

and afflict your heritage.

⁶They kill the widow and the sojourner,
and murder the fatherless (PS 94)

On 4 of July in the year two thousand, a group of several people gathered, most of them from outside of Kielce – mainly journalists, photo journalists, cameramen. We read out the names of the murdered ones, we lit 42 candles, and then we set off, in the direction of the Jewish cemetery at Pakosz. It took us 3254 steps to the grave of the victims. Jerzy Daniel, a Kielce journalist, noted: *“A march of repentance. A small group of locals participated, but that is not what is most important. Maybe in a year, or maybe in five years, there will be more of us. The most important thing is that it can still happen. After all, only recently the very thought to go out into the city streets on the anniversary of this event, which is the most prominently known about our city in the world, would be seen as extremely impudent, it not completely unreal. Decades had to pass since 4 July 1946, before those who had been murdered on that day in Kielce could return and demand to be remembered”*.

Today, there are hundreds of us. There are even two marches taking place today. The seventieth anniversary is commemorated with many conferences – the first one had already taken place in January, the two successive ones – in April and May. There will be at least two more tomorrow. Some have come here to pay respect to the memory of the murdered Jews and thus express their rejection of Anti-Semitism, chauvinism, xenophobia. Others want to honour the “victims of the provocation of the communist Security Service”. There are also those who commemorate the “victims of the murder by the court”. For some, the crime of 1946 is the “Kielce pogrom”, for others it is the “Jewish pogrom”. There are those who simply see it as “tragic events which took place in Kielce”, or nothing but a simple “communist provocation”, or a “political murder” – refuting the idea of the pogrom at all. Some believe that the perpetrators were people of Kielce, regular local residents who at least once a week addressed God with *“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”*. Others believe that the murderers were the representatives

said to the President of the French National Assembly: *“Ha! And what is it divides us? Our opinions? You must admit, it is indeed so little!”*.

Friends, so what does divide us? So little – only our opinions. And there is so much more, something so much more important that unites us.

I assume, I trust, I am convinced that nobody gathered here, whatever and however they might think about this morbid historical fact from July 1946, wants for anything as atrocious as this crime staining Polish soil to ever happen again, on whosever’s inspiration. I trust that we all want the same: so that nobody suffers, nobody loses their life due to hatred or political calculation, ignorance or superstition. So that no man or woman – created, after all to the likeness of God – is ever again harmed on the grounds of their language, skin colour, ethnicity or religion.

Could the crime of 1946 ever be repeated?

I fear that yes, it could.

I try to fathom just who inspires and provokes these great young Poles, these patriots manifesting their attachment to the Church and Homeland, to make that most despicable of all gestures - the Nazi variant of the Roman salute? Who inspires and instigates those who attack, physically or verbally, foreigners or immigrants and refugees who have come to this country? A 38 year old British citizen of Egyptian decent was beaten up in Gdańsk recently – so brutally that the doctors had to keep him in an induced coma for a number of weeks. In Warsaw, a similar attack took place against an entrepreneur from Pakistan, just several days after another assault of a Syrian refugee, working and living in Poland. A Ukrainian citizen was almost beaten to death in Brzeszcze – the two attackers did not like his “eastern accent”. Young Turks who study here, in Poland, are assaulted and offended on a daily basis – diplomats from Ankara had to intervene in their case. In Rzeszów, students from Portugal were subject to such aggressive attacks that they were placed in a separate dormitory and assigned a bodyguard. In Łódź, a Moslem woman from Algeria was first

Let no Catholic ever say that Poland needs “chemotherapy”.

Friends! Let us protect our Homeland against those who mock patriotism. St John Paul II, who now looks at us from so many plinths, taught us that “*Nationalism, particularly in its most extreme forms, is the antithesis of true patriotism*”. He recognized nationalism as “national egoism” which is contradictory to the civilization of love. It is English nationalism which in recent days was the reason for attacks against Polish people and institutions in the UK. After all, what else could it be?

Friends! We have much to do together. We can continue to organise marches, conferences and rallies. But perhaps we can also finally take care of the memorial dedicated to the Righteous Among the Nations which we have just passed. We can fill it in with new plaques carrying the names of the people who have been recognised with this beautiful title – people of whom we are so proud and who are the glory of this nation. Few visit the memorial now. And our Association is so small. We do what we can but we cannot do it alone. We need your help.

Friends! Or perhaps we can take care of the Jewish cemetery in Kielce together? The small Jewish community in Katowice who has more cemeteries than Jews as its members, and who is the inheritor of the Kielce Jewish community, has been given this piece of land bearing the ashes of the dead. Before the war, Jews were one third the population of Kielce, they built houses that the town is still using today. Perhaps, moved by their history, you could also think about the cemetery. Our Association is so small. We do what we can, but we cannot do it alone. We need your help.

Never again! There will never be another pogroms again! – it’s so easy to say. But what about prejudice? Let us do all in our might to protect our youth against the despicable nature of prejudice. With these words, I appeal to the Catholic Church of Kielce and other Christian communities, as well as the Institute of National Remembrance with its department of education, and to patriotic and patriotic and historical societies, and to those who manage of the system of education in our town.

How rapidly it pounces, tracks us down.

It's not like other feelings.

At once both older and younger.

*It gives birth itself to the reasons
that give it life.*

When it sleeps, it's never eternal rest.

And sleeplessness won't sap its strength; it feeds it...

(Poem translated from the Polish by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh)