

**Address by Father James McCurry, OFM Conv.
during the Ceremony Posthumously Awarding the Order of the White Eagle
to Father Łucjan Królikowski
Washington, D.C. - June 24, 2020**

During the past ten years, when I had the privilege of serving as the Minister Provincial of the late Franciscan Friar Łucjan Krolikowski, I frequently tried to speak a few words of Polish with him, even though I am Irish. Each time I attempted to speak Polish, Father Łucjan always smiled – and what a great beautiful smile he had! However, I never knew whether Father Łucjan was smiling at me, with a “smile of approval,” because my Polish was OK; or with a “smile of pity” because my Polish was so poor. Today, in Father Łucjan’s honor, I shall try to speak in Polish – and I pray that he will indeed be smiling down from Heaven upon me and upon all of you.

Most especially, I pray today that Father Łucjan will be smiling from Heaven upon the great President of the Republic of Poland – upon you, Mr. President Andrzej Duda. Last September, I had the joy of driving Father Łucjan to meet you in New Britain, Connecticut. He had just celebrated his 100th birthday. You personally greeted him at the end of Holy Mass at Holy Cross Church. Afterwards, Father Łucjan told me that he considered his meeting with you, the President of his beloved homeland, to be one of the greatest honors of his lifetime. Little did Father Łucjan know then that today, nine months later, you would be conferring upon him, posthumously, the highest honor which the Republic of Poland can confer upon one of its citizens, the Order of the White Eagle. With profound gratitude, I humbly accept this noble decoration in the name and memory of Father Łucjan.

As you know, Father Łucjan was a member of the Order of Friars Minor Conventual. We Franciscans first came to Poland in the year 1236. Today’s ceremony marks a unique moment in the 800-year-long history of the Franciscan Order. For the first time in Franciscan history, and in Polish history, the Order of the White Eagle is being conferred upon a Franciscan friar. How fitting, indeed, it is, that the humble Polish Franciscan Łucjan Krolikowski is the recipient! Your decision, Mr. President, to bestow this decoration upon Father Łucjan inspires all of us who are here present at this ceremony today. Not only we, but all the people of Poland, and all Franciscans throughout the world, rejoice today. Together we are all soaring with Father Łucjan on the wings of the White Eagle, raising our voices in a hymn of praise to God and Fatherland.

Father Łucjan liked to describe his century-long journey of life as a “Franciscan Odyssey.” As a 15-year old boy, young Zbigniew (later given the religious name “Łucjan”) felt attracted by the future St. Maximilian Kolbe to enter Niepokalanów, the famous Franciscan “City of the Immaculate” center of publishing and evangelization, near Warsaw. From the first moment Łucjan set foot at Niepokalanów in 1934, his “Franciscan Odyssey” would have an epic scope, like that of Odysseus in Homer’s mythology. In his old age, Father Łucjan looked back and marveled how the script of his “Franciscan Odyssey” could only have been written by the hand of a Loving God.

The Odyssey of Father Łucjan’s life defines the word “heroic” – as a friar; a Siberian exile; a priest-chaplain-soldier in General Anders’ army; a guardian of Polish war orphans and refugees at Tengeru camp in Tanzania, Africa; a new “Moses” leading the Polish orphans to repatriation in Canada; and finally as a patriarch and shepherd to generations of Polish in North America. Father Łucjan dreamed dreams and climbed mountains. Many times he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania with his Polish orphans, reminding them of the great Tatra Mountains in Poland, which their ancestors climbed in order to feel closer to God. He taught everyone to trust God and to face every challenge. His Polish spirit was unconquerable. His Franciscan love was limitless.

Father Łucjan entitled one of his many books, *Love Explained Everything to Me (Miłość mi wszystko wyjaśniła)*. That was the principle which animated his heroic pastoral care of the Siberian Polish orphans. That was the grace which gave him the strength to defy Joseph Stalin’s plan to repatriate the orphans in Soviet-controlled Poland. That was the force that pulsed through his whole Franciscan Odyssey of life.

We have thousands of photographs of Father Łucjan taken at various stages of his life’s journey. Among the most prized of those pictures is the one of him smiling broadly behind the figure of St. Maximilian Kolbe, guardian of

Niepokalanów, on the day that Friar Łucjan professed his first vows as a Conventual Franciscan friar, on August 29, 1939 – three days before World War II began with Hitler’s invasion of Poland.

We cannot underestimate the enormous impact that St. Maximilian Kolbe had upon Friar Łucjan. Father Łucjan was one of St. Maximilian Kolbe’s last protégés before the saint’s martyrdom at Auschwitz during World War II. In memory of the relationship between Father Łucjan Krolikowski and St. Maximilian Kolbe, I wish now to present to you, Mr. President Andrzej Duda, a first-class relic of St. Maximilian – precious hairs from his beard. Thank you for bestowing the Order of the White Eagle upon the late Father Łucjan Krolikowski. Please now accept this relic-gift as a token of esteem and blessing from the Franciscan Friars in the name of Father Łucjan. God bless you.