

MONUMENT OF A POLE, FRANCISCAN, MISSIONARY AND
HERO OF JAPAN ERECTED IN POLAND

A great Franciscan missionary to Japan the late Brother Zenon Żebrowski, was honored with a monument by his fellow-countrymen, which stood in his birthplace, Czarni, Poland, in the Niepokalanego Poczęcia Najświętszej NMP Parish. Brother Zenon, the joint-creator of the Polish Niepokalanowa in the neighborhood of Warsaw, together with Father Maksymilian Kolbe, left on a mission in 1930, to remote Japan. A country bursting with blossoming cherry trees, became his second native country. This Polish Franciscan devoted himself to his new homeland without any restrictions. Already, before the war, he organized help and guidance for the most needy, homeless, and "street people". Brother Zenon fortunately survived the Atomic Bomb blast in Nagasaki, and witnessed the "infernal hell" of burnt land. Vast destruction, waves of suffering, and human tragedies drew out individual characteristics in the sensitive heart of a Polish Franciscan that became the inexhaustible source of energy of Br. Zenon's charitable activity. A blue-eyed Franciscan from far-off Poland encircled his care to people most in need, cripples, sick and homeless. He took charge of the neglected children of the street, and established the famous hospice "Ari no Maci," so called, "Miasta mrówek" ("Towns of Ants") for them in an insular country. These hospices for the poorest, with the intercession of the bearded Franciscan, were started up in almost every large city of the Country of the "Setting Sun". During the post-war period, Brother Zenon got through with humanitarian help to victims of many elemental disasters/earth quakes, typhoons, fires, floods.../. His help outran far beyond the borders of Japan, and reached among others, as far as Korea, Vietnam,

Nicaragua, India. He also extended help to other countries where people suffered having been victims of different elemental tragedies of life. Brother Zenon engaged other people in helping him in the matter of his work with the poor and hungry, of their own free will. One of the close collaborators of the Polish-Samaritan was the daughter of the Japanese professor Satoko Kitahara. She lived amongst the poor children in one of Brother Zenon's hospices, dying there, having the reputation of saintliness. For his boundless devotion, and unselfish fullness of love of Christian work amongst the poor and homeless, helpless children in need of a modest Polish Franciscan, he received the utmost regard of recognition from the society of the Country of the "blooming cherry tree". ("kwitnącej wiśni") The Japanese Government granted him free passage to all means of transportation in the whole Country and decorated him with the highest decorations, among which was "The Order of the Golden Treasure". ("Order Świętego Skarbu"). In Japan, films were made of him, as well as a few books written about the life and work of a great philanthropist in a Franciscan habit. Still during his lifetime, a magnificent monument was erected for him at the foot of the famous mount Fudzi-San, and the children in school sang songs and read tales of the splendid Franciscan with the white beard. At the present time in Japan, a consecutive film is in the making about a Polish Franciscan entitled, "Brother Zenon – Boundless Love" / Brat Zenon – Bezgraniczna Miłość / - at a later date, this film will be shown in other languages, such as English, Polish and Italian. Brother Zenon through his Christian life and unselfish charitable work for the cause of the needy enrolled himself for good with golden letters in the page of the Catholic Church and the whole Japanese Country. He died with the reputation of a Saint; he is a candidate on the altar. In agreement with his wishes, the Japanese laid the bones of their benefactor in the

heart of the country of the "setting sun", in Tokyo. (wschodzącego słońca").

The Polish Government also appreciated the work and the magnificent specific position of an "ambassador" of Poland on Japanese land, by awarding him in 1976 with the "Golden Insignia of Merit": ("Złota Odznaką Zasługi"). The following authors and books took a positional stance in the popularisation of this likeness situated on the Vistula: O. Ludomir Jan Bernatek "Opowieść o bracie Zenonie Żebrowskim" ("A Story of Brother Zenon Zebrowski), Toru Matsui "Zeno nie ma czasu umrzeć" ("Zeno, doesn't have Time to Die"), Paul Glynn "Uśmiech gałganiarki". ("The Smile of a Ragged Female Ragamuffin"). Several "Masters of Arts" was written, amongst which were also found my own social standing. Exhibitions also served as a means to better recognise the character of a Franciscan Philanthropist in Łódź, Warsaw, Legnica and other Polish cities. Those exhibitions, in which I also, played an active part, were organised by The Polish -Japanese Society, whose Headquarters is in Lodz. A few years ago, in the town of Ostrołęka, in order to honour a great son of the Kurpion land, one of the streets was named Brother Zenon Żebrowski. It is beyond any doubt, that the most important stage of popularising Brother Zenon in Poland was, the 19th of September in 1998, in which the unveiling and the blessing of his monument was achieved. This ceremony assembled four bishops, representatives of educational institutions of theology, numerous clergy of neighboring decants, Franciscans from Niepokalanów of the guardsman

monastery and Father Provincial from Warsaw, representatives of the Japanese Embassy, delegates of the Polish government, administrators of viovodeship from Ostrołęki and Łomży, Senators, representatives of different Provincial Government Officials, Social and Political Organizations, Cultured and Educated people from Poland and Japan, as well as representatives of the Media. The first part of the ceremony started at 9:00 o'clock, with the educational symposium dedicated to Brother Zenon. The first guest speaker was, Father Roman Soczewka, a Franciscan from Niepokalanów, who delivered a lecture entitled "Brother Zeno in the opinion of the Superior of Fr. Maksymilian and brotherhood mutual brothers", ("Brat Zeno w opinii przełożonego O. Maksymiliana i współbraci"). The following speaker, Bishop Edward Samsel spoke about "The Spirituality of Brother Zenon", ("Duchowość Brata Zenona"), Professor of the University of Osaka, Mr. Yoshikazu Matsui, took up the subject of, "Brother Zenon on the background of the Kurpiosk's and Japan's local culture", ("Brat Zenon na tle kultury kurpiowskiej i japońskiej"). The other Japanese Speaker, Mr. Shizuki Edami from Tokyo presented the following problem: "The Life and Works of Borthter Zenon in Japan", ("Życie i praca Brata Zenona w Japonii"). There was also a lecture on "At the basis of a man's spirituality" and "The hundredth anniversary of Brother Zenon's birth", ("U podstaw duchowości człowieka" i "Setna rocznica urodzin Brata Zenona"). The educational session was closed by a brother of "The Apostle of Goodness" (Apostoła dobroci)", from Canada, Fr. Jerzy Żebrowski's lecture was entitled, "Personal reflections on the subject of Brother Zenon", ("Osobiste refleksje na temat Brata Zenona"). At the 13:00th hour, with the sounds of the Parish orchestra and a firing salute of the fighting squad, the grand unveiling of the monument took place. Weighing tons, the bronze mold represents a two-meter

figure of a Monk, Franciscan with a beard, in the company of two children. A Japanese boy, dressed in the Japanese traditional kimono, and a Polish girl in the Regional local costume who represent two such remote Nations, and two such diametrical different cultures. The figure of Brother Zenon links the two Countries with their own baggages of specific values and shows the world over and above the character of Christian Nationalism and love. This monument has become a symbol of friendship between the Polish and Japanese Nations. On a special foundation, built from the original stones taken from the now non-existent home where Br. Zenon was born is a seven-ton socle on which is immortalized the human shape of Brother Zenon with children. After a few opening words, the official cutting of the white and red ribbon, which encircled the monument was performed by the Bishop Stanisław Stefanek, with the assistance of the following individuals: Minister of the Japanese Embassy in Warsaw, Mr. Hitohiro Ishida, the viovode of Ostrołęka, Mr. Jacek Duchnowski, the head of the House of Commons of Czarnia, Mr. Czesław Jurga, and the Pastor of the local Parish Fr. Waclaw Nowacki. The Cantilena choir of Ostrołęki sang through the magnificent song about Brother Zenon entitled, "St. Nicholas in the black habit", ("Święty Mikołaj w czarnym habicie"). The Kurpiow band also played. The blessings were performed by the Franciscan, Polish Bishop – Missionary from Brazil, Bishop Jan Wilk. The ceremonial celebration of the Eucharist was presided over by the Brazilian Bishop with the assistance of Bishop Stanisław Stefanek, who delivered the Word of God and Bishop Tadeusz Zawitowski. Fellow-Brothers of Brother Zenon also celebrated together with him the Holy Eucharist, as well as numerous Franciscan Fathers and Priests gathered

from neighboring Parishes and localities. In the Church, one could look over a rich exhibition on Brother Zenon Żebrowski, organized by Mr. Krzysztof Piguła, Sylvia, and Konrad Szczepara of the Polish-Japanese Society – Łódź Division. On the church grounds was a stand of religious books. Amongst many items were found a few books about Brother Zenon. One could also purchase religious articles as well as, artistic pieces of work created by local artists. After a festive dinner, which was held at the House of Culture, a short concert of the Cantilena Choir followed. Resulting from these festivities, a Regional Literary Contest on the subject of Brother Zenon was also announced. The number of participants in this contest was fifteen persons. Very attractive souvenirs were prepared for the best. All participants were presented with consolation prizes. After the end of the Holy Mass, a folkloristic festival continued from the early afternoon until late at night. Brother Zenon's happy countrymen and crowds of guests who arrived enjoyed themselves until late at night, admiring the folkloristic troupes and the competition of bands, taking part in dance tournament, and in festive troupes by the fireside on the neighboring field. Doubtless to say, that the 19th of September, became "a Spiritual feast", (Uczta duchową) for the citizens of Czarni and its neighborhood: This was a very important event for the Parish and the whole of the Church of Łomży. This event became also, a Franciscan holiday and assumed measurement of significance of the Country, which proof of this was, if only for the fact that the Polish Television and Television of Niepokalanów were present. Naturally, there would not be any festive celebration of 100 years of the birth of Brother Zenon if it were not for the big heart and such enormous engagement of the

Pastor of Czarnia Parish, Fr. Wacław Nowacki, together with the whole congregation of children, youth, neighboring Houses of Commons, schools, and teachers as well as, Organizations and Associations together with representatives of local governments. It is worthwhile to add that, in the building of the old rectory, just by the church, is being erected a museum devoted to a Polish "Showgunner", (Szogunowi) Brother Zenon in Japan. Quite possibly, that on the day of unveiling and blessing of the monument of "the Apostle of Goodness", ("Apostoła dobroci") were sown "Evangelical seeds", ("ewangeliczne ziarna"), which after some years will fructify with new callings to the Religious Order, from which derived a heir that day, namely, Brother Zenon Żebrowski; and surely, this event will sensitize everyone to the needs of the Church's mission in the whole world.

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