

---

COMMEMORATING THE SEVENTH CENTENARY OF THE DEATH OF SAINT HYACINTH

---



CARDINAL WYSZYŃSKI BLESSES PEOPLE WITH RELIC OF SAINT HYACINTH

# DOMINICANA

Vol. XLII

SEPTEMBER, 1957

No. 3

## APOSTLE OF THE NORTH

ROBERT REID, O.P.



LONG, RUMBLING TRAIN ground slowly to a stop in Rome's Terminal Railroad Station one day last May. From it stepped a smiling, alert man of 56 to greet the enthusiastic crowds who had gathered to await his arrival. The man was Stefan Cardinal Wyszynski, Primate of Poland, and one of the most outstanding prelates in the Church today. Under his leadership, the Polish people have won a "quiet" and successful revolution against their Communist masters. Today, the people of Poland enjoy a degree of religious freedom unparalleled anywhere else in the Communist world. Imprisoned bishops, priests and religious are free, religious teaching is once more allowed in the schools, the people are free to worship God publicly again—all these through the prudent and zealous efforts of this dynamic Polish prelate.

The Primate was in Rome to receive the red hat of a Cardinal of the Church. Actually, it had been awarded to him *in absentia* in 1953, but he had been unable to receive it in person at that time because of his imprisonment by the Communists. Now this Polish apostle would be honored as a Prince of the Church and return to his beloved country with renewed faith and confidence with which to inspire Poland's more than 27 million Catholics.

This year of 1957 is indeed an important one in the history of Poland's Catholicism. It is, too, a happy coincidence that 700 years ago another event occurred marking another milestone in that history. In the year 1257, death came to Father Hyacinth Odrowatz, O.P., better known to us as St. Hyacinth, O.P.—*The Light of Poland* and the *Apostle of the North*.

## MIRACLE AT SAN SIXTO

In the year 1219, another Polish bishop was arriving in the Eternal City, following much the same route as Cardinal Wyszynski did last May. He was Ivo Odrowatz, Bishop-elect of Cracow, who was going to Rome to receive the confirmation of the Holy See. In his retinue were his two nephews, Hyacinth and Ceslaus, and two young clerics, Herman the Teuton and Henry of Moravia. The little band of Poles were graciously received as guests at a monastery near Rome's Appian Way.

There were at the time many convents of nuns in the city of Rome which had fallen into grave abuses and were greatly in need of reform. Pope Innocent III had tried unsuccessfully to gather all these nuns together into a single convent and place them under a reformed rule and now the work had been taken up by his successor, Honorius. The new Pope had wisely entrusted the project to the zealous and prudent founder of the new religious Order of Friars Preachers, Dominic Guzman. After much labor and not a few disappointments, the work was now almost completed and all was in readiness for the installation of the nuns in Dominic's own convent of Saint Sixtus which he had given in return for that of Santa Sabina on the Aventine. Many important prelates had been invited for the solemn ceremonies including Bishop Odrowatz and his four young companions. Little did they know that they were about to witness an event that would change the whole course of their lives and that of their country, as well.

The solemn ceremonies had just begun when a messenger abruptly entered the hall and announced excitedly that his master who had been on the way to the installation had fallen from his horse and was dead. St. Dominic left to view the body and order it to be brought to a room nearby the chapel where he was about to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. After the Mass was finished, the Saint arranged the broken limbs of the young man and began to pray over his dead body. Dominic made the sign of the cross over the corpse and, immediately, the young man arose, happy and unharmed!

Needless to say, the effect this miracle had upon the crowd was electrifying. Among the most profoundly moved was the group of clerics from Poland. They sought to know more of this wonder-worker and his new Order. In the days that followed, they conversed with the Holy Patriarch and listened with wonder and admiration to the plans and thoughts he had formed.

Bishop Ivo immediately saw that such a group was greatly needed in the countries of the North and begged the Saint to send some Dominicans back with him to Poland. The Friar Preacher explained that he, too, realized the need for apostles in that region but, alas, he had none whatever to send. But, he told the bishop, what of the four young men in his company—why could not they become Friars and return to preach the Gospel in their native land? After much serious reflection and discussion, the group decided that they would take the holy man's advice and Bishop Ivo returned to his diocese alone to prepare the way for the coming of the Friars.

#### PREPARATION FOR A MISSION

A fresco on the wall of the Chapter Room in Santa Sabina vividly describes what next happened. The four young men, Hyacinth, Ceslaus, Henry and Herman, are shown prostrate at the Holy Founder's feet begging admission to the habit of his Order. St. Dominic is shown placing the habit on the shoulders of the young Hyacinth. We are told by early historians of the Order that the Holy Founder himself acted as Novice-Master for the group. Under Dominic's zealous and intensified spiritual training program, Hyacinth and the others progressed rapidly and, within six months time, were ready to return to their homeland as Dominican Apostles. Hyacinth, we are told, soon outdistanced the others in the advancement toward perfection. "Soon his religious fervor and austerity of life, zeal for God's glory and for the salvation of souls was comparable only to that of St. Dominic," says a biographer.

The four young Poles bid a reluctant farewell to their Holy Father. The Saint blessed these young apostles of his as they set off on foot, "with neither purse nor script," to conquer worlds for Christ. But, not even the Holy Patriarch could have envisioned the phenomenal success these new Dominicans would have.

#### RETURN TO CRACOW

On their journeys through Northern Italy, the Friars preached whenever and wherever the opportunity presented itself. They did not stop in any one place very long, however, as they were anxious to reach their own country. But, they eventually came to Freisach, a city in what is now Austria. There they were graciously welcomed by the Archbishop of Salzburg who

was a great friend and admirer of St. Dominic ever since he had met him at the Lateran Council. At that time, he had begged for some Dominicans to be sent to his diocese. The preaching of the Friars was enthusiastically received by the people of the city. The whole area took on new life; priests and laymen soon flocked to the Preachers and begged admission to the Order. The Archbishop was greatly enthused over the whole affair and offered a large monastery to the Order as a training house for postulants. The little band held a meeting and it was decided that Herman the Teuton would be the first Prior of the new foundation. With matters thus settled, Hyacinth and the others resumed their trip to Poland.

Along the way, Father Hyacinth's thoughts must have turned often to his native land to which he was returning and, perhaps, even to his birthplace near Breslau, Silesia. His family was a noble one and some of the most famous leaders in the history of the country were descendants of the ancient house of Odrowatz. As a boy, Hyacinth loved to roam through the corridors and halls of the great castle of Lanka which was his home and gaze with admiration on the huge paintings of his ancestors which hung there. One of his favorites was his paternal grandfather who had achieved fame in the battles against the Tartars. He had two illustrious sons, Eustochius, Count of Konski, who was the father of Hyacinth and Ceslaus, and Ivo who was to be consecrated Bishop of Cracow, Poland in 1218.

It was to their saintly uncle that the early training and education of young Hyacinth and Ceslaus Odrowatz was entrusted. He undertook this task while still a Canon of Cracow, but soon realized that he could not give enough time to what he considered a most important project. So it happened that Hyacinth was sent to the University of Prague and afterwards to Bologna. It was while he was at the latter institution that the young student decided to enter the Sacred Priesthood. Ordination soon followed as did appointments to be a Canon of Cracow and a member of the Episcopal Council. The young priest soon became renowned for his works of charity and zeal. Meanwhile, Hyacinth's brother, Ceslaus, had also become a priest and was provost and treasurer of St. Mary's Church at Sandomir. In the year 1218, the venerable Bishop of Cracow resigned his episcopal office because of his advanced age and ill health and Ivo Odrowatz was elected to be his successor. It was necessary for him to go to Rome in order to receive confirmation of the election and he chose Hyacinth and

Ceslaus, along with the other clerics mentioned earlier, to be his companions. How providential that young Hyacinth and Ceslaus should have made that momentous journey to Rome! When they left Poland, little did they realize that they would be returning as Dominican Preachers!

#### FIRST POLISH FOUNDATION

After a long and busy journey through Styria, Austria, Moravia and Silesia, the travellers finally reached Cracow. The reception they received was one of the greatest in the history of that city. Crowds of the clergy and the faithful accompanied the little band to the Priory that had been prepared for them. But, they had hardly settled there when the great number of postulants seeking admission made it imperative that they move to larger quarters. A large convent adjoining the Church of the Holy Trinity provided the answer to the problem of space and so, on the Feast of the Assumption in the year 1222, the first Dominican house in Poland opened its doors.

Hyacinth himself remained on as superior in Cracow while Ceslaus and Henry went to work in Bohemia. At Cracow, the Saint found much work to be done. He preached constantly to both the diocesan clergy and to the people. All flocked to hear his sermons and were amazed and edified by this new kind of "monk." But, soon Hyacinth was extending his apostolate to the surrounding provinces. New houses of the Order were founded at Sandomir and other neighboring cities. It was on the return trip from Sandomir that Hyacinth performed one of his countless miracles, that of crossing the Vistula river using his *cappa* for a raft. This miracle was one of the ones cited in his Bull of Canonization.

#### APOSTLE OF THE NORTH

After his amazing and successful tour of preaching and evangelizing in Poland had seemed to restore the zeal and piety of the people, Father Hyacinth felt that the work could now be left in the hands of the brethren in Cracow. After making final preparations and making his farewells, Father Hyacinth set out for the Polish frontier in the company of two other Friars, Godinus and Florian. At last he was about to fulfill his goal: to evangelize the Northern Kingdoms.

They first reached Pomerania and Prussia which they found torn with heresy and idolatry. Their untiring zeal attained mi-



raculous effects and not only did they succeed in converting great numbers of the people, but they were able to found many convents of the Order to help perpetuate their mission. Priors were begun in Kulm, Camina near the Oder River; at Elbinge and Presmil, Prussia and at the modern-day city of Danzig.

Denmark, Norway and Sweden were the next scenes of the Dominicans' labors. Their success is best expressed in a brief of Pope Gregory IX, dated 1231 addressed to "All the princes and peoples of the North" instructing them "to follow the instructions of the Friars Preachers, those saintly apostles who have drawn you from darkness of error into the path of truth and justice."

Hyacinth and his companions moved on to Russia where they converted many who had fallen into the Greek schism. This was perhaps the most difficult area of activity for the Saint, mostly because of the Grand Duke Vladimir's repeated attempts to thwart the priest's every effort. Hyacinth travelled throughout Russia, visiting Moscow and Kiev. He was in the latter city when it was attacked by the Tartars. He carried the Blessed Sacrament and a statue of the Blessed Mother out of his Order's church and through a savage band of Tartars. This event is a favorite one for artistic representations of the Saint. Now Hyacinth began the long return trip to his native Poland. He was very gratified to see the success with which the various foundations of the Order which he had begun were meeting. Finally, in the year 1241, Hyacinth arrived once more in Cracow.

He again took up residence in the Convent of the Holy Trinity which he had founded in Cracow and made it his home for the next two years. He used this time to renew his own spiritual vigor by long fastings, prayer and the most severe penances. It was during this period, too, that some of his most outstanding miracles were wrought, such as the raising of the dead and walking on the waters and the restoring of sight to the blind.

#### LAST MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

After this spiritual and physical retreat, Hyacinth once more set out on his missionary journeys both to places he had already visited and to new areas. After seeing the fruits of his labors once more among the Prussians, Muscovites and Danes, he set out for the country of the Cuman Tartars, whose conversion was St. Dominic's life-long ambition. He found traces of the missionaries sent to these people by Jordan of Saxony in 1228 and soon

renewed their converts and made thousands of others. The extent and success of his apostolic journeys is almost beyond belief. We have reliable evidence today that this aging Dominican preached the Gospel in Tartary and Tibet and even reached the Great Wall of China! Returning, he passed once more through Russia and stopped at Lithuania where he had founded a flourishing convent at Vilna. Finally, at the age of 72, Hyacinth Odrowatz returned home to Cracow. Even now, his zeal was unbounded. He preached, heard confessions, visited the sick and advised his brethren.

On the feast of St. Dominic in the year 1257, the saintly apostle was stricken with a severe fever which marked the beginning of his last illness. On the Eve of the Feast of the Assumption, he was well enough to assist at the Midnight Office and to attend Holy Mass which he could no longer celebrate himself because of his weakened condition. The end, however, was near and after devoutly receiving Holy Communion (which was also to be his Viaticum), he received Extreme Unction and was assisted back to his cell. His beloved and weeping brethren surrounded their saintly father's bedside. In his weakened voice, he exhorted them for the last time. "Into Thy Hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit," he cried out as he breathed his last breath. It was August 15, 1257.

#### SAINTHOOD

The saint was buried in Cracow where thousands flocked to his tomb which became the scene of many miracles and wonders. Just the recounting and enumerating of his miracles take up 33 pages in the *Acta Sanctorum*. His brother in religion, St. Vincent Ferrer, was probably one of the few Saints to surpass him in the number and wondrousness of miracles.

Peoples of all ranks and all nationalities besought the Holy See to canonize Hyacinth Odrowatz. The kings and hierarchy of Poland made earnest appeals for this end. In 1527 and 1530, Bulls were issued permitting the Dominican Order and the Church in Poland to celebrate his feast. Clement VIII enrolled Hyacinth in the catalogue of the Saints in 1594 and Pope Urban VIII extended the feast to the Universal Church, so that all throughout the world on August 17, St. Hyacinth, Apostle of the North, would be honored.



## LIGHT OF POLAND

So the journey to Rome and back to Poland by Cardinal Wyszyński just 700 years after St. Hyacinth's death is a significant one, indeed. This Prince of the Church returned to Poland to restore and renew the faith of his people as did the first Polish Dominican so many years ago. The Catholic Church in Poland has grown and been strengthened until today it numbers more than 27 million Catholics in 24 dioceses.

The Dominican Order is still very much alive and active in Poland today, despite the incredible persecutions of both the Nazis and the Communists. Dominicans are doing all they can to make this Seventh Centenary of their Saint a great event even under the limited freedom they enjoy. As an indication of this, we quote here two brief excerpts from letters received from the Polish Province of the Dominican Order and reprinted in the magazine *Ideales* published by the Spanish Dominicans at St. Stephen's House of Studies, Salamanca, Spain (1957 Edition):

*December 11th, 1956:* ". . . Right now we are preparing to celebrate the VII Centenary of the death of St. Hyacinth, the Founder of our Province. Here in Cracow, we have his tomb and a very beautiful chapel built in Renaissance style. . . ."

*February 21st, 1957:* ". . . For the occasion of the VII Centenary of the death of St. Hyacinth, we have organized here at Cracow a great "Hyacinthian" Exposition of books, images and various other objects belonging to the cult of the Saint. In connection with the Centenary, also, there appeared in January the first number of the *Historical Review* of our province entitled *Studia Hyacinthia*. Unfortunately, it was mimeographed.

"According to the wishes of the Very Rev. Father Provincial, our Studium is presently preparing a mystery play in honor of St. Hyacinth. We are also expecting a visit from the Most Rev. Father General, but nothing has been said officially. . . ."

Let us all join with these sons of St. Hyacinth in honoring him during these trying days for his beloved Poland. Let his centenary be a reminder to us of all he did for the Church, the Order and Poland. Let us ask the Blessed Mother, to whom the Saint had such special devotion, to look after her children with loving care. Last May, more than 500,000 Poles renewed their national

dedication to the Mother of God at the Shrine of the Madonna of Czestochowa where King John Casimir dedicated his throne and his people to Our Lady Queen of Poland just 300 years ago. Following this, their beloved Cardinal celebrated an open-air Mass which marked the beginning of a nine-year novena which will end in the 1000th anniversary of Poland's beginning as a Christian land.

Yes, 1957 has been an important year for Poland, just as was 1257. May their modern-day Dominicans and Apostles be as successful as were Hyacinth Odrowatz, Blessed Ceslaus and the other first Polish Dominicans over 700 years ago. May the "Miracle Worker" of Poland come to his country's aid today.

Poland is knowing a flowering of the Catholic Faith greater than any in the world today. She owes much to her modern apostle and protector, Stephan Cardinal Wyszynski, but even more, an everlasting debt of gratitude is owed to her finest son and protector for seven long centuries, the Dominican, St. Hyacinth.

SAINT HYACINTH,  
LIGHT OF POLAND,  
APOSTLE OF THE NORTH,  
MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWER OF THE ORDER  
OF PREACHERS,

*Pray for Us!*