

FORTY HOURS DEVOTION 2009

Homily given by Fr. Dennis Koliński, SJC

St. Peter's Church in Volo

18 October 2009

When Lithuanian troops invaded northern Poland in the year 1290, a priest in the village of Głotowo buried a gold-plated silver ciborium in a field so that the soldiers wouldn't take it. However, he had done it so hastily that he didn't check to see that there was still a consecrated host inside of it. He, along with many others were killed and the village destroyed.

Then many years later, as a farmer was plowing that very same field around dusk, the oxen pulling his plow suddenly stopped in their tracks when a very intense light emanated from the ground, at a spot where the plow had just turned over some of the soil. It lit up the field as if it was noontime and the oxen bowed down. Wondering what the source of light might be the farmer dug into the dirt and found the ciborium that had been hidden there many years before with a snow-white host still in it. This was the source of that mysterious light and the animals had bowed down in adoration of the Eucharist.

In the year 1354, another mysterious event took place in southern Poland in the royal city of Kraków. Thinking that the Church's sacred vessels were made of solid gold, thieves broke into All Saints Church one day, pried the tabernacle open and took a monstrance that was inside. When they realized that it wasn't gold, they threw it into a marsh just outside the city near a village named Bawół. Totally unaware of what had happened, people in the area began to see an unusual light emanating from the murky waters. Word of this very quickly made its way to Bishop Bodzęta of Kraków, who then ordered an investigation into the supernatural light. Upon discovering that it originated

from a Host in the stolen monstrance lying in the waters of the marsh, the bishop ordered that it be retrieved and returned in a solemn procession to the church from where it had been stolen. Delegates from all of the city's parishes took part and King Kazimierz the Great commanded that a church named Corpus Christi be erected on the spot in which the monstrance was found. It is a large beautiful Gothic structure that I have visited many times.

Then, in 1399, three Jews living in the western Polish city of Poznań, who had a particular hatred for Christians, persuaded a servant girl to steal three consecrated hosts from the Dominican Church in return for a large reward. When she handed the Hosts over to the men, they took them into the basement of a house in the city and began to stab them with knives. As they did, blood began to gush out of the Hosts. Some of it struck the eye of a blind girl, who happened to be in the basement with them and she immediately regained her sight. Thrown into a panic the desecrators tried to destroy the Hosts, but unable to do so, they threw them into a marsh outside the city near the Warta River.

Not long after that, a young shepherd boy, who was passing by, noticed three luminous Hosts suspended in the air at the place where they had been discarded. Unable to contain himself, the boy ran home to tell his father and the authorities. At first, they didn't believe him, but before long the entire city had come out to see this remarkable thing. But it was only after the local bishop, Wojciech Jastębiec, beseeched heaven with fervent prayers was he able to retrieve the Hosts, which then descended into a pyx, which he was holding. The bishop immediately ordered that a solemn procession accompany the Hosts back into the city to the Church of St. Mary Magdalene.

A wooden chapel was erected on the spot where the miracle had taken place and became the site of many pilgrimages. Eventually, King Władysław Jagiełło came to know of the miracle and made a pilgrimage to the site himself. As a sign of devotion he ordered that a church named Corpus Christi be built on the site at which the miracle took place, where even until the present day, the miraculous Hosts are preserved, along with the blood stained table on which the desecration took place.

For some reason Poland has been on my mind a lot these last few weeks and having recently reread these accounts, they seemed so appropriate for today. Most of you have heard about other great Eucharistic miracles, such as in Lanciano or Orvieto but it is good to hear about others because it helps strengthen and confirm our belief in the Real Presence, which is under attack so much today.

But Eucharistic miracles are not something only confined to the past. They are still happening, even today. There are reports that a new Eucharistic miracle may have taken place almost exactly one year ago. On October 12, 2008, in northeastern Poland, a Host accidentally dropped on the floor as a priest was distributing Communion in the parish church of Sokółka. He picked it up, put it in a vasculum (the small finger bowl next to the tabernacle in which we purify our fingers after distributing Communion) and then later, transferred it to a safe in the sacristy. Upon opening the safe seven days later, on the 19th of October, the priest noticed what looked like a bloodstain on the Host. He notified the local bishop in Białystok, after which samples from the Host were sent to two separate laboratories for analysis. Both laboratories concluded that the samples appeared to be living heart muscle tissue. The commission, which investigated the incident determined that there was no third-part intervention. The case has now been sent to the

Apostolic Nunciature in Warsaw. Unbeknownst to us, our observance of Forty Hours here very well could be the one year anniversary of the most recent Eucharistic miracle in the world.

Eucharistic miracles continue to take place, even in these times of skepticism—perhaps because of it, because many of the Eucharistic miracles of the past have occurred in the face of doubt about the nature of the Real Presence. In the past, this has usually been in cases of doubt on the part of individuals. Today, unfortunately, we live in a time of mass doubt—even among many Catholics.

Sometimes, God determines that a supernatural event such as this is necessary to help re-ignite faith. But in so many more instances, he works through normal means, through what He has already given us and through the faith of normal people like you and me. Although we don't have bloodstained or light radiating Hosts here in Volo, we do have the greatest miracle that one could hope for—the miracle of bread and wine transformed into the Most Precious Body and Blood of Our Lord and Savior every day on our altar as our spiritual food to sustain us and help us grow closer to Him. And those of you, who have been able to spend time here with Our Eucharistic Lord during these Forty Hours have been, through your silent adoration, a great testament to our parish's profound belief in the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

I thank you once again for your participation in this act of devotion, which will be the source of many blessings and graces that God will shower down upon us because you have shown that you are so deeply in love with His Son.