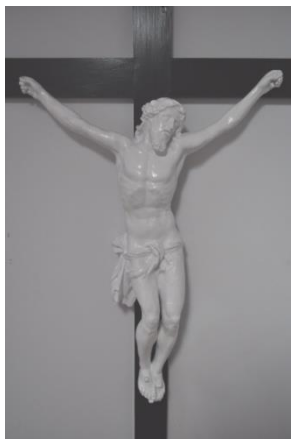


Snapshots: The Epiphany Blessing



Yesterday was 6th January – Epiphany, which celebrates the Adoration of the Magi – the visit of the Three Wise Men to the newly-born Jesus in Bethlehem. They followed a star which led them to the right place. It is difficult to read Matthew’s account, without feeling their joy when they saw that they had reached the spot: “...they set out. And suddenly the star they had seen rising went forward and halted over the place where the child was. The sight of the star filled them with delight and going into the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and falling to their knees they did him homage. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.”¹



The Epiphany Blessing of our home at Szymanów, is an event that involves the whole community. Sisters weave through the corridors led by the chaplain, singing carols, and leaving behind them the scent of incense. Every cell, together with its resident, and every room that we use receives a blessing, and the letters chalked on the doors, which usually remain in place for the whole year, remind us that our home is dedicated to God, for His use. Yesterday, as the procession went from cell to cell, stopping to pray, it reached the part of the building where our Novitiate is located. In one of the cells, my gaze fell upon the crucifix hanging on the wall. A large wooden cross, with a white figure of Jesus. As I looked at it, I was reminded of something that took place many years ago...

The Superior at the convent of the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Warsaw, located at 59, Kazimierzowska Street², during World War II, was sr. Wanda Garczyńska. It is difficult to explain sr. Wanda’s wartime role in a few words. The convent in Kazimierzowska Street, among other things, provided a refuge for Jewish children, a meeting place for the Polish resistance, and a centre for prayer and worship in the midst of a nightmare. Sister Wanda was posthumously awarded the title “Righteous Among the Nations” by the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, Yad Vashem in Israel.

On the wall of one of the rooms at 59, Kazimierzowska Street, known as the “rose room”, a similar crucifix hung. A black cross with a large white plaster figure of Christ, more than 1,5

¹ Mt 2:9b-11 (New Jerusalem Bible)

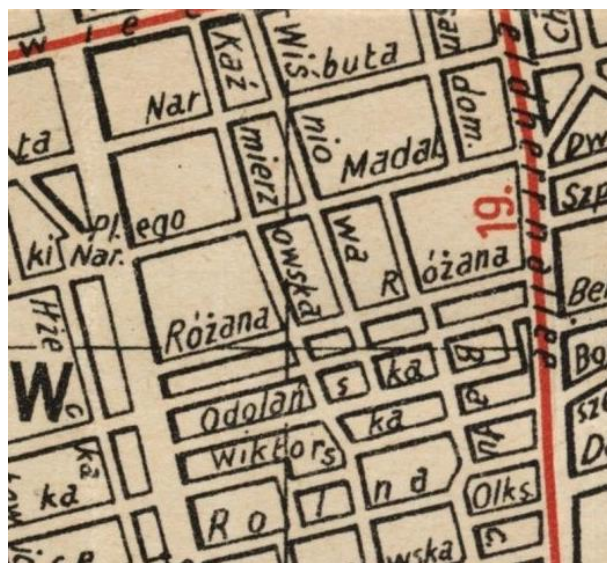
²This building no longer exists. The current location of the Congregation’s convent in Warsaw is Jerzego Zaruby Street

metres high. The room was next to the chapel, with which it had a connecting door, although this was usually closed. During the first month of the Nazi occupation of Poland, this crucifix suddenly fell from the wall. The wood of the cross shattered into fragments, but the figure, which had become detached from the cross, sustained no damage at all. Sister Wanda took the figure of Christ to her cell, and laid it on the bed. At night, she would take the figure off the bed and lay it on the desk. In the morning, she honoured it with a kiss, and replaced it on the bed, saying “May You feel good there Lord Jesus – we have one bed, You have it during the day, and I at night.”

Sister Wanda lived with this figure of Jesus – shared her cell with Him. Reading about her life, and the situation she faced as the Superior of a convent where the lives of all the sisters were at risk every day, because of the activities they were involved in, it is not hard to see, that she shared not only her cell, and her bed with Jesus. Her communion with Him was moment to moment; her trust and reliance on Him, radical. Where He led her, she followed. She had learnt how to live with Jesus, and how to give Him to others through the sacrifice of her own comfort and safety. Revelation 14:4, speaks of those who “...follow the Lamb wherever He goes...”³ God gives great grace in great difficulty. We do not face what Sr. Wanda faced, but to follow the Lamb wherever He goes, focus on Him, open our hearts and live in His presence – this we can choose in whatever situation we find ourselves.



Sister Wanda Garczyńska



Map of wartime Warsaw, showing Kazimierzowska Street

³ Revelation 4:14b (New Jerusalem Bible)