flames with great love towards God, Church and Homeland. This love makes him think of far-reaching plans to fill all strata, all areas, with faith. Therefore our joy is proper and our hopes are reasonable. In such difficult and dangerous times, God entrusted the helm of this large diocese to steady and noble hands.”

When Pelczar was enthroned in the Diocese of Przemyśl, this part of the Lwów metropolis covered a vast territory of more than 889 square miles. People of different nations lived there. The highest percent of the population were Poles living mainly in the Northwestern region of the diocese. Ruthenian Uniates, subject to the Greek Catholic Bishop of Przemyśl, prevailed in the southeast.

### 2. THE PROGRAM OF A BISHOP’S SERVICE

Having assumed authority in the Przemyśl diocese, Bishop Pelczar had already and explicit ideal of the priest-

pastor, which he later described in the book, *The Pastor after the Heart of Jesus*. When he was preaching from the bishop's chair for the first time, he outlined the image of a model priest, and announced the guiding principles of his future service. He assured his listeners that he would do his best to form priests as men of prayer, especially the prayer of praise which make people like angels; men of every virtue and science; involved in social work, taking care of the poor, afflicted and abandoned. This is why he paternally encouraged them: "Be therefore zealous for everything beneficial to the Church, the nation, and society and let not your heart resent any trouble or money expended for pious works. Let it be your ideal and ambition to do as many good deeds as possible during your life. Especially if one of you should be a pastor, should you elevate the state of a parish in all aspects --decorating its church, founding a day-nursery or place for relief for the poor. Then you can die in the Lord without money and debts, but with a large bundle of merits in hand." In sum, one can say that Bishop Pelczar wanted to have a holy diocese.

The Saint put his heart into a speech addressed to working classes, since he was very anxious about their problems. "I am speaking with you, my most beloved sons and daughters in Christ, who earn your daily bread by hard manual labor. Do not think that God has put you at a disadvantage, for each job, so long as it is honest, has been raised to the rank of nobility by the One, who, although able to do miracles and amaze the world, served humbly in the home at Nazareth. Only be faithful to God, to the Church, to all duties, and you will be great in the Kingdom of God. One day those beads of sweat you now shed will decorate your crowns as so many precious pearls."

### **3. ZEALOUS FATHER OF HIS DIOCESE**

The most fruitful period of Bishop Pelczar's service as a bishop occurred during the time before World War I. At that time, thanks to propitious circumstances, he managed to bring the diocese to bloom. There was comparative peace and liberty of religious life in Galicia. It was possible to build new churches, found new parishes, organize public devotions, and create different societies and fraternities without obstacles. Although atheistic propaganda was also spread in those times, Bishop Pelczar was held in such great esteem that he was able to efficiently prevent such hostile tendencies.

Both in his personal piety and in the pastoral animation of the religious life of the diocese, he used to join the devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Most Blessed Sacrament with veneration of Our Lady, the Immaculata and the Queen of Poland.

The Bishop started his program of sanctification of his diocese by working to heighten its religious standard. In order to reach this aim, he convoked a diocesan synod in 1902, which worked out not only a set of laws but also pastoral rules. This set was then supplemented during the next two councils in 1908 and 1914. The last council, planned for 1924, was not realized because of the death of the Bishop.

Describing the sphere of his work Father Joachim Bar OFM Conv., writes thus: "The Przemyśl Bishop, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar, was the only bishop of partitioned Poland who had the courage to conduct a synod. Moreover, he conducted not only one but three synods and prepared another one. Przemyśl synods are indeed, for the most part, the personal handiwork of Bishop Pelczar, the monuments of his virtues and attributes."

The Saint took special care to put a lot of work into the formation of alumni and priests, both in respect to science and morality. To increase priestly vocations, he built the "junior seminary" (high school for boys things about the priesthood), which was opened in 1902. He also extended the building of the seminary and reorganized its program of studies. To prepare proper professors and tutors, he sent them to study in Rome, Vienna, Innsbruck, and, after World War I, to Kraków and Lublin. The Hospice for Polish priests studying in Rome also emerged from his solicitude for the formation of priests.

Bishop Pelczar encouraged priests to be zealous in the apostolate, saying: "It is not enough today to confine one's work only to church or school, but it is imperative to approach the society with great faith and great love, especially to youth, to the afflicted and abandoned. You should, according to the words of the Gospel, go out into the streets and lanes of the city to encourage nonbelievers, people who are cold toward God and the Church, to enter the marriage banquet."

During the canonical visitations which he prepared and conducted with great care, Bishop Pelczar could be satisfied that he had many zealous priests in his diocese. His notes attest to this fact: "Every visitation shed streams of sweat, but was also sweet relief for me, because I had the opportunity to watch in detail the devout work of priests and the sincere piety of the people." Rev. Kazimierz Kotula, the bishop's secretary and chaplain, adds that during every visitation, the Saint used to extend an invitation to the peasants and workers to sit at the table with him. He respected people who were inferior to him without letting them feel that they belonged to a lower social state.

The devout father of the diocese was aware of various social needs of the faithful and would provide assistance to them. He took care of the development of charitable institutions and village day nurseries. During World War I, Bishop Pelczar created relief committees to aid wounded soldiers, cripples, war orphans and the poorest parishioners.

The Catholic and Social Association, another organization founded by Bishop Pelczar, active within the entire territory of the Przemyśl diocese, was a great help to priests with their welfare and charity, as well as cultural religious works. On behalf of their pastors, its members conducted charitable activities, organized lectures, directed religious reading rooms and libraries and helped with catechesis or the organization of religious ceremonies.

The Arch-pastor attached great importance to the beauty of churches, and put much of his exertion, time and money into their renovation. Having begun with the restoration of the Cathedral and the reconstruction of Most Sacred Heart Church in Przemyśl. During his service, more than 100 churches were built, 11 new parishes, and more than 60 minor religious centers erected in the diocese.

Because he was a lover of history, culture and art, the Diocesan Museum (1902), the Diocesan Library (1904) and the monthly newspaper, *Kronika Diecezji Przemyskiej* (*Chronicle of the Przemyśl Diocese*) (1901), were established.

Although he led a very active life as the pastor of the diocese, Saint Joseph Sebastian never gave up his work as a writer, producing new writings and preparing reissues of older ones.

Despite poor health, the activity of his life and the unusual fruitfulness of his work were already admired by his contemporaries. Present-day biographers, who know his life and activity better, have good reason for an even greater admiration. If to the aforementioned works, one adds his numerous sermons, spiritual conferences, conferences to priests, civil authorities, teachers and children, the several pilgrimages made by him, including finally the time he reserved every day for prayer (adoration for one hour, two meditations, Holy Mass with a long preparation and thanksgiving of about half an hour, Divine Office, and the rosary), indeed one can only be astounded. It surprises no one then to hear the 82-year-old bishop's simple confession, "I'm tired, for I have worked very hard."

#### **4. AT THE DAWN OF THE INDEPENDENCE OF POLAND**

Joseph Sebastian spent his entire life serving God and homeland. As preacher and writer, he took every opportunity to urge his compatriots to spiritual renewal. Pelczar's concern for the welfare of his homeland was especially expressed during and after the First World War when hopes for the independence of Poland became more real.

In 1915, he wrote a brochure entitled: *An Appeal to Work for the Spiritual Revival of the Polish Nation*. This work, published four times, circulated throughout Poland, and was very helpful in the spiritual mobilization and unity of the nation.

Waiting for the new, emerging Poland, in 1919, he issued *A Proclamation to the Clergy Concerning Proper Conduct at the Present Time*. He wrote: "All clergy and laity should strive not only for an independent, united, and strong [Poland], but also a godly, that is, a Catholic and holy Poland. Let us take care for the spiritual renewal of the nation, since it will be of no use to proclaim an independent Republic, and create its body from three joined parts, if its soul were to be corrupted with wickedness."

In January, 1920, while preaching in Warsaw, the Saint told his fellow citizens: "Beware of discords and obstinacy in the power struggle of [political] parties. Beware of anarchy in private and public life. Beware of laziness, apathy, and discouragement. Beware of extravagance, miserliness towards good purposes, and wasting public money."

When, in 1921, a group of Parliament members demanded the creation of secular schools and a division between the Church and the State, Bishop Pelczar addressed *An Open Letter to Representatives from the Diocese of Przemyśl and, Indirectly, to All Representatives of Parliament*. Reading it, we can find the sentence: “I have been longing all my life for a free, strong, and holy Poland. I have been praying and working for such a Poland. At the present time, the revitalization of Poland is in a sad state. It pains me much and so as the senior of arch-pastors at the very brink of the grave, I decided to reply to you with a warning and advice. Look into these matters conscientiously, and learn from the past and from experience what a blessed effect religion has –not only on individuals and families, but upon nations and states.”

A great part of Bishop Pelczar’s work in the spiritual construction of the state was appreciated by the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Ratti, and by Polish authorities, who decorated him with the medal *Polonia Restituta*<sup>17</sup> in 1923.



**BISHOP PELCZAR AT HIS DESK**

“It was my ardent desire to also serve God with my pen, and to divide with my brother-priests what I had perceived as a priest and bishop, and what I had taught as a professor in Przemyśl and Kraków, so that all the gifts received from God would be utilized, and that I might be useful to the people even after my death.”

*(The Pastor According to the Heart of Jesus,  
Lwów, 1913, Preface)*

## **VII WITH A BURNING HEART FOR THE MEETING WITH THE LORD**

During the last years of his life, Bishop Pelczar's spirituality was supremely dominated by love. Entirely immersed in God, Joseph Sebastian lived only for Him and in Him. He prayed much. He used to read his Office and the book *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas a Kempis while kneeling, since, in his opinion, it is impossible to read the sublime in any other way. The Saint attained to such a level of deep prayer that he would often become oblivious to what was happening around him. At work, the Bishop usually united himself with God spontaneously, using short, fervent prayers. His entire personality radiated this communion with God.

Father Paul Frelek, who had an opportunity to speak personally with the Saint during the Bishops' Conference in Czestochowa (1923), gave this description: "What a wonderful figure! I became so attached to him that I cannot forget the moment I spoke to him. The truth of the words: 'The nearer the saints are to the moment of death, the more visible their holiness' is proven with regards to him. One can say that although his body is on earth, his soul is already in heaven. He will die soon, for God's love consumes him."

On March 19, 1924, Joseph Sebastian Pelczar celebrated the 25th anniversary of his episcopal ordination in a joyful ceremony. Eighty-three years old, he was in the 68th year of his priesthood. One could say that he indeed had many reasons to give thanks to the Lord and enjoy himself!

The jubilee Mass and greetings took place in the Cathedral. Prior to this, the Bishop had received a letter of congratulations from Pope Pius XI. The local newspapers, societies and associations paid their tribute to him, expressing their joy and gratitude.

Two days later, Bishop Pelczar fell ill with pneumonia. He said, "If it is God's will that this illness be the last of my life, I am ready for death, for which I have been preparing throughout my entire life." It was to be the last. On March 28th at 1:30am, with his eyes fixed upon a picture of the Immaculata, he passed away.

News of the death of the holy Bishop aroused sorrow and many good memories. The local newspaper, *Ziemia Przemyska i Jaroslowski* (*The Land of Przemyśl and Jaroslaw*), published an article, "At the fresh grave of the Arch-pastor," which concluded with the following words: "The saintly priest, the great bishop and lover of his people, fulfilled the duty of his life. For a long time his ...tomb will continue to say to us: 'Poland, be united in mutual love.' He did not harvest a ripe harvest, but his twenty-five years of sowing his words will yield great fruits in the future in a free homeland."

The fruits are numerous through the intercession of Saint Joseph Sebastian. Among the numerous favors obtained by many different people from Poland and other countries noted by the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, some regard spiritual and moral spheres, others material and health problems. One of them Ban instant and permanent recovery was officially recognized by the Church to be miraculous.

John Paul II beatified Joseph S. Pelczar on June 2, 1991 in Rzeszów during his 4th pilgrimage to Poland. It is worth mentioning that the 200th anniversary of the declaration of the May 3rd Constitution was one of the reasons for this visit of the Holy Father to Poland. This aforementioned constitution represents freedom for each Pole. Freedom means the possibility of choosing, particularly the good, although it be difficult. Saint J.S. Pelczar was a man of right choices, who used the personal freedom of his will for the benefit of his neighbors, Church, and Homeland. Saint Joseph Sebastian, teach us how to use the gift of freedom well!

## POSTLUDE

On May 18, 2003 in Rome, the Holy Father pronounced him a saint of the Universal Church. The relics of Saint Joseph Sebastian Pelczar presently rest in the Cathedral Church in Przemyśl. In Krakow, Saint Joseph Sebastian is venerated in a special way in the church of the Sister Servants of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, where there is a chapel dedicated to him. His feast day is observed on January 19<sup>th</sup>.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> After the canonization of St. Joseph Sebastian Pelczar on May 18, 2003 in Rome, all references to "Blessed" have been changed to "Saint" throughout the document.

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<sup>2</sup>From 1772-1795, Poland was divided into three parts by Austria, Prussia and Russia, losing its independence for more than a century. The southern part of Poland, which was ruled by the Austrians, was called Galicia. The Galician Slaughter or the Peasant Uprising of 1846, was an uprising instigated by Austria and led by Jakub Szela which began on February 18, 1846 and lasted two months. During this time, Galician, mostly Polish, peasants killed about 1,000 noblemen and destroyed about 500 manors. The Austrian government used this uprising to decimate nationalist Polish nobles who were considering an uprising against Austria. It was the largest peasant uprising on Polish soil in the 19th century (As cited online at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).

<sup>3</sup>Gymnasium - comparable to the American high school.

<sup>4</sup>Final examinations at the end of high school.

<sup>5</sup>Presently known as the Pontifical Gregorian University.

<sup>6</sup>Presently known as the Pontifical Lateran University.

<sup>7</sup>Presumably, penitents were coming to receive absolution to gain the plenary indulgence available under the usual conditions when participating in May devotions.

<sup>8</sup>The krone was a form of currency used by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire at the time our Founder wrote his *Autobiography*.

<sup>9</sup>Gwiazda (Star) Society, an association of Polish craftsmen or skilled workers.

<sup>10</sup>Health resort in Bohemia

<sup>11</sup>Latin for "Lift up your heart!"

<sup>12</sup>Apologetics refers to the science of dogmatic theology that aims at explaining and justifying religious doctrine so as to show its reasonableness in answer to objections.

<sup>13</sup>As of this writing, presently Servant of God, Mother Klara Szczęsna

<sup>14</sup>The Roman Catholic Ordinary of Przemyśl

<sup>15</sup>The Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Kraków

<sup>16</sup>The Greek Catholic Ordinary of Przemyśl

<sup>17</sup>The Order of *Polonia Restituta* (Polish: *Order Odrodzenia Polski*, English: *Order of Poland Reborn*) is one of Poland's highest Orders. The Order can be conferred for outstanding achievements in the fields of education, science, sport, culture, art, economics, defense of the country, social work, civil service, or for furthering good relations between countries. It was established on February 4, 1921 and can be awarded to both civilians and soldiers, as well as to foreigners (As cited online at [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)).