

Archbishop Antoni Baraniak: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*
Give me souls, take away the rest

Our first of the series of meetings dedicated to the distinguished members of the Polish church regarded Primate Stefan Wyszyński – the Primate of the Millennium.

Today I would like to introduce you to an exceptional person who stood by the side of Cardinal Wyszyński. A heroic, modest and gentle labourer of the Lord's vineyard who played a unique part in history. A great hero who seemingly acted in the background.

Current Archbishop of Cracow Marek Jędraszewski said: "if it hadn't been for Abp. Baraniak and his unyielding demeanour, Primate Wyszyński would have never come back to Warsaw after imprisonment and without Primate Wyszyński there would have never be Cardinal Wojtyła and subsequently Pope John Paul II. To summarize, the history of the Church in Poland, in Europe and the rest of the world would turn out differently, in a way that is difficult for us to imagine. And behind it all stands this adamant and quiet man who at that difficult time did not bend, did not break and as the Primate himself said – took upon himself the responsibilities of the Primate for the Church in Poland."

A short biographical note does not reflect greatness of this man. In a brief summary we could say: *Polish bishop of Roman Catholic Church, *he lived between 1904 and 1977, *a Salesian, *a chaplain and Secretary of two Polish Primates,* Auxiliary Bishop of Gniezno and Archbishop of Poznań

He was born on January 1, 1904 in Greater Poland region in the family of farmers. Growing up, he received thorough religious education. He studied in the local parish and then attended the Salesian Congregation. He studied philosophy in Cracow and in 1925 he professed his perpetual vows.

Between 1927 and 1931 he studied theology and law, here in Rome, at the Pontifical Gregorian University and completed his education with doctoral degree in theology. The ambience of Rome, his presence in the heart of the Christian world had undoubtedly tremendous impact on the young priest. (On a side note: during the investigation the communist security police were particularly interested in his studies at 'Gregorianum' and relationships he

established back then in Rome. Of course, the communists believed that these contacts were clearly of ‘espionage nature.’)

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1930 in Cracow. The ceremony was conducted by Abp. Adam Sapieha , The Unbroken Prince, who also ordained Karol Wojtyła later on. Three years later he was appointed by Cardinal August Hlond as his Secretary and personal chaplain.

When the World War II broke out Primate Hlond was forced to leave Poland. Together with his Secretary they went to Rome. They lived in Lourdes and later on they were hiding in the Benedictine Abbey in Hautecombe in Savoy. While exiled they fought together for the Polish cause by submitting to the Holy See and the public opinion of the West the account of prosecutions and crimes committed by the Germans in Poland. They visited Polish refugees and they conducted charity work on a large scale. Eventually (after Cardinal’s imprisonment by the Gestapo) in July 1945 he comes back to Poland together with Cardinal Hlond.

In his presence in October 1948 Cardinal Hlond on his death bed names Bishop Stefan Wyszyński as his successor. The final sentence of his last will states: “Victory, when it comes, will be Mary’s victory”. This statement will become the foundation of his successor’s plan of action.

Father Antoni Baraniak becomes Secretary and chaplain of Primate Stefan Wyszyński. He is by his side during the most important celebrations and supports him in his everyday services.

He accompanies Primate Wyszyński during his first visit *ad limina apostolorum* to Pope Pius XII in April 1951. It was a particularly important event during which: “Pope Pius XII after hearing Primate’s report accepted without any reservations the Episcopate’s line of action and approved fully Primate’s method of proceedings.” Then Primate received a decree granting him special letters of authorizations.

In the same month Pope Pius XII appoints Father Baraniak as Suffragan Bishop of Gniezno. He is ordained as a bishop by Primate Wyszyński. His motto states: “*Da mihi animas, caetera tolle*” (Give me souls, take away the rest).

However the 25-th day of September 1953 came –a decisive moment in the life of the Bishop, the Primate and the Polish church.

In the late evening hours officers of the Department of Security stormed Archbishop's residence. Bishop Baraniak tried unsuccessfully to hold them back. One of the officers shouted at the Bishop: "Hands up or I'll shoot!". Ten agents entered the Primate's Secretariat and started to search the office.

This is an extract from the Bishop's account of this event: *"I found him [the Primate] in the company of a few undercover officers. They were in the middle of discussion. One of them was reading out the arrest warrant. When His Eminence asked to show him this document he was denied. It turned out that they had brought me upon Cardinal's request. While leaving His Eminence charged me with the management of his Secretariat and gave me all the necessary authorizations. I was moved when he spoke but I understood him clearly."*

It appeared straight away that Bishop Baraniak was put up against much greater challenge than he expected.

During the search of the office Father Baraniak "prayed rosary several times". In the morning he was told that the military prosecutor's office decided to arrest him. (*"They ordered me to get dressed. When I asked what I should wear, one of them replied: <Something warm>"*)

In the Mokotów Prison – I will quote Bishop's words: *"they took my briefcase with undergarments, all the bishop insignia, everything I had in my pockets including my rosary and money found during the search of my room and bedroom. I was taken to an empty concrete cell with a bunk, a stool, a water jug, a bowl and a toilet."*

He spent 27 months in a cell locked with i.a. "Nazi war criminals". He was treated cruelly and brutally: interrogated 145 times a dozen or so hours at a time, beaten, mentally and physically abused, kept naked in a dump and unheated solitary confinement even during the cold. They even ripped off his nails. He was refused food or medical care. During his whole stay in the prison he was isolated from family and friends. He was denied not only visits but also any form of correspondence. They tried to portray him as a thief by accusing him of stealing a pillowcase and an elastic bandage. Communists implied that he *"praised fascist rulers – Mussolini and Hitler"*.

The purpose of these inhuman treatment was to obtain evidence that would incriminate the Primate. They wanted to put him on trial for espionage,

counterrevolutionary activity and treason, just like they did with Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek.

In the “Investigation report concerning the case of Antoni Baraniak” from 1955 we can find a sentence unusual when it comes to communist secret police customs: *“investigation in the case of Baraniak continues for almost two years which is in contradiction to the people’s rule of law”*.

This is a clear admission to a violation of, very defective after all, communist law as well as to a complete failure of the investigators. When you read the interrogation protocols you can clearly notice how cleverly the Bishop protects Primate Wyszyński, other priests and seculars and even deceased Primate Hlond despite being questioned day after day for many hours at a time. *“Cardinal Hlond did not discuss political issues during the banquets”*. His usual answers are: I don’t remember this affair, I didn’t work on this problem, I’m unable to specify date, I can’t recall the name of this priest, etc.

Archbishop’s moderation in his description of the tortures he was subjected to, is unusual. He did his best to avoid exposition of his person. He was a martyr though. He rarely opened up on the subject of interrogations: *“They were very tiring and exhausting, sometimes humiliating, he was repeatedly persuaded to admit to things he had never done (...) if it wasn’t for the fact that he was taken to hospital for the appendix operation (...) he would have nervous breakdown and ended in an asylum”*.

This heroic Bishop only twice mentioned what he went through in prison. The first time it was during one of his visits to Rome when he was talking to his fellow priests: *“when they couldn’t force him to testify against the Primate they moved him to the so called ‘black cell’. He was locked for a few days, maybe eight or more naked in a basement of a kind without a window, very dump where water was dripping from the ceiling and walls. And he stayed there without food or anything else. He didn’t break (...) one of the inmates told him earlier that every prisoner breaks down at some point (...) Then Bishop Baraniak decided to undergo spiritual retreat (...) in front of other inmates, he kneeled and prayed. He also made a resolution that whatever happens he will never testify against the Primate and that he is ready to sacrifice his life for the Church.”*

A few decades later, in 1976, he underwent a medical examination in Poznań. Doctor Milada Tycowa recollected: *“naturally I had to examine his back. Archbishop hesitated but this basic examination was necessary. I momentarily*

noticed that the whole surface of his back was covered with scars, a result of severe beating. It was a shocking sight. I knew that Archbishop had been many years before in a communist prison and so I asked: Is this a reminder? To which Archbishop replied only : Yes, reminder. And we never spoke about it again.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me leave this attestation without a comment...

Primate Wyszyński found out about Bishop Baraniak's arrest only after 2 years. In his "Records" from the time of his internment he wrote: *“The people who provided me with the initial information about Bishop Antoni saw him in the Mokotów prison by chance during the walk in the prison yard. He was walking by himself wearing a cassock. He was pale but looked cheerful. The opinion about him circulating within the prison walls gave a positive impression of his mindset (...) Bishop Baraniak holds on bravely and presents a dignified attitude towards the investigators. It was generally known (...) that this investigation was prolonged and unduly burdensome and that the Bishop did not incriminate anyone. He was said to have had a positive influence on other prisoners through encouragement, impressive priestly attitude and admirable disposition.”*

Tortures did not break Bishop Baraniak. He didn't cooperate. He didn't incriminate the Primate despite strenuous efforts of over 30 security police officers. He remained loyal.

In December 1955 Bishop Baraniak was relocated to one of the Salesian houses probably because of the fear of Bishop's death.

In Spring 1956, during his conversation with visiting clergymen, Primate Wyszyński presents as a condition of his return: the release of all bishops including Antoni Baraniak, Baziak, Adamski and Kaczmarek. This subject (the return of bishops to their former positions) is brought up during the visit of the representatives of government in Komańcza in October 1956. However the essential issue then was a withdrawal of the decree from 1953 on staffing church positions.

And finally, another decisive act – a letter to the First Secretary Gomułka issued by the Polish Episcopate – item no.3: *“Bishop Baraniak, arrested with the Primate and held imprisoned for over two years while innocent. The last Decree of the General Prosecutor's Office on the discontinuance of the investigation in his case results in dropping all charges against the Bishop. It would be advised to allow Bishop Baraniak, a Suffragan of the Gniezno Archdiocese, to return to his service.”*

On November, 2 the Primate and Bishop Baraniak are together in Jasna Góra where Wyszyński delivers a passionate sermon: *“And yesterday my closest colleague Bishop Baraniak, the Suffragan of Gniezno returned to Warsaw. We came here together because we experienced similar fate, only the Bishop suffered more than I did as he was treated even harsher. He underwent a more difficult trial, one that ruined his health whereas Our Lord’s wish was to spare me, to save my health and strength. We both came here to humbly offer everything we’ve got left to our Mother and Queen. We give it all to Her, with all our sufferings, experiences and hardships that God blessed us with.”*

After his release Bishop Antoni remained the director of the Primate’s Secretariat until the end of May 1957, that is the day he was nominated by Pope Pius XII to become the new Archbishop of Poznań.

In May 1957 Primate Wyszyński goes to Rome with the *ad limina apostolorum* visit. He is accompanied by among others Bishop Baraniak. This visit had historical importance. The Primate really wanted new bishop’s appointments. He wrote: *“I’m going to present a terno (a list of three candidates) with Bishop Baraniak as a lead candidate”*.

On May, 14 an audience with the Holy Father takes place and four days later Primate Wyszyński officially receives the cardinal’s hat. Bishop Baraniak assisted in the celebrations. Two weeks later Pope Pius XII appoints Bishop Baraniak as the Metropolitan Bishop of Poznań.

Both hierarchs remain in close contact – the new Metropolitan of Poznań stands by the Primate’s side in the most significant moments of his mission. He travels with Primate Wyszyński to Rome, signs documents (like in 1961 when the Primate subjugates himself, bishops and whole Poland to Blessed Mother in the **“Act of subjugation of Poland to the Blessed Mother by Polish bishops”**) and participates in the works of the Second Vatican Council. His loyalty to the Primate is also reflected in the reports of the communist secret police because he was still under surveillance : *“He is one of the closest and most trusted associates of Cardinal Wyszyński. He eagerly enacts and supports Cardinal Wyszyński’s policy and Episcopate’s resolutions.”*

On the first Session of the Vatican Council in October 1962 Archbishop Baraniak is elected as a member of the Oriental Commission. He also presents a project of the revision of the liturgical calendar.

A year later during the second Session of the Vatican Council Primate Wyszyński chooses him to lead the Polish Episcopate Commission to the Vatican Council and makes him responsible for the relations with the Episcopate of Italy. (He spoke Italian fluently which was very helpful)

The Letter of Reconciliation to the German Bishops and celebrations of the millennial anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Poland are some of the most significant events in the modern history of the Polish church.

Archbishop Baraniak was very much involved in the millennial celebrations in Poznań and other cities. Celebrations in Poznań in mid April developed into “*unintentional confrontation of the Church and atheistic government.*” There were around 40, 000 participants.

On May 3, 1966 during the celebrations of the Blessed Virgin Mary central celebrations of Sacrum Poloniae Millenium (Millennium of Christianity in Poland) also take place in Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. 300,000 people attending the ceremonies are welcomed by Archbishop Baraniak on behalf of the Polish Episcopate and the entire clergy.

During the Solemn Pontifical Mass celebrated by the Metropolitan Bishop of Cracow Karol Wojtyła the Primate delivers a sermon and reads out an ***Act of subjugating Poland to the Motherly Servitude of Mary Mother of the Church for the freedom of the Christ's Church.***

Political background of these events and the attitude of the communist government towards it are best explained in a top secret document reporting the first month of the celebrations which says that “*they are an expression of political demonstration and reactionary position of the episcopate towards the reforms...*”

-“a way to spread devotion and fanaticism” through the cult of Virgin Mary—“

Great portion of this report regards Archbishop Baraniak: “*(...) Archbishop Baraniak made great effort to increase the number of participants of the millennial celebrations in Poznań and to make them more demonstrative. The best example is the organization of the welcoming of the image of Our Lady by large groups of people from suburbs and the city of Poznań. Not by accident the procession with the painting was led by Cardinal Wyszyński and Archbishop Baraniak all the way from Gniezno to Poznań. Around 30 thousand people gathered in the square in front of the Fara Church in Poznań to greet the image.*”

By the late night several thousand people had visited the painting in the church. (...) During the transportation of the painting to the cathedral thousands of most devoted citizens of Poznań gathered on the decorated route. In some parts of the route the image was carried by the faithful. It was a political demonstration that Wyszyński and Baraniak counted on.”

In 1966 he wrote a famous letter to the faithful. In this letter he strongly protested against the absurd “arrest” of the image of Black Madonna made by the communists: *“the will of the people is not to treat atheists differently than the people of faith. We are all children of the same nation after all (...) Feeling painfully the constant decrease of religious freedom in our Homeland and clear violations of religious beliefs we make today an official protest against attempts on the freedom of the Church and against the attacks on the travelling image of Our Lady, the Primate and the Episcopate.”*

The communists didn't allow the Holy Father to visit Poland and prohibited the Primate to go to Rome.

Archbishop Baraniak actively supports Primate Wyszyński. He participates in Synods of Bishops in Rome and takes part in the most important celebrations in the Eternal City – beatifications of Father Maksymilian Kolbe (1971), Mother Teresa Ledóchowska (1975). (His interview for the “Il Tempo” caused plenty of rumour because he spoke emphatically about the prosecutions of Church in communist countries and called on Council Fathers to take a stand on this matter. Unfortunately it didn't happen. He also contributed greatly to the work on the Declaration of religious freedom in 1965) .

Archbishop Baraniak works very hard to promote the construction of new churches, a cause which was against communist policy. He courageously, publicly demanded from the authorities permissions to build new temples.

At the beginning of September 1966 the communists once again “arrested” the image of Our Lady of Częstochowa. In every church in Poznań archdiocese a pastoral letter was read out expressing the protest against the prohibition of peregrination. It provoked the communists to attack the Metropolitan of Poznań once again.

October 31, 1972: Archbishop Baraniak, among other church hierarchs, signs *“A memorandum to the government on the religious freedom as a fundamental*

And what was Archbishop Baraniak privately like? I will quote his close associate Bishop Stanisław Napierała: “Archbishop Baraniak was a good man, very descent man, very straightforward (...) when visiting Rome he always brought with him many requests from people concerning various issues. He took great joy in making others happy.”

I will only add that there were those who held against him the fact that he smoked cigarettes. (He started smoking in prison.) And he enjoyed from time to time a glass of wine or cognac. I don't perceive it as something reprehensible. I have on my desk a picture of Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati with a cigarette in his hand. I also remember that Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko smoked like a chimney. They passed away to Our Lord “in odore sanctitatis”...

Even John Paul II indulged in a glass of wine occasionally. Interestingly the communist authorities tried to foment a discord between those two hierarchs – Wojtyła and Baraniak. They of course failed to do so. Department IV of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, whose main objective was to act against the Church, surveilled all Baraniak's conversations. In December 1972 they reported: “Archbishop Baraniak was to say that if the papal conclave was about to take place presently, the most probable candidate is Karol Wojtyła, currently very successful and highly valued in the Roman Curia.”

We can find out what Wojtyła thought about Baraniak from what he said when he visited already very sick Archbishop in hospital in Poznań in August 1977: “Polish Church will never forget what Archbishop has done to defend it in the most difficult times”. On his dying bed Baraniak commented this with typical for him sense of humour: “Well, this Cardinal Wojtyła knows how to console a man.”

The Primate remembers his tried and true associate and in June 1976 sends him best wishes to commemorate 25th anniversary of his consecration as a bishop. He also visits his terminally ill friend several times in hospital in Poznań in 1977. Because of his health condition Archbishop hands over his responsibilities as a bishop to his successor – Bishop Jerzy Stroba.

He dies on August 13, 1977. (Just before he passed away he recalled his beloved Rome and “terremoto”, he experienced during his studies at university...)

The Requiem Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła and Primate Wyszyński read the eulogy: *“Bishop Baraniak imprisoned (...) provided me with a sort of protection. He was the one burdened with the heaviest accusations while I spent three years secluded but spared from the harsh treatment (...) Only his fellow inmates knew about the sufferings he went through (...) I guessed that I owe my relatively tranquil imprisonment to him because he took upon his shoulders the whole weight of responsibility of the Primate of Poland. It created remarkably strong bond between us. I can only express it with my great respect to this man and wholehearted gratitude to God for the amazing strength he gave him that provided me with unwavering support”*.

Archbishop Baraniak was buried in the Arch cathedral Basilica in Poznań.

Recently Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, the President of the Polish Episcopal Conference blessed the prison cell where Archbishop Baraniak was held and he celebrated a Mass in the prison chapel.

Already 3,000 people have signed the petition to initiate his beatification process. Who if not him? - one could ask. Heroism of Archbishop Baraniak was a subject of Archbishop Jędraszewski’s book “Teczki na Baraniaka” (“Baraniak’s Files”) published in 2009 and a documentary “Zapomniane męczeństwo” (“Forgotten Martyrdom”) .

Primate Wyszyński’s testament from 1969 which was read out during his funeral on May 31, 1981 contained significant words:

“I was blessed in my mission because ever understanding God while burdened me with responsibilities also provided me with support. I’m particularly grateful for my closest associates – Archbishop Antoni Baraniak, my fellow prisoner in Christ (...)”