



YOU MUST DEMAND  
**OF YOURSELF**

*Joannes Paulus PP. II*



*“The task of every man is to be the creator of his own life:*

*All men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece”.*

*John Paul II*

The Extreme Way of the Cross was established in 2009. The initiators intended it to help men awaken their masculinity. However, it quickly evolved into something more - a method and a way to change the lives of many: "It's not worth living normally, it's worth living extremely." This way was supposed to wake one from lethargy, pull out of patterns. It restored hope, inspiring life change and development. It became the way of idealists.

The Extreme Way of the Cross helps change, but also evolves itself. It matures. It is sorting itself out. In 2019, it attracted 100,000 people in Poland and 20 other countries. It was born out of overnight solitary hikes and meditations, out of overwork when only nights were left for trips to the mountains. It was inspired by the figure of St. Francis who experimented with his own body to find perfect joy.

This is the 16th edition of the Extreme Way of the Cross. The main slogan is: "Walk 40 km at

night, alone or in a group, but with concentration, and become a beautiful person." 40 km at night is just a tool. The goal is to become a beautiful person. A beautiful person is one who makes everyday life come alive - from a simple thing they can bring out something amazing, and in people they see their goodness and beauty.

Testimony of Kasia, a granddaughter: "An example of such a person for me is my grandmother. Unfortunately, she passed away. Her tombstone bears the inscription: "One should be good as bread". These words are the definition of her life. She often said: "Who comes at you with a stone, you come at them with bread". I have an image of her before my eyes: an elderly woman, modestly dressed, with a thousand wrinkles and worries. She raised nine of her own and three foster children alone. Everything she did in life, she did out of love for God and people. Having completed only a few grades of elementary

school, she was gifted with extraordinary wisdom in life. In addition, she was very humble and had a simple heart. She also had a strong faith, and it was from her faith that she drew the strength to be beautiful. She spoke little and valued silence. With this she inspired trust. She was also able to listen and knew the worries of everyone around her. Despite her own problems, she had the strength and sensitivity to care for others. She taught by her own example - she never lectured or chastised. I am sure she is a saint. And this, I think, should be our goal: to be a beautiful person, to strive for holiness."

How little Karol became the Great Pope.

John Paul II, the Great Pope, said: "All men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece". We decided to study his history, especially his childhood and adolescence. Was he the creator of his life, did he make it a masterpiece?

Fourteen Stations of the Cross are before us. In the meditations we will be accompanied by Karol Wojtyla. Fourteen stations and fourteen stories of how little Karol became the Great Pope. This is a story of life, a real life.



John Paul II said:

*"Demand of yourselves! Be demanding of the world around you, but above all demand of yourselves. You are sons of God: be proud of it! Do not fall into mediocrity, do not succumb to the dictates of changing fashions that impose a lifestyle incompatible with Christian ideals, do not allow yourselves to be deluded by the illusions of consumerism. Christ is calling you to great things.*

## **Basic principles of the Extreme Way of the Cross (EWC):**

1. the EWC has the following requirements:

- 40 km at night;
- alone or in a small group, always in silence and concentration;
- it is not a sport, but a hike with deliberation;
- you can eat and drink, but no picnics.

2. sacrifices are encouraged, but we respect any decision to return home early.

3. EWC is different from other actions - it does not indulge, but demands. It helps to transcend one's own limitations.

4. On the route, we require concentration. If someone is

distracting, ask them to keep quiet.

5. EWC is not measured only by physical effort - we expect fruit, an internal change for the better. The EWC is a lifestyle.

As Pope John Paul II said, laying the foundation for the Extreme Way of the Cross:

1. demand of yourself!
- 2) Be demanding of the world around you, but above all demand of yourselves.
- 3) Do not fall into mediocrity.
- 4) Do not succumb to the dictates of changing fashions, consumerism, convenience.
5. Christ calls you to great things. Do not let Him down.



Station I: Jesus is condemned to death.

We are judged, evaluated. Stereotyped. The white cassock that the Pope wore gradually became a screen on which different people projected different judgments. Who was the man who wore it? How did he build his identity, how did he "become" to be?

Karol Wojtyla was born in 1920 in Wadowice, 30 km from Auschwitz (later Nazi Auschwitz) and 40 km from Krakow, the former capital of Poland. His mother died in 1929, when he was just 9 years old. His older brother died in 1932, when Karol was 12. He never met his sister, as she died shortly after he was born. In 1941, when Karol was 21, his father also passed away. In 1939, World War II broke out. At the time, he lived in Krakow.

Karol Wojtyla wrote about it himself: "So relatively quickly I became a partial orphan and an 'only child'. My boyhood

and adolescent years are connected primarily with the figure of my Father, whose spiritual life became extremely deepened after the loss of his wife and older son. I looked closely at his life, saw how he knew how to demand of himself, how he knelt down to pray. This was the most important thing in those years, and it meant so much in a young man's adolescence."

The Wojtyla family were in a very difficult financial situation. Dad, a retired lieutenant, had to recall his tailoring skills to repair his damaged closet and remake his uniforms into clothes for his son. One of Karol's friends recalls that the lieutenant also remade Karol's uniform after his railroader father, Karol's grandfather: "Karol and I were growing rapidly, and what was fitting us today was tight and short in six months."

**Reflection: Karol, a loved child who experienced tragedies. After all, all this hurt may have broken him and defined him negatively for life.**

**We often compare ourselves with others, complaining to ourselves that they had better conditions, different parents, etc. Any reason is good to absolve ourselves of responsibility for our**

**lives. Karol enjoyed the atmosphere of his home. However, one can see that Karol treated his fate as a task and working on himself as the best way to take a chance.**

*Lord Jesus, help me to treat my fate as an opportunity, not a threat. I would like to go the way of Karol, to be the creator of my life, not a victim of fate.*





Station II: Jesus takes up his Cross.

Life is not only a gift, but also a task. Where we are born and raised is important. But even more important is what we do with it. One's own life should be taken on one's own shoulders, and one should not look to others. As children, we have an extraordinary vitality within us. We want to live, act, learn and win. And what was it like for Karol?

Karol's colleague: The fact that we sat together in some classes meant that we did our homework together, always at Karol's house, in the kitchen, which was accessed from an interior balcony on the first floor. This joint work gave me, personally, a lot. Karol was extremely solid and systematic in his studies, and this rubbed off on me. Although, I still had a long way to go. We did all the homework assigned for the next day - both important and less important. We always studied the material from the

last lessons. After working through each subject, Karol would go out to the other room and then return after a while. One time the door was unlatched and I noticed that Karol was praying on the kneeler....

Observer's report: The Wojtyla family led a very regulated lifestyle. In the mornings, the boy went to school, then there was lunch at Banasia's restaurant, then he had two hours of free time (soccer, running, and on rainy days ping-pong in the Catholic Home next to the church). In the afternoon, he would do his homework, eat dinner and go for a walk with his father. They both enjoyed hiking and spent most of their holidays (after church) wandering around the Wadowice area.

Reflection: how to sum it up? He did his homework every day. All of it. After each subject he knelt down and prayed. Unheard of. During the day he had a variety of activities - school, study, sports, play, friends, prayer. Also trips to the mountains, adventures. He lived in many dimensions. Each

successive day shaped him, built him up. Each made Karol "become," the creator of his life.

*Lord Jesus, I want to be the master of my fate. I want to stand firmly on the ground, work, learn, play, develop. Help me to create my life consistently, every day. Help me to become.*



Station III: Jesus falls for the first time.

There is no life that's only right, perfect. Flawless.

John Paul II: "At the age of ten or twelve I was an altar boy, but I must confess that I was not very diligent. My mother was already dead... My father, having noticed my indiscipline, said one day: "You are not a good altar boy. You don't pray enough to the Holy Spirit. You should pray to Him." And he showed me the prayer."

Did little Karol forget this remark?

"I didn't forget it. It was a supreme spiritual lesson, more lasting and stronger than any I could later learn from my readings or the instruction I received."

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz on the last moments of John Paul II: "That day he celebrated

Mass in the morning and just before he died in the evening; he participated in the recitation of the breviary, along with the reading from Divine Mercy Sunday. And he recited 'his prayers,' including the prayer to the Holy Spirit, which his father had taught him."

Let us pray with St. John Paul  
II to the Holy Spirit:

*Holy Spirit, I ask you*

*for the gift of Wisdom to  
better know You and Your  
divine perfections,*

*for the gift of Reason to  
better understand the  
spirit of the mysteries of  
the Holy Faith,*

*for the gift of Skill, that I  
may be guided in my life  
by the principles of this  
faith,*

*for the gift of Counsel,  
that I may seek counsel*

*from Thee in all things  
and from Thee always find  
it,*

*for the gift of Fortitude, so  
that no fear or earthly  
considerations can tear  
me away from You,*

*for the gift of Piety, that I  
may always serve Your  
Majesty with filial love,*

*for the gift of Divine Fear,  
that I may fear the sin that  
offends You, O God.*

*Amen.*



Station IV: Jesus meets His Mother.

A mother is important in our lives. But a father is also important. Especially when the mother is missing. No, it is always important, but we don't emphasize it enough. The father in the story of Karol Wojtyla is very important.

Karol Wojtyla: "After the death of my mother and brother, my father's life became a constant prayer. It happened to me that I would wake up at night and find him on his knees, just as I always saw him on his knees in the parish church."

Karol's friend: One rainy day a friend dropped by the Wojtylas' house and found the father playing soccer in the living room with his son. Karol, as goalkeeper, defended the door, the father scored the goals.

Karol Wojtyla: "A father who knew how to demand of himself, in a sense no longer had to demand of his son. Looking at him, I learned that

one must make demands of oneself and set an example in fulfilling one's own duties."

An account from the Pope's secretary: John Paul II usually began his day by lying prostrate in a private chapel. Alone with God. He had an "appointment" with Him every day. Because he put prayer at the very centre, he was able to cope with the most packed agenda of the day.



Reflection: the Father. In all dimensions. Because life, housing, food, clothes, school, and even fun, sports, mountains. Prayer. Karol Wojtyla senior - a retired lieutenant, legionnaire, endowed with unheard of physical fitness. An excellent swimmer. Military man. Disciplined. And what else? It was he who infected the young Karol with love for the

mountains. Almost every day after dinner they would take walks in the surrounding hills, and on Sundays they often went out into the mountains.

*Lord Jesus, I would like to meet exceptional people in my life. To live among them, to support each other, to cooperate. Help me to build myself, to build my family. I would also like to find true friends in poverty.*



Station V: Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross

One must have buddied within oneself. The habit of helping others, cooperating, doing things together or having fun. Simon of Cyrene had it in him. What kind of a buddy was little Karol?

At the school that Karol went to, playing soccer was a favourite game. The division of teams was based on an uncomplicated rule: Poles versus Jews. Class friends Kluger and Karol would then play against each other. This was not always the case. When the Jewish boys lacked a player, Karol willingly stood in goal on their team. He was a fine goalkeeper.

**Reflection:** This friendship later brought the long-awaited dialogue between Christianity and Judaism.

Karol's classmate: "We treated sports with ambition. The games between the classes were an event, a holy

war. The desire and goal of each of us was to win. This is also how Karol treated the matter."

"As a commuter student, I always had an hour until the train left. Then Karol would invite us to play ball in the nearby belt of greenery. Of course, he would bring the ball, because it was an unattainable thing for us, village children."

Reflection: at the time when Karol was young, things were poor in Wadowice, but in the villages around the small town in southern Poland the situation was even worse. Karol noticed the "poverty" of his schoolmates. When they were waiting for the train and bored, he would pull out a ball. He shared it and his time.

John Paul II: "Play is not only a manifestation of the need for entertainment or evidence of recklessness, but even when you do not realize it, it is an opportunity to form character

and cultivate virtues. In the future, you will sometimes have to interact with others, to measure yourself against them. You will find yourself faced with situations, problems and projects that make life so similar to a match that must, after all, be played fairly; a match in which the wise use of one's energies, the ability to adapt to the pace of others and a loyal and noble attitude to the cause of

competition play a role. This is why there is continuity between school and play: both are complicit in the formation of your personality, because both can teach you a great deal, while being an expression of youth, which is not only youth of body, but also youth of spirit."

*Lord Jesus, I would like to have friends and be a friend to others.*



Station VI: Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

Beautiful man. Veronica's sensitivity and tenderness is touching. What was Karol like?

Karol's friend from the theater group: "We sometimes recalled, in melancholy, that time when Karol was the good spirit of our whole bunch. When we succeeded in something small, Karol would throw himself on the floor, stand on his head, walk on his hands, and sometimes make incredible noises with his not at all powerful baritone...". Karol was a student at the time and part of the Rhapsody Theatre.

A student of Rev. Professor Karol Wojtyla, who lectured in Lublin: "In the opinion of my friends, he was very cordial in private contacts. His colleagues liked him very much and treated him as a certain symbol of good fortune. They used to say: 'Well, today I'll have a good day, because I saw Karol.'

Once they watched the priest professor, how he was doing while he was waiting for a train from Lublin to Krakow. He looked around carefully, spotted a piece of vacant floor against the wall of the waiting room. He would pull out a rather worn sleeping bag from his bulky briefcase, squeeze into it, place the briefcase under his head and fall peacefully asleep. He was really undemanding."

Father Karol Wojtyla as a vicar in Niegowici: He travelled by cart or on foot - in rain and frost, trudging through mud or snow - from village to village, always ready to help and always cheerful. Riding in the cart, he was constantly reading something. Walking on foot, he would say a prayer. When an old widow had her bedding stolen, he gave her his, while he himself slept on a bare mattress.

Fellow student: Friends from the Academic Dormitory

nailed a business card on the door of Karol's room when he was a student. It said: a budding saint.

Reflection: clothes do not make a man, he is made with what he has inside... How do we look at ourselves? We look for what is good for us in others. We appreciate the fact that we feel comfortable with someone. We like to be

positively surprised, inspired. If people can spread their wings thanks to us, then we are on the way to becoming a beautiful person. Karol Wojtyla was not "in disguise," but lived the life of a beautiful man.

*Lord Jesus, I don't want to be average, let alone unpleasant to others. I want to become a beautiful man.*



Station VII: Jesus falls for the second time



Life is opportunities, but also problems. Work, effort, struggle for survival.

Karol Wojtyla was a labourer from the beginning of the war. First a footboy in a tailor store. Then a worker in a quarry, where limestone blocks of rock were stripped using explosives. Twenty-year-old Karol, a secret student at the time, was loading up wagons and hauling limestone ballast. He repaired the tracks. After a year, he was transferred to the factory itself, where he carried buckets of lime water and bags of chemical reagents.

Reports from fellow quarry workers:

When I pushed the soda carts, he would run to help me. I often saw Karol Wojtyla in the equipment room and whenever I met him, I saw him kneeling and reading something. Always in this room, if he read books, it was only while kneeling.

I met him at the plant. It was twelve o'clock. The bell was ringing for the "Angel of the Lord." He heard the bell, put down his buckets, crossed himself and prayed. Then he got up and walked on. He was not embarrassed by anyone.

On the night shift around twelve o'clock at night, he would kneel in the middle of the purification plant and pray. Usually, in a half-voice, so I wouldn't disturb his prayer, I informed him that he had to go back to work. After a while, he would finish his prayer and get to work. Not all employees were respectful of this. There were some who threw bundles and whatever they could at him while he was praying.

He never complained of fatigue or hankered for some other job. He grew into the environment of the workers, enjoyed their affection and increasing respect.

Karol Wojtyla worked well, performed his duties willingly, when he had a free moment at noon, he read books.

John Paul II: "I knew what physical labour was, because I was a labourer. I met people of hard labour on a daily basis, I got to know their environment, their families, their interests, their human value and dignity."

"I worked at the quarry from September 1940, and a year later I moved to the water purification plant. So, the years related to the formation of the final decision to go to the seminary are connected with this period."

"I became friends with many workers. More than once they invited me to their homes. Even as a priest and bishop, I baptized their children and grandchildren, blessed marriages and conducted funerals for many of them."

Reflections of John Paul II: "Man is called to work. Work distinguishes him from the rest of creatures whose life-sustaining activities cannot be called work - only man is capable of it and only man performs it, filling his life on earth with work at the same time."

*Lord Jesus, I want to work and earn a living. I want to have my life in order. Be with me.*



Station VIII: the women of Jerusalem weep over Jesus

“Do not weep” – Jesus admonishes the women. He admonishes all of us. Instead of weeping, we should demand of ourselves.

Karol, the student. He maintained extraordinary discipline in his life. He devoted his free time to religious and spiritual practices and rigorously followed the principle instilled by his father: "Don't waste a single moment."

A student, he participated in canoeing: He disliked poncing around, knocking around. He was in very good physical condition himself. If he planned a route, he did it.

Karol, the child: His barracks time was well planned and overworked. Home barracks was where life had its own rhythm: wake-up, Mass, school, lunch, two hours of free time, homework, dinner, and a walk with his father.

Reflection: a disciplined soldier in wartime does not fail, he can be counted on. Hard work in peacetime brings results. Thus, prepared Karol did not fail in difficult times, he won his life's clashes. "He did not like knocking around. The basic principle of good use of time is: what you have to do, do right away! Often, we would do anything to change our situation, as long as we wouldn't have to change ourselves and our habits.

*Lord Jesus, I like the way of working on myself. I don't want to waste my life, to be disappointed with myself. I prefer to work on myself.*



Station IX: Jesus falls for the third time

Jesus, to die on the cross, had to have the strength to get up after falling. Strength. Fitness of the body. The truth is that there is no spiritual life without asceticism, without exercising the body. It is easier to live a life of pipe dreams, and harder to train the body.

At the time of his election as Pope, Karol Wojtyla was 58 years old. He looked quite young; measuring 1.74 meters, strongly built, 80 kg in weight, bulky, wiry, with young movements, athletic. He owed this to his lifestyle. He practiced sports and hiking. As a child, he played ball and hiked in the mountains. He skied and swam. His father was an excellent swimmer. Karol added kayaking to the mix.

When he became pope, he went to the conclave in Rome straight from a canoe trip. He had been a cardinal for 11 years at the time. Earlier, someone asked him a

question: does it get away, Cardinal, for a priest to go skiing? - What a cardinal doesn't get away with is skiing badly! - replied Wojtyla.

And what was the Pope's sports life like? Every day he exercised, walked, ran. But skiing? I don't think that's something the Pope can get away with," he thought. A few years after his election for the Pope, young people from the Alps wrote an engaging letter inviting the Holy Father to go skiing. When the Pope read it, he stated: "It is necessary to go for the sake of young people. Any excuse is good. After that, the whole world circulated the news: the Pope on skis!

He also ordered the construction of a swimming pool at his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo. When asked if it was worth pursuing such an expensive investment, the Pope replied: "My funeral will entail much greater

expenses. The Pope must be fit and healthy."

John Paul II: "It is significant that some expressions typical of the language of sports - for example, the ability to make a choice, training, life discipline, enduring hardship, trust in a demanding guide, honest acceptance of the rules of the game - are not foreign to the disciples of Christ. The Christian life, too, requires systematic spiritual training, for a Christian, like one who stands up to wrestle, denies himself everything."

Reflection: effort, fatigue, struggle, joy, satisfaction, success, defeat, victory.

These facets of sports are an excellent school of character. Sports, physical activity requires overcoming one's weaknesses, overcoming limitations, changing habits. The more you put your heart into performing the effort, the more it costs you, the better it is a "spiritual mortar" for yourself.

*Lord Jesus, I am already taking charge of myself. With the strength of the spirit I want to shape the strength of the body.*



Station X: Jesus stripped of his garments



Stripped bare. Sensitive to the tenderness of the wounds. Sensitive and focused.

On September 1, 1939, World War II began. It was the first Friday of the month. What was the nineteen-year-old Karol Wojtyla doing then?

Karol Wojtyla: The day of September 1, 1939, particularly stuck in my memory. It was the first Friday of the month. I came to Wawel Castle to confess. The cathedral was empty. It was probably the last time I could enter it freely.

A priest at Wawel Cathedral: The morning air raids on Krakow caused panic among the cathedral staff, so that I had no one to serve Mass. Karol, who came to Wawel for confession and Holy Communion, wound up. The young student of Polish studies diligently followed First Fridays. Stuck in my memory was that first wartime Mass in front of the

altar of Christ Crucified - amid the howling of sirens and the roar of explosions.

A friend of Karol's: During ski trips, Wojtyla always stipulated that no one speak to him during the first two hours of the morning - this was to be a time for reflection and contemplation. We didn't start talking until later.

John Paul II: You know that Jesus, before he began his public life, hid in the desert for forty days to pray. Well, Dearest Youth, try to find some silence in your life too, so that you can think, meditate, make resolutions, pray. It is difficult today to create "areas of desert and silence" for we are constantly caught up in the cogs of activity, carried away by the buzz of events, the attractiveness of the media, so that inner peace is threatened."

Reflection: sensitivity is the ability to get in touch with what we have inside, in the soul, in the mind. And we usually have a hurricane of thoughts there. Including fears, injuries, pain, unsatisfied desires. A person can only become someone serene if they somehow put it together for themselves. And for this they need time spent with themselves. The fruit? Nineteen-year-old Karol comes to the

cathedral despite the sounds of the beginning of the war. Others give in to fear. Was it possible for a bomb to fall there then? Rather not, however, a missile could have hit anywhere. Fear is irrational. Karol remained calm with inner peace. He arranged his thoughts. Sensitive and focused.

*Lord Jesus, the Extreme Way of the Cross is my time to immerse myself in my thoughts. Be with me in my frantic mind.*



Station XI: Jesus is nailed to the cross

Being nailed to the cross changes the situation of life. One cannot do anything with either hand or foot. One can no longer go anywhere. It is impossible to get anything done. The head remains. Thinking. Jesus, on the cross, forgave the evildoers, talked to his Mother and St. John, took the Good thief into his kingdom, and finally gave his spirit to the Father. All this in immense suffering. Today we marvel at this extraordinary wisdom of Jesus. What he had in his mind.

What did Karol Wojtyla do with his mind? Did he invest in wisdom?

Throughout his high school years, Karol Wojtyla was immensely active in various areas of school life. In school documents from 1930-1938, he was the most frequently mentioned among students. He was active in the school council, was elected head of the class, recited at soirees

and academies, gave lectures, talks, readings and speeches in classes, etc.

Classmate: He was a standout student, a "targeter" - as we called him. It must be said that the boy was modest. When the professor asked a question, and none of us could answer it, Wojtyla never struck out on his own. Only when called out did he answer the question. He also tended not to hint; he thought he could help, but outside of lessons.

He began his studies at Jagiellonian University in the Faculty of Polish Studies in 1938. What subjects did he choose? Among others: etymology of the Polish language, elements of phonetics of the Polish language, theatre and drama in Poland up to the mid-18th century, drama theory, novels, literature of the Polish Middle Ages, the dramas of Stanisław Wyspiański,

contemporary Polish poetry, humour, comedy and irony and their role in literary works, grammar of the Old Church Slavonic language and Russian and ancient literature. As if he wanted to know everything.

Seminar colleague: He followed the seminar rules faithfully. During lectures, he was focused and took careful notes, catching the professor's essential thought on the fly. Whenever he lent me his notes to supplement the lectures, I read them without difficulty.

John Paul II: "Science is good in itself, for it is knowledge of the world, which is good, the world created by God. Human cognition of the world is a form of participation in the knowledge of the Creator. It thus constitutes the first degree of man's likeness to God, an act of reverence for Him, for everything we

discover is a tribute to the Original Truth."

"Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit soars toward the contemplation of truth. God Himself instilled in the human heart the desire to know the truth about Him, and ultimately that He might also reach the full truth about Himself."

Reflection: what is a man without science? Only a collection of instincts and habits. One needs to know a lot to choose wisely. If we know little, we are easily manipulated because we don't know what we should know.

*Lord Jesus, please gift me with passion for science. Now, right away. I want to know more.*



Station XII: Jesus dies on the cross

Death is close to us. All sorts of people die, near and far. And we will die eventually. Young Karol Wojtyla was close to death. Very close.

It was a frosty afternoon on February 29, 1944. The 24-year-old Karol had just finished hard work at the plant. He was walking back to his apartment. He was walking close to the curb. Suddenly a German truck hit him at an intersection, and he fell next to it as if dead. A woman riding a streetcar, seeing the accident, got off at the nearest stop and hurriedly approached the lying young worker. He was unconscious. For a moment she stood helpless, shielding the lying man from oncoming cars. There was a war going on, so who would care about a dying man. Finally, a car stopped, from which a German officer got out. Noticing what had happened, he instructed the woman to fetch water from a

nearby ditch, while he himself stood by Wojtyla. With the water mixed with mud, they washed the blood from the face of the man lying down, who began to show signs of life. At that point, the officer stopped the truck carrying the rods and ordered the injured man to be taken to the hospital. Karol ended up there with a broken collarbone and a concussion. He spent twelve days in the hospital. After leaving it, he did not forget his saviour, Jozefa Florek. He wrote letters to her, addressing Mrs. Jozefa as the one to whom he owed his life.

Reflection: friends are made in poverty. Let's reverse the meaning of this proverb: in poverty you can meet people who will become your friends. It is not an effort to help those who are doing well....

*Lord, one day I will die. Eventually, at the end of my years, I will die. Until then, I ask You, Jesus, to help me. I want to be a good, helpful and decent person.*





Station XIII: Jesus taken down from the cross.

The silence of the tomb. It is not filled with death when meaning pervades it. In the beginning there was a Word... The Word. Words. Karol Wojtyla's great passion.

Karol Wojtyla: "My choice of Polish studies stemmed from an orientation toward the study of literature. But the very first year of my studies redirected me toward language. (...) This introduced me to entirely new dimensions, not to say to the mystery of the word."

"By discovering the word through the study of literature or language, I came closer to the mystery of the Word: "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Later I realized that these Polish studies were preparing in me the ground for another direction of interest and study; I mean philosophy and theology."

Karol Wojtyla as a student of Polish Studies co-founded the

Rhapsodic Theatre. What was it like then? During the occupation, Mietek Kotlarczyk and his wife came down to his modest apartment (three cubicles in basements) in Cracow. He had previously managed the Universal Theatre in Wadowice. They lived together and talked a lot. This is how the idea of a theatre of the word was born. The Rhapsodic Theatre. Why rhapsodic? In ancient times, rhapsodes were singers who went from village to village during the perpetual wars to comfort the people.

The life of a rhapsodist. This was young Karol's idea of life. The war was going on. And he, though young, did not go to fight. He did not become a soldier or partisan, did not join the resistance. He believed that the war would end one day, and the nation would need the Spirit. Spirit - meaning God, but also spirit - meaning culture. This was his

mission throughout his life. During the communist era in Poland, he served the people by giving them the Spirit. And as the Pope, he constantly opposed wars and called for peace. One can even encounter such an "accusation" against him: that as Pope he kept the world at peace, despite all the tensions. In fact, when John Paul II, the world leader of the Spirit, was missing, our world began to plunge into wars.

Fellow theatregoer: We rehearsed at Karol's home, twice a week. We called his basements the catacombs, because what went on underground was not allowed, just like in the time of the early Christians. Karol played with his whole self, but the longer he played - the less he was concerned about himself. He played to discover the mystery of the WORD.

Opinions on the theatrical workshop of the Pope:

It was hard not to see this theatrical and rhapsodic past in the external posture at the Holy Father's speeches and appearances.

I have this conviction that the enormous media success of Karol Wojtyla is due to the fact that the media, watching him very vigilantly and carefully, did not catch him in any compromising moments of absentmindedness or inattention. They simply weren't there. He always remained alert and attentive to the other person. This was an expression of love of neighbour. John Paul II translated love into concrete, into attention to the other person.

Throughout his life he consciously used his body to show the essence of faith through gesture, word. To behave naturally, one must accept oneself, and above all know the truth about oneself. Knowing the truth about

oneself is not possible without putting oneself in new and uncomfortable situations.

*Lord Jesus, I seek Your words. I would like to live*

*by Your word. And be able to share the good word with others.*



Station XIV: Jesus is laid in the sepulchre.

Resurrection, this is new life after death.

"You need to be born again", says Jesus. You need to deny yourself. To begin a new life.

Let us repeat the motto of this Extreme Way of the Cross: ""(...) all men and women are entrusted with the task of crafting their own life: in a certain sense, they are to make of it a work of art, a masterpiece."

We have come this long way to make a masterpiece out of our lives. This road is not measured by fatigue, but by fruit. It doesn't matter who we were at the beginning of the road. It matters who we become now. Each of us can become Someone. A beautiful person is someone who makes his life a masterpiece. A beautiful person is an enlivener of everyday life for others. Life with them becomes beautiful. One wants to live.

Did Karol Wojtyla, later the Pope, invent the Extreme Way of the Cross? I think he did. He said: "Demand of yourself! Be demanding of the world around you, but above all demand of yourselves. Do not fall into mediocrity. Christ is calling you to great things. Do not disappoint Him..."

Rev. Jacek WIOSNA Stryczek: I will admit that in creating the Extreme Way of the Cross, I imitated St. Francis, who treated his body radically. He fully demonstrated a simple truth: spiritual life is only possible in combination with asceticism, working on one's body. And then, as a young priest, I met Karol Wojtyla. I knew him by spirit, not by body. He wrote, and I read. He became my true master. I followed his spirit.

Finally, it is worth saying this: the spirituality of St. John Paul II is a path of asceticism, work on oneself, depth. Little Karol worked on himself in such a

way that one day it turned out that he was fit to be the Pope, could lead the Church, be a prophet of his time. He did not take the position called "Pope". He created this position. He was a creator, not a re-creator. While preserving tradition, he gave the papacy a new dimension.

I discovered something more. When Wojtyla got to Krakow and then to the seminary, he met people similar to him - professors, priests, laymen. And he quickly became one of them. One of the masters at work on himself. People for whom every moment was precious and managed.

In 1983, I began my studies in Krakow. I worked on myself with extraordinary doggedness. And that's how I ended up in this environment. People of great demands, working hard on themselves. Some I met personally, and others I heard about. An example? Rev. Prof. Kazimierz

Klosak (1911-1982). He read all of Marx and in 1948 published the book *Dialectical Materialism. Critical Studies*. He wanted to do it. Apparently, he only slept from 8 pm to midnight. He read somewhere that between 8 pm and 10 pm we sleep twice as much. So, this time counts for 4 hours. So, it came out to a total of 6 hours of sleep for him. And, supposedly, an adult need that much sleep. This is what he believed. I did not know him personally. But I got to know those who lived a similar discipline.

I am writing about this because I keep discovering that I grew up among people, priests, who were from the "school" of great work on themselves. From the Krakow school. Amazing self-discipline, passion for study, humility, spirituality. Young Karol joined this environment in his seminary days. He found himself there and in time

became one of its masters. And his school is still in operation. You can "enrol" in it, join it. The Extreme Way of the Cross grows out of it and was created in its inspiration. In telling this story, I pay tribute to all those people who shaped me and thanks to whom I was shaped.

Karol Wojtyla. For me, he is not a monumental figure, but a hard-working man who worked hard on himself. It is the whole environment that he co-created. You can join this environment.

And finally, what constitutes a new beginning. Vocation:

John Paul II: I think the result of the conclave on October 16, 1978, was a surprise not only to me! God, who directs events, is at the same time the Lord of hearts. That is the mystery of vocation. Vocation always means that we are to see a new blueprint for our own lives - different from the one we have lived so far.

*Lord Jesus, together with You I want to start a new project of my life. I am ready to work hard on myself.*



## Afterword

I used many sources to compile these reflections. I, myself, know Karol Wojtyla primarily by spirit, also thanks to you, the authors of numerous publications. Thank you.