Ekstremalna Droga Krzyżowa



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Preface

MEN'S SIDE OF REALITY means that the human reality and humanity in general may have many faces. The Men's Side or Reality is one of them. Sometimes, however, we are faced with people, women and men, who exude a special beauty. We see in them the harmony of what is best in women and in men.

I remember a visit which took place years ago, at the beginning of my ministry in the Church. It was a hospital in the bush on the border between Angola and Namibia. Four Irish women, Medical Missionaries of Mary, ran a crowded field hospital there, almost devoid of medical supplies and medicines. For two years they remained cut off from the world because of an armed struggle between the government forces and the rebels. Specialists and surgeons had escaped from that region. Two of these missionaries were doctors and the other two - nurses. They treated all patients, without asking whether they were civilians or military. They didn't segregate the patients into government forces and guerrillas. Moreover, they performed real medical miracles given the scant resources that were available.

On the second day of my visit, this forgotten hospital was attacked by some armed men. They seized the missionaries, the few staff members and the visitors. Then they dragged the missionaries to the hospital room and, at gunpoint, forced them to look at horrific torture and shooting. They were after the people who they'd found guilty of aiding another hostile group of guerrillas or the government troops. One of the nuns could not cope with this situation and was later sent back to her homeland. The other three continued their work: they dressed the wounds, comforted the survivors, buried the dead. And they prayed for everyone: for the victims and the attackers alike.

In the determination, perseverance, kindness and trust of those nuns I saw the harmony of what is best in women and best in men. I saw the greatness of Humanity spelt with a capital H and I believed in this greatness.

Like the centurion at the foot of the cross who hearing Jesus say: *Father, into thy hands I place my spirit, cries: truly this was the Son of God, and God, and Man*. The soldier was one of the first to understand that Jesus was so deeply convinced that God is Abba, the Father, that is Love, that even the drama of Calvary did nothing to shake or change this belief.

And here's the extreme nature of Jesus. It is the extreme nature of His Way of the Cross and of every Way of the Cross which we follow today. God the Father agreed with Jesus. After this extreme experience He raised His Son from the dead. In our extreme experience He also raises us to live now and in eternity.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore
Apostolic Nuncio to Poland

The Men's Side of Reality

"I love you" - so begins the story about the Men's Side of Reality. Here Jesus enters the River Jordan. He is baptised by John. St Mark's Gospel says:

And at once, as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, ***'You are my Son, the Beloved; my favour rests on You.'*** (Mark 1: 10-11).

Even though the atmosphere itself is extraordinary: water, heavens open, the Spirit – what is most important here are the words that are spoken then - I LOVE YOU. This I love you has three dimensions: you are my Son, meaning a little like Me; Beloved - like a warm breeze of absolute kindness; my favour rests on You – this is a choice, and not just destiny.

No matter how long we meditate on it, it's a resounding declaration (like "a bolt out of the blue") of the love of God the Father to His Son. Indisputably and definitely. Except that there ends everything which intuitively should happen after such a confession. Instead of glamour, thrones, servants and privileges resulting from such a kinship and choice, vocation appears:

And at once the Spirit drove him into the desert (Mark 1, 12).

The forty days of testing in the wilderness were both an expression of the love of the Father, and the love of the Son. Their mutual love. As if "I love you" turned into a distinct form of male initiation. As if a man must first go through a survival camp to be able to respond to love. As if a man's answer has to be deeds, not words. As if ...

We know that the forty days of fasting were good preparation for the Way of the Cross. By carrying the cross Jesus proved not only his physical and mental preparation for the toughest of challenges and the most violent of experiences. He also tested his faith in the love of the Father which did not bring privileges but a challenge. IfHe felt ready to set out on the mission to save the world after forty days in the desert, similarly after the Way of the Cross and death, He "felt" ready to ascend to heaven.

I LOVE YOU - which becomes a challenge – this is an absolutely the men's side of reality. Like the EXTREME WAY OF THE CROSS - which is almost a literal imitation of Jesus' survival in the desert for forty days. Along with temptation at the end which must be overcome. This is men's spirituality which begins with challenges, leaving the comfort zone to cope even in the face of pain and retain certainty of God's love.
Welcome to the Extreme Way of the Cross.

Rev. Father Jacek WIOSNA Stryczek

JESUS IS CONDEMNED TO DEATH

There are things more important than life.

Thus begins the story about a real man. In the mind of every little boy there is a vision of the world that is falling apart, where evil wins and you have to fight to the death. Just one life versus the whole world - how can you cope? How do they compare? So it's obvious from the start that it's worth dying for a cause. That a man's life is a function of value, and merely functioning is not a value in itself. In this perspective, virtually all of the challenges that a boy and later a man face are only a preparation for the final battle between good and evil. To win then, he must practice now. By taking part in battles, competing, preparing for the final battle.

OSKAR CONFESSED:
"There are things more important than life. There are values (people), which or whom it is worth dying for which means voluntarily giving up your life. Jesus said that *no one takes life from Him; He lays it down of His own free will,* (John 10:18) and *no one can have greater love than to lno one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends* (John 15:13). Do you have such values in yourself and such people around you which or whom you would be able to give up your life for? Not when it's dangerous and you have no choice. But when you can safely leave and you choose to stay there and die."

Jesus before the court is a real-life situation: “So what about your life?” He is asked by everyone. “Do you have it for yourself, are you ready to give it up for the salvation of the world? Are you ready for the battle in which you'll die? Are you ready...”

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, send me to the desert so that I can prepare well for the most important battle in my life.

JESUS CARRIES HIS CROSS

I bravely accept the consequences of my decisions.

KAROL'S REFLECTIONS:
"Jesus rode the cutting edge, he fell out with all those who had authority. He knew he was going to die. When confrontation came, he didn't look for excuses, today we'd say he took it on the chest. And he succeeded. In real life, we strive for something. And when it comes to it, we bury our heads in the sand. In my case, I've wanted to save people since I was 18. I got into medicine, I graduated and went on to specialize in trauma surgery. I was already treating patients in hospital but I still thought about the biggest challenge which was to work in the emergency ward. In my work treating patients in the emergency ward is considered to be the most difficult. There's the pressure of time: tens of patients when you work on call, decisions must be made quickly. At the same time there's full responsibility, if you miss a disturbing symptom it may result in the loss of a patient's life and your career. Moreover, there's fatigue, 12-hour on call night shifts after normal working hours. Then there are emotions - patients who complain because they have been waiting for several hours, families of victims awaiting information, medical staff who need the doctor's instructions. But there's only one doctor. If he or she is new, they additionally struggle with lack of experience, organisational difficulties and lack of authority ... In the end, however, I did it. My life was waiting for this decision. Despite the hardships I am experiencing fulfilment. There's power in it! "

ANGELIKA'S TESTIMONY:
"A man from MSR - loving like Christ. And Jesus, when He loves - gives Himself up, and puts the cross on His shoulders of His own free will... This station tells me about love. About love in general, but also about love in particular cases, i.e. the love between a man and a woman. So Jesus voluntarily puts the cross on His shoulders, because He loves and because He wants to. From the perspective of today's morality it seems pointless - Jesus "is wasted", "He wastes His life this way." And I just admire this decision, and I love! I admire His masculinity, responsibility, the effort He makes, the fact that He goes against the current.
I love when I look at the fruits of this decision – thanks to it the Church exists to this day and constantly pours love onto those who want it! When Jesus loves, He becomes the source of eternal, undying love. And a man's love may also have such a power! It can and should bear fruit. Only you have to be ready to put the cross on your shoulders."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, help me to love truly
and even more.

JESUS FALLS THE FIRST TIME

A man falls because he takes up a challenge, an aim which is too much for him.

KAROL'S REFLECTIONS:
"There is a huge temptation for each of us to set ourselves only those goals which we are certain of achieving, those which require no effort, no self-denial. You can go on in such self-delusion for ages: "I'm great, I always succeed." A challenge hurts. It leads to a crisis in which you need to define what you really care for. Therefore, challenges make you define your identity and shape it anew since every challenge you are successful in transforms you."

OSKAR'S TESTIMONY:
"I imagine that Jesus' Way of the Cross was a big event. The crowd who demanded that Jesus be convicted later accompanied Him. On his way Jesus met His Mother, the women of Jerusalem, Simon, John, Mary Cleophas, Mary Magdalene. But all the time He was followed by the hostile crowd. The fall which saddened the ones who loved Him must have resulted in a snort of laughter and derision from the mob. He was pushed, spit on and insulted. *It had to be that way until the end* (Mark 15: 29-32) – even when He was on the Cross they still tried to give Him a hard time.

For an ambitious man, a fall is annoying. It may be off-putting. There is a strong temptation to give up. Jesus could have also given up – all He had to do was not to get up. In the end, they would have finished Him off. But He got up. Even with the perspective of subsequent falls, ridicule, humiliation.
I'm a surgeon. In our practice each surgeon must confront complications following surgery – the operation itself was successful but the treatment is not proceeding as expected. Things keep on happening, something goes wrong. I remember the first time I had a complication. There were so many thoughts going through my mind. Had I really done everything right? Could I have prevented it? The people around react in a variety of ways – with irritation, mockery, pointing an accusing finger or with understanding. There was a big temptation to give up, change my specialisation, choose an easier life, avoid surgery. I needed to get hold of myself and move on. I had to get up. With time, I got to know that every practising surgeon gets complications; diseases and operations have a certain percentage of complications which is virtually the same all over the world. Master surgeons say that the only surgeons who don't get complications are those who do nothing. Each complication is difficult emotionally - it's like a fall, it's frustrating. A man's characteristic feature is to get up following a fall and to continue struggling despite the certainty of the subsequent falls. Victory doesn't mean you don't fall but that you can get up after a fall."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, give me the strength not to give up. Let me always choose a valuable way despite the waiting falls.

JESUS MEETS HIS MOTHER

A mission more important than blood bonds. Jesus was aware of the fact that by consenting to suffer He was hurting the ones He loved.

KSENIA'S REFLECTIONS:
"I always get shivers down my spine when I imagine this meeting. A brief moment when their eyes meet. What must be happening between them? What can Jesus see in Mary's eyes? What can Mary see in the eyes of Her Son who is consciously going to His death? Once I tried to imagine what would be the biggest failure and humiliation for me. After all, even Jesus' disciples thought that the plan had fallen through, that they'd lost, and that Jesus had them failed although they'd staked their lives on Him. So I imagined the fall and the humiliation. And then I imagined that I had to look into the eyes of my parents at precisely that moment. I still remember this biting mixture of shame and guilt that I experienced - after all, they'd invested so much in me, put so much effort. And then a different feeling came. Awareness of their suffering. The fact that my decisions were giving so much pain to the ones I love.
So when I think about the meeting of Jesus and Mary at the Cross, I think about these two things. The fact that manly decisions are based on an internal awareness that something is most important, crucial. And that this determination is stronger than what the others think. Even the closest family. Even if the loved ones suffer because of such decisions. Suffer a lot. A real man is able to survive and endure it, "take it on the chest", but not remain indifferent. So when I imagine this meeting between Jesus and Mary with shivers running down my spine, I see suffering. But this suffering conceals something much more important. Love. And understanding. Because it's even more difficult to build a relationship where both people agree to suffer together for a common goal. I think that Jesus prepared Mary for this moment. He led Her towards it so that She would set what belongs to God over what belongs to people. And when the time came, a quick look was enough because everything had already been said. True grit is shared in relationships and strengthens the others."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, work with me, like You did with the rich young man – so that I can take on challenges.

SIMON OF CYRENE HELPS JESUS TO CARRY HIS CROSS

One man pushes another one to take on challenges.

MATEUSZ'S REFLECTIONS:
"I like to imagine this station like a scene from a blockbuster. The blazing sun. Two muscular men groaning under the weight of the wood. They are dead tired, sweaty and bloody. They can barely lift their heads to look at the horizon – their destination. They aren't talking, they aren't looking around – they're heading straight to their destination. Simple, but not easy.

One man pushes another one to take on challenges. We are made that way, so one joke or disparaging look from another guy can force us to make superhuman effort – not to appear a loser in the eyes of the other one. Such negative motivation often later results in our pride and honour."

MARCIN'S STORY:
"During a meeting of the Men's Side of Reality somebody suggested organising EWC. And I was asked: "So, Marcin, can you do it?". Despite my doubts, I said: "Sure!"

IWONA'S STORY:
"One warm Sunday afternoon in Krakow a man was standing on Piłsudski bridge and saying he wanted to commit suicide. None of the passers-by reacted. I called a psychiatrist, the police and an ambulance."

MARCIN'S RECOLLECTIONS:
"Two years ago the boys and I organised an extreme hiking trip for men. After a week of working and studying I was to be a belayer for some guys who were climbing in a dark cave 30 meters up. There was no room for error. My fatigue, the darkness and exhaustion were nothing compared to the responsibility I had taken on. It's because of this event that I could go on for a total of 38 hours without sleep, in full readiness. I realised that this was when I moved beyond selfishness. I also realised then that it was the other person who was important than myself in the world which 'I look for'."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, join me,
so that I transcend myself.

VERONICA WIPES THE FACE OF JESUS

A man needs tenderness

MATEUSZ'S REFLECTIONS:
"A man also needs to feel that there is another world where gentleness, tenderness, protectiveness rule. He knows that he should not reject this world. It's just that a man moves on after a short stop. He should never stay behind in such a world because he if he does, he loses his identity. He should shrug it off and go on to change the world which is dominated by violence."

IWONA'S MEDITATION:
"This station is the meeting of two realities: women's and men's ones. Veronica approaches Jesus because she can see what's happening. This brings up the question of whether she can see only what others do, that is blood, pain, suffering, weakness, or whether she can see what is there once she wipes His face, that is His true face where Victory shows. What openness and courage there must have been between the two ... Veronica doesn't care for the crowds, soldiers, she wants to meet with the Truth and she wants to show it to others ... She can see something more and she wants to follow it... She discovers who He is. Jesus reveals to her who He is, not just what you see on the outside, but He also shows her His mission. What kind of woman she must have been to have created such space for openness? What kind of man He must have been to have victory in His eyes, despite the pain? The greatest value of a meeting is to find the goodness in other people and their potential, which is sometimes deeply hidden. How to accomplish this in your life? I learn lessons of openness and courage to start relationships with people during my voluntary work in the SZLACHETNA PACZKA project (I've been in it for already about 7 years). You can't create space around yourself for the others if you remain in your world of convictions. After all it is relationships with others which show you who you really are."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, help us to experience the feeling of tenderness so that we are ready to build deep relationships.

JESUS FALLS THE SECOND TIME

Every failure is food for success. Power is polished by weakness.

OSKAR'S RECOLLECTIONS:
"For my last year's EWC I chose the 56 km route. The night before I'd slept approx. 3 hours and 2 nights before: 5 hours. On top of this, because of my Lent resolutions, I'd eaten my last meal at 7 p.m. the previous day. I was well prepared as far as fitness went. The extreme aspect appeared by itself. Even before the third station I became very sleepy. Extremely sleepy. I'm a surgeon and because of my long working hours I can fall asleep not just when I'm lying, but also when sitting or standing. However, I first fell asleep while walking when I was going along the river Wisła and I bumped into the fence of the waterworks. This repeated twice. At the fourth station in the rocks near Tyniec I leaned against a tree. In one hand I was holding water and reflections in the other one. I kept on blinking my eyes, but at some point I realised that both the reflections and the water had fallen out of my hands. People who were around me had disappeared. Only the dark night remained. From then on the journey was one of the longest in my memory. The monotonous embankment. I counted that I'd fallen asleep while walking 14 times and had been more or less successful in avoiding falling from the embankment. I didn't calculate the number of times that I'd fallen asleep while standing. At times I must have walked in the opposite direction because clouds were covering the sky and there were no landmarks around me. My mobile recorded an average speed of just over 2 km per hour. This was a failure. I decided to give up in the nearest town. I got there at the crack of dawn and started waiting for a bus. I thought about my failure, about the reaction of friends and how they would laugh at my pathetic story. And about my failure. Sitting at the bus stop I missed 3 buses, one after the other, probably because God has a sense of humour. It was not a day for giving up. I got up, I removed the ice from my equipment and went on. First slowly, trying to move my joints which'd gone stiff at the bus stop. Then faster and faster and faster. In the end I went so fast that despite getting lost twice which meant my route extended to over 60 km, despite the loss of at least six hours, I managed to overtake 6 people. I arrived at my destination. I turned failure into success.
Jesus gets up after the second fall. A fall is not a time for giving up. He dies only when He chooses to. He gives up His life. No one takes it from Him. He will also get up after the third and the tenth and the fifteenth fall if necessary. A fall is not a time for giving up."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, teach me to get up after a fall and to turn it into success.

JESUS MEETS THE WOMEN OF JERUSALEM

Words of truth are comforting...

IWONA'S RECOLLECTIONS:
"When I reflect on this station the word comfort comes to my mind. As they were weeping Jesus probably wanted to cheer them up. How might He have done it? Maybe by hugging them? By giving them a pat on the head? I find it very unlikely. Jesus' "comforting" doesn't mean "patting" or feeling sorry for those who are weeping - He motivates, He's already fallen twice but is continuing on the Way of the Cross, not stopping.
This immediately reminds me of the story of my recent bike trip around Krakow. This meant cycling approx. 130 km and then later working on call. I was doubtful of whether I could do it. I thought that I was certainly not fit enough and on top of that I was going with two guys. After cycling 70 km, my knees started to hurt (the day before I'd had a fairly intensive workout). I wanted to burst out crying and return from Wieliczka by bus.
And then another point of view appeared - a conversation with my companions during a short break: “We've cycled more than a half of the distance! We can slow down a little, of course you can do it!” It didn't seem like a pat on the head, like hearing: “Oh, I know how it hurts, maybe you should really go back by bus.” I don't know how I did it, but I managed to cycle over 100 km. For the first time in my life. Then I went to work for 12 hours, and soon after that I made a decision which was important for me but had been long delayed.
You can ask friends to feel sorry for you if you're in a difficult situation, but you can also listen to a completely different outlook on what hurts you. You can do it, but you need to be open and have the courage to hear this different point of view.

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, open me up to the words of truth ...

JESUS FALLS A THIRD TIME

The third fall is an emergency situation after the previous failures. He doesn't give up despite His exhaustion.

BARTOSZ'S REFLECTIONS:
"Where did He get so much strength and determination to get up once again? What struggle must have been going on in His mind, in every piece of His exhausted, wounded body filled with pain and on the edge. Well exactly- "on the edge". In my opinion, this state, referred to as "being on the edge" is one of the most important places where Men's Spirituality is shaped. After a long break I started doing sport again and re-discovered how important it is to me. Everyone who's done sport knows the feeling: you're exercising and at a certain point you find yourself on the edge. It's most visible in competitive sports where depending on the attitude which you adopt at this decisive phase you either win or lose. I persevere and give my all or else I give up and waste hours of intense training? It's there – "on the edge" that victory is separated from defeat by a very thin line. It seems that that's as far as I can go and that I'll soon drop dead. There's a voice in my head saying it doesn't make sense to tire myself out so much. Time to give up... And at precisely that moment you should make yourself go even further. It's a matter of one decision that you need to take and persevere for a short time, even though it then seems like eternity. In my sports practise I learnt that you can do it, that you can transcend yourself and that it's an attitude that you can learn and practice so that it becomes a habit. This habit works not only in sport but also in everyday life where the stake is sometimes much higher. Take, for example, an argument with your wife: you come back after a hard day at work, you're exhausted. A problem appears, it starts with something small, then you work each other up, you feel you're about to explode. You're "on the edge", you can't stand it any longer and you'll burst out in just a second... Stop! This is the moment, "the edge", if you let go and burst out, there will be an unnecessary argument, unnecessary pain. But you can transcend yourself, control your emotions, relax and try to solve the problem when you both calm down. "

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, I want to live on the edge, but with You...

JESUS' CLOTHES ARE TAKEN AWAY

I have my principles, I am a believer and I'm okay with it ...

PIOTR'S TESTIMONY:
Am I ready to show the world what my values are? Do I have the strength to say simply: "I have my principles, I am a believer and I'm okay with it?" What will I do when the testing time comes? When someone asks: "Do you want to make extra money on this transaction, but as a backhander?", will you say, "I have my principles, I'm a believer - I don't take bribes." I've had a lot of such opportunities, but didn't use them. It was hard because I had to say, "No, I don't take bribes, I have my principles." I often met with derision, laughter. It was difficult, I had to try much harder, but I can now look at myself in the mirror and say, "I have my principles, I am a believer and I'm okay with it." Jesus was stripped of his garments. He wasn't ashamed of it, he was prepared for a situation where he could say in front of many hostile people, "I have my principles." However, there is a huge difference, because Jesus really said: "I have my principles and I am willing to die for them." And he did. He allowed Himself to be humbled and killed. This can not be compared to taking bribes or not, but *anyone who is trustworthy in little things is trustworthy in great* (Luke 16:10). Jesus, give me the strength to be humbled for my principles and for my faith.

ELA'S REFLECTIONS:
Once the body was strong, beautiful and athletic. The powerful hands did the hard work of a carpenter, lifted the fallen. The resonant voice cast out the merchants from the temple and cried out to the Father during the prayer in Gethsemane. I can imagine this scene: Jesus hardly able to remain standing surrounded by a bunch of screaming soldiers. He might seem vulnerable, humiliated, He's suffered another, shameful "slap". His naked body can be seen by everyone. People scoff, laugh, and what does He do? He's said "yes" to Father and now accepts the greatest humiliations without a second thought. Faithful to the cause. What strength, what perseverance! Could you do it? When they spit, kick, humiliate, strip you of your clothes – could you remain silent and just say: "I forgive, I accept." The strength of a man is not in his muscles but in his wisdom, in a skilful estimation of what will bring more fruit. Screaming and fighting for what's yours or humble, but strong and courageous, "taking it on the chest." Not words but deeds!

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, I want to have Your principles and more wisdom ...

JESUS IS NAILED TO THE CROSS

Stop feeling sorry for yourself! Let go of this illusion of warmth and comfort. Stand up and fight! Only that is left for you to do! Fight to the end!

RAFAŁ'S STORY:
"Have you ever suffered so much that you had enough? And then what happened - someone came and gave you a hand, or finished you off? I was working on call as a doctor for the first time. I'll never forget it. I'd worked all day and night without a break. Every now and then someone needed my help, my decisions, which I was afraid of making as I didn't feel I had enough knowledge and experience. Thoughts were rushing through my head, I had to deal with a lot of things at the same time and I wanted to finish everything. Until the morning I'd been writing a report to hand everything over to my colleagues properly. Before handing in the report I was tired but happy that I'd managed to deal with everything, I'd given up the opportunity to get some sleep so that everything would be perfect. While I was handing over the report one of the doctors began to question about my patients' diseases, detailed test results, etc. I got mixed up, I couldn't remember many things ... At first, I tried to explain, but it only fuelled the attacks. In the end, I just patiently repeated "I don't know". This went on forever. I felt completely crushed. Stripped of my clothes and finished off before the whole team. Without mercy.
If you're counting on the fact that God will protect you from misfortunes and suffering, then you're stupid. He didn't save His beloved Son so why should He save you?
Jesus said to his disciples: *"Take care that no one deceives you, because many will come using my name and saying, "I am the Christ," and they will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this is something that must happen, but the end will not be yet. For nation will fight against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All this is only the beginning of the birthpangs."* (Matthew 24,4-7)

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, let me be tough ...

JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS

Death exists. It's a fact. Suffering exists. The Son of God suffers and dies. And His death is a fact. It happened.

KAROL'S RECOLLECTIONS:
"The Alps. The steep slope is covered with soft snow. We're traversing the ridge. With each step my feet slide deeper and deeper into the snow and down the slope. I look down and I see rocks and fog and an endless precipice. We're alone within a radius of several kilometres. With each step I lose my confidence, I can feel I'm sliding down the slope into the precipice. I know that if I fall, no one can save me and I'll crush on the rocks or freeze if I survive the fall. I begin to pray: Hail Mary ... We don't have any belays so that the one who falls doesn't pull the others behind him. No time nor conditions for belays. I can imagine my death, what it will look like, how my family will react... All that takes seconds. Time is short because in a few hours it'll be dark and we still have to descend. OK, too bad, so I may die. I go faster. We climb up the ridge. Then we walk along the ridge in strong wind, it's just a narrow path covered with soft snow and with the precipice on both sides. I walk most of it erect. If I'm to die, I want to do it proudly. We climb the peak and then go down the same way ... We reach the shelter. We've all survived. *"Anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it."* (Matthew 16, 25)

KSENIA'S REFLECTIONS:
"So it's happened. Apparently everyone knew how it would end. But the man has this amazing capacity of not letting hope die. I see this often in my patients with terminal cancer. In their families. The man is a surprising creature who knows from the start that they will die, but when actually faced with death they are nevertheless surprised: How come? Is it really happening? And until the last minute, somewhere at the back of the head, sometimes a very quiet, and sometimes a loud voice in us saying that there's hope that a miracle will happen. That you'll be saved at the very last moment - like in American movies. We often think that God will save us. After all He promised to guard our lives, keep an eye on each step we take and He counted every hair on our head. But death exists. It's a fact. Suffering exists. Son of God suffers and dies. And His death is a fact. It's happened. When I pray for my patients, I ask for good time. I ask God to give them strength to wisely and fully use the time that they have. And when I meet them, I smile and say to myself that after all we're not so much different - I also play for time. The only difference is that they know they may have little left while I'm still pretending that I don't know it."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, I'm taking part in a race against time. I've got plenty of it. From now until my death ... Be with me from now on, until my death.

THE BODY OF JESUS IS TAKEN DOWN FROM THE CROSS

Man - learn from your Mother. She's a person who won't let you down and will never desert you...

ELA'S REFLECTIONS:
"The mission was accomplished. Jesus who's just been lifted up on the cross has now been hastily removed from the tree of shame, and handed over to His Mother ... His whole body is one big wound, the last drops of blood are streaming down the dead body of the most courageous of men. Mary is holding on her lap the body of Her only child, tenderly embracing and kissing Him. In this scene Mary emanates incredible strength and determination. She persevered until the end, She didn't leave Her Son, even though it caused her a lot of pain. Men should be guided in their life by Jesus' words but also draw on the attitudes presented by Mary – the mother. A mother is a person who won't let you down and will never desert you - you can be sure of that. She'll follow you to death... And when she's no longer here on earth, you should know that she'll look after you from heaven. Can you stay with another person like She did, not only in moments of joy, but most of all, when everything falls apart. Or do you chicken out as soon as difficulties appear? Can you be responsible for another person?"

LET US PRAY:
Mary, Mother of enduring love,
pray for us ...

JESUS IS LAID IN THE TOMB

Jesus, give me the strength to bring things to a close.

KRZYSIEK'S REFLECTIONS:
"For me the grave is a symbol of a stage in life which has come to an end. The end means that whatever I've experienced has changed me for the good or for the bad but it's behind me and I fully accept this fact, I don't keep on going back and dwelling on it. However, I know from experience how difficult it is to "lay in the tomb" whatever I've gone through. And it doesn't matter whether this stage is associated with positive or negative experiences. Your past stops you from moving forward and makes you look back. This "laying in the tomb" reminds me of a phrase that I heard once that "your measure of greatness is the biggest challenge you've faced and succeeded". This sentence is about the continuing need to face challenges and to confront. It's impossible to win a challenge once and then remain in this euphoric state over a long period of time because it means a downward spiral for your character. Each challenge, no matter if you win or lose, should be immediately "laid in the tomb", meaning you draw your conclusions and go on to face other, even greater challenges. I once got into such euphoric state: I'd graduated with two university degrees and I thought: “Now I am SOMEBODY. I'm positive that now they'll all give a limb to have me.” But the reality was different, because the world'd gone on and in addition to a good degree you now had to have experience, speak other languages, have extra skills. To be SOMEBODY, you have to go on which means facing new challenges all the time."

PIOTREK'S TESTIMONY:
"I have a great need to bring things to a close. This is an attitude which demands commitment, but I need it very much. I define myself by what I've achieved and completed. I often stumble on this route. I experience it in the course of work on myself when I struggle to achieve my goals in the Code of Honour at Men's Side of Reality. I've taken on numerous challenges but the ones which bore the best fruits were the ones which I've brought to a close. They made me proud of myself: I undertook to do something and I did it. It's only in such cases that I can define myself by the challenges: a mountain peak which I climbed alone on a winter night... I took on the challenge, I won and now I can say that it's mine. I define myself through it. I can go on and face the next challenge."

LET US PRAY:
Jesus, I am looking for new challenges. I am finishing this Extreme Way of the Cross. And tomorrow I must go further...

Conclusion of the Men's Side of Reality at the Extreme Way of the Cross:

THIS IS FOR REAL. It's about real life. Your life. And if you win your life, there will be more winners. FIGHT. You were made to fight. Your life is not the greatest value. DISCOVER values which it's worth dying for. Give up your life to be RESURRECTED. And to live for real.

REV. FR. JACEK WIOSNA STRYCZEK

(born 1963) - a charismatic priest from Krakow known for his unconventional sermons and events, chaplain of business people, as well as founder and CEO of Stowarzyszenie WIOSNA - one of the largest NGOs in Poland.

For years he has been promoting the concept of WISE AID - thought over, customised and therefore effective. Aiding is not about giving fish, or even fishing rods, but rather about instilling in people the mentality of a fisherman. A person who does not have the mentality of a fisherman will sell the fishing rod and buy fish. And the one who has it will make a fishing rod even from a stick, father Stryczek tends to repeat. In 2001 he founded the Stowarzyszenie WIOSNA (literally SPRING Association), known for nationwide aid programmes such as SZLACHETNA PACZKA and AKADEMIA PRZYSZŁOŚCI.

Rev. Fr. Jacek WIOSNA Stryczek is also known for his original evangelisation concepts. It was he who placed a confessional in front of a shopping mall in Lent. He also announced that, as a priest, he was considering submitting his candidacy as the leader of the Polish left wing coalition and then launched a serious discussion about ideals.

He has also been the initiator of numerous events. For four years he has been organising the Extreme Way of the Cross which involves walking approximately 40 km at night. His sermons can be heard every Sunday at an evening Holy Mass at St. Joseph's church in Krakow.

SZLACHETNA PACZKA (The Noble Box) project is already fifteen years old. It was first organised in Krakow in 2000. At that time a group of students from the University Chaplaincy Centre, led by Rev. Fr. Jacek Stryczek (now CEO of WIOSNA Association), gave presents to 30 families in need. Today, it is a nationwide scheme which brings together hundreds of thousands of people like no other charity in Poland. It gathers volunteers, donors, benefactors and families in need. In 2014 SZLACHETNA PACZKA reached 19,580 families in Poland, bringing together in intelligent aid nearly one million Poles: Donors, SuperV's (SuperVolunteers), benefactors, members of families in need and all those who joined in the Szlachetna Paczka project.

AKADEMIA PRZYSZŁOŚCI is a nationwide scheme which helps children in need. Children who despite their young age had a difficult life and who need another person rather than material things. They require somebody who will believe in them and teach them how to win. Thanks to a system of motivators of change and year-long care of a volunteer-tutor, children learn that they are important and unique. It is at the AKADEMIA PRZYSZŁOŚCI that children first realise that they can be successful: "I volunteered for the first time when the teacher asked us questions", "I got B+ in dictation", "I know all the planets of the solar system."

About Authors

Angelika Chmaj, MD (1983) - doctor - paediatrician, a happy wife and mother of the six-month-old Emilka. In WIO since 2005 where she is the leader of the Thursday group and the prayer group, she's active in Perła Kobiecości. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA - Volunteer and Donor.

Marcin Chochla (1990 r.) - automation and robotics student, employed at a company which produces industrial machinery. Has a girlfriend and 2 brothers. In WIO for 3.5 years where he is the leader of Poligon Duchowości, leader of the Liturgical Service. He climbed one 4-thousand-metre peak and two 3-thousand-metre peaks.

Marcin Grandys, PhD (1978 r.) - university teacher, husband and father, a trained mountaineer. In WIO for 12 years - head of MSR, the first leader of the EWC (two editions), organised a MSR expedition to Aletschhorn for 14 men. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA - Volunteer and Donor.

Iwona Kafel (1983 r.) - works in a medical laboratory. In WIO for 8 years. Leader of Thursday group, volunteer of Akcja Ukraina, she's active in Perła Kobiecości. For 7 years she has also been involved in SZLACHETNA PACZKA as Volunteer, Description Specialist, Audit Team Leader.

Mateusz Koczwara (1987 r.) - export specialist in a manufacturing company, historian, advocate of economic patriotism. Married to Basia, has a daughter Alicja. In WIO since 2011, active in EWC organisation for two years. Volunteer in SZLACHETNA PACZKA.

Karol Korzycki (1984 r.) - doctor, happily married to Ania, father of one-year-old Weronika. In WIO since 2004. Active in Liturgical Service, coordinator of the Sacred Triduum and the leader of the Code of Honour. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA – Volunteer, Coordinator for Krakow, Coach for leaders and trainers.

Ksenia Kwiatkowska, MD (1988 r.) - doctor. In WIO for 8 years, active in Perła Kobiecości, sings in a choir. She volunteered in numerous projects. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA - Volunteer and Donor, Regional Consultant, Senior Trainer.

Elżbieta Markuc (1989 r.) - logopedist, speech therapist. In WIO since April 2014. Active in the prayer group.

Piotr Nizio (1985 r.) - works in IT, sales and marketing. Married to Ula and father of Zuzia. In WIO since 2009. Member of the WIO and MSR Boards, responsible for PR and communication. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA – Volunteer, Team Leader and Donor.

Krzysztof Wojda (1985 r.) - engineer. Happily married to Ola, father of four-month-old Helenka. In WIO since 2009. Former head of Akcja Ukraina, currently on the MSR Board. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA – Volunteer, Internal Trainer.

Bartosz Zaczek (1985 r.) - physiotherapist, married to Beata, father of Szymon. In WIO for 5 years. Leader of Thursday groups and currently a board member of MSR and head of MSR Code of Honour. In SZLACHETNA PACZKA: Donor.

Oskar Zgraj, MD (1980 r.) - paediatric surgeon, newly-wed. In WIO since 2000. Long-term, distinguished unit leader, volunteer and Head of Akcja Ukraina, coordinator of EWC districts. The head of one of the three districts in "Podaj Dalej" - one of the precursors of SZLACHETNA PACZKA. Organised the scheme in Ireland.