

# God loves you and has a great plan

**The possibility to spread the Good News has been the greatest happiness for me.**



■ Fr Peter

I have been asked many times what was the catalyst in your decision to become a priest? It is not an easy question to answer, each vocation is a mystery and it is how it should be viewed.

Truly we may say that life is a great mystery; we should all be amazed by the mystery and power of our own life. I believe that we are chosen for some things, and we become who we are meant to be, in our response to Christ's Divine call.

I come from Toruń, Poland and have one brother. We were raised

in a devout Catholic family. When I was young, I used to pretend to be a priest. My brother played the role of an altar boy and I put a bed cover over my shoulders and pretended to celebrate the liturgy which was like a role play of what I witnessed in the church.

My grandmother was deeply religious and quite often motivated me to pray. I remember us kneeling in prayer for approximately eight minutes – for a child of my age that was quite a lot. Although my knees ached, my grandmother kept telling me to improve my posture because we were talking to God. Some of the prayers have stayed with me even to this present day and I am extremely grateful to my grandmother for that.

A few years passed and I joined one of the youth movements in the local church. We then moved to a larger home, and a new parish run by the Michaelite Fathers, called St Michael's Church. I was deeply impressed by the integrity of their work and willingness to work and support children and young people. They interacted and played football with us; visited homes and organized various activities. This was quite epic at that time in Poland.

## I desired to discover God's will for me

At high school I began to consider which path of life to follow. In the many retreats I attended they always repeated the slogan, *God loves you and has a great plan for you*. I believed that and desired to discover His will for me. I learnt that God does indeed call people to a particular 'type of work' and gives all people various kinds of guidance for their work. Our reply to such a vocation calling seems to be the best commitment to God's will and purpose for our lives.

Eventually, I knew I wanted to serve God as a priest. The only thing I was not sure about was if I should become a diocesan priest or join the Congregation of St Michael. Prayers for guidance and careful discernment helped me in my decision and I finally chose the Michaelite Fathers.

When I told my parents about my vocation to live a life directly consecrated to God, they were pleased with my choice.

At the time we were living under a communist regime, also known as a Marxist-Leninist state, a one-party state that is administered and

governed by a communist party guided by Marxism–Leninism.

While attending school I was trying to hide the fact that I was going to the seminary for various reasons. Mostly because I wanted to pass my final exams of obligatory education. At that time it was not obvious for people with strong Catholic faith and priests who were thought to be dangerous enemies of the state, because the majority of them did not want to cooperate with the communists. The authorities did everything to make their life hard. If you were a believer and said that aloud, you were a suspect and could be sure of many problems at school including bad marks or failed exams even if you were well prepared.

In the high school we were part of the rebellious youth culture. Despite bans and a threat of being expelled from school, we would hang wooden crosses on the classroom walls. When the crosses were removed by order of a headmaster, one of my friends broke into the school and painted crosses on the school walls so that they were easily visible. We also put notes on class room doors with information about the daily Angelus prayer due to take place during the lunch breaks in a nearby park.

Our headmaster, an atheist and well-established communist, got angry with us and we received various punishments. One of my friends failed her exams due to her engagement in the faith.

Nevertheless, at 18 years of age I passed my exams. Then, the period of being a novice of the congregation for my probation period ... and so was the start of a really hard life. Apart from religious education we worked on a farm.



■ The main seat of the Congregation of the Sister of Our Lady of Mercy, Warsaw, Poland

At home I was rather pampered and received lots of love and care from my parents. I had baby-soft hands which were not used to hard physical work. There in the novitiate I faced an enormous amount of duties such as working in the fields, looking after cattle, feeding the pigs, undertaking various construction duties – It was a real culture shock to find myself in an extremely tough environment, a ‘mission’ for a young boy from the city who never dealt with animals on a daily basis.

At first, I thought it was not for me and questioned the sense of being in such a place. But something deep inside kept me going on. Now after many years I can honestly say that I am grateful for such an experience. The novitiate time was an opportunity for me to train my character. I had to do things that were not of my preference. This was a great lesson of real life that helped me overcome difficult situations or moments in my adult life.

One of my colleagues once gave me an excellent piece of advice, namely, to prepare a list of daily special intentions. His suggestion was to pray for those intentions within the

troubles of the day. “God can answer vague prayers but being specific creates a deeper bond between you and Him”, he said. So I prepared such a calendar with monthly intentions to pray. They all related to different people, matters or urgent needs.

Sometimes I had a bad day; I felt cold and hungry. We usually ate bread with margarine and tea. Cheese was not a common thing on our plates. Meat appeared only once a week and a sausages dish was a huge treat like a proper feast. Our rooms were extremely cold with mice running around. When I was facing all this, I always tried to remind myself of a daily intention, for example: “Let me pray for my uncle who is addicted to alcohol, apparently he needs my sacrifice today”. That was the way I tried to handle all of my daily challenges.

## Spiritual milestones

After my first vows I worked in the minor seminary as a teacher. Followed by six years in a major seminary where I met a good number of fantastic people from various congregations. Today

we share beautiful memories at our reunion meetings.

After my priestly ordination in 1990 I worked in Krosno where I attended retreats for young people and adults – first time as a priest, not as a participant. I discovered that preaching God's Word was a source of great joy for me. When I spoke, the words I expressed also affected me, motivated and converted me. My faith grew from listening. The possibility to spread the Good News has been the greatest happiness for me since then.

Another tremendous spiritual experience occurred on retreats in Przemyśl in 1994. There were almost eighty participants, mostly well-formed mature people aware of their faith and responsibilities in the parishes and their neighbourhood. We were living in very basic conditions, we slept on mattresses put directly on to the floor. Everything seemed to be fine, but the retreats turned out to be a trial. People were discouraged, with difficult emotions, they argued. The atmosphere was really unfavourable.



■ Fr Peter on one of his missions

The program of the retreats included everyday meetings with various groups and movements within the Catholic Church. They were to tell us about their history, people they work with and methods of working.

One day a group of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit Movement came. They did not talk, they just started to pray on us and with us. I glanced at my watch; time was ticking away but they continued with the prayer of praise. Spontaneously with fervent insistence they invoked the Holy Spirit and prayed to the Lord Jesus. And suddenly we all experienced an extraordinary 'coming' of Jesus Christ.

People started to cry. A girl suffering from a hand contracture could fully stretch it. All the purely emotional experience of the Divine lasted for nearly an hour. Visibly I did not feel anything but deep inside I knew that something magnificent had happened. Suddenly, a day after the Renewal group left, different passages from the Holy Bible and various psalms started popping up in my mind. I could not sleep because my heart was praying. I began to read knowledgeable books.

## Sharing testimonies

The following day we went for the community meeting and we were surprised no one argued. There were no bad atmosphere or emotions. People, with courage and empathy, were sharing their testimonies showing what God was doing for and through them the day before. I realised we experienced 'The Outpouring of the Holy Spirit' often called 'Baptism in the Holy Spirit'. It was a milestone in my spiritual life.

Through the years I learnt that a person with such an experience can

fully understand another person with the same experience because they both share the great graces of the charisms and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They both cannot keep this for themselves but they are to serve with those gifts in the community of the Church. I understood that we've been given those graces to help others experience the same healing power of Jesus' love. Therefore, I always include the prayer for the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit wherever I go for a mission or retreat in my country or abroad. I never forget about this even if the schedule is tight.

## Divine Mercy shaped my heart

My superior sent me from Krosno, south-eastern Poland to the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Warsaw where I served as chaplain for four years (1993 – 1996). Certainly it was the part of God's plan. The Sisters often asked me to lead different conferences and preach sermons. On Sunday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000 Sr Faustina was beatified by the then Pope John Paul II in St Peter's Square in Vatican City during a Mass celebrated with over 100,000 pilgrims from all over the world. I had the privilege to take part in the beatification Mass.

The spirituality of Divine Mercy became closer and closer to me. It was like if Jesus was shaping my heart to prepare me for the future mission. I managed to finish my psychology studies as well as my English language course. After some time, I felt a deep desire to proclaim the message of Divine Mercy in the English-speaking countries. I am deeply convinced that my stay with

the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy resulted in that desire of my heart.

I always keep saying that I have one actual brother and one spiritual sister. My brother's name is Mark and my sister's name is Faustina – St Faustina Kowalska.

I worked as a seminary prefect for clerics and after three years, moved to the HQ, the General House in Marki near Warsaw in 2000.

The same year God started to make my desire of preaching the Good News abroad come true. I received a phone call from Sr Renata from the convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy, Warsaw. "Father, we have a job for you", she said. I was slightly surprised and asked, "What kind of job?"

The Sisters received a request from the lay Divine Mercy Apostles in Australia; they were looking for a priest who could go to Australia to lead the novena before the Feast of Divine Mercy. Sr Renata remembered me as their chaplain who completed an English language course and she thought I would be the best choice.

I went home and reflected on this invitation. My English was very basic to say the least, having never using English religious terminology before – this was definitely a massive challenge for me. But on the other hand, kangaroos, koala bears – paradise on the other side of the world and I thought "Why not?" I returned the call, asking about the details and promised I would give an answer within 24 hours as I needed to receive permission. My Superior said, "Father, please go for it. Try it".

Going to Australia required a lot of effort. I had to write nine conferences and nine homilies in English not to mention preparation of travelling with visas, documents, clothes etc.

After visiting one church I was immediately invited to another. Over time the number of foreign travels constantly increased. It was as if God created a chain of routes to various English-speaking destinations.

There were times where I had more than seventy flights in a year. For a short time at the very beginning everything was rather like going to the tourist attractions sites but after five flights to Australia and twenty to America, my trips became more like true missions without thinking of all those initial attractions that drew my attention before.

## Each parish is like home to me

For the past twenty years I have visited many English-speaking countries: USA – twenty times, Hawaii – four times, Australia – five times, then Papua New Guinea, England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Trinidad and Tobago etc. Sometimes people say, "Oh Father, you are going on a long journey abroad". I always reply that wherever I go, each church, each parish is like a home to me. Jesus fulfils his promise, "And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life" (Matt. 19:29).

After having a small group first in the summer of 2005 I started organising English-speaking pilgrimages that gather people from around the world. We mostly go to the Shrine of St Michael the Archangel in Italy, The Divine Mercy Shrine in Krakow and other various shrines in Poland

and to the Holy Land. It would not be possible without the lay team who support me in my mission.

I discovered people did want to know more about God, Divine Mercy, St Michael and the Holy Angels; they were thirsty for God's Word and His healing power. It was the people's curiosity and questions that encouraged and pushed me to acquire reliable knowledge about St Michael the Archangel and the Holy Angels. It was also one of the reasons why we started "The Angels – Messengers from a Loving God" magazine. The first edition of this quarterly Catholic magazine in English was published in March 2010. At present the circulation reaches about 2,500 issues and is distributed in several countries.

## Knighthood of St Michael

In 2004 I was appointed the General Animator of the Knighthood of St Michael, the lay movement within the Catholic Church focused mostly on St Michael, the spiritual battle and prayers for other people, particularly those endangered by addictions and spiritual oppressions. At present the Knighthood in Poland has about eight thousand members. There has been the Devotional Knighthood of St Michael for English-speaking people since 2013. This is my great joy that St Michael reaches other countries too and invites people to become his knights at the service of God.

Becoming a priest I knew little about St Michael. Only when I visited the Shrine of St Michael in Italy did I discover how powerful a patron saint that we have. I felt a

great need to know more about St Michael, to bring people there and to talk a lot about this extraordinary archangel. I could ask him for other people by preaching about him and helping others find their own way to the Prince of Heavenly Hosts. It is something that I consider as a 'great grace' in my life.

I could not stop thinking about how to bring people closer to St Michael. Usually, people go on a pilgrimage to holy places, but I had an idea to do the contrary: to bring St Michael to the people and their daily life. In 2013 we managed to organise a visitation of a pilgrim statue of St Michael of Gargano to Poland. St Michael was to visit churches, parishes, oratories, prisons and convents within a year. It was a huge event and required a lot of planning, work and effort by many people. We originally planned just a one-year visitation but St Michael had a different plan. Now we are coming to 2023 and his statue is still visiting parishes in Poland. Since early 2015, Derry in Northern Ireland have their own pilgrim statue. This year once again Scotland has a number of parishes asking to book dates for the pilgrim statue. We could not have expected such a response from lay people! England is to follow shortly. Now millions of believers have entrusted their lives and their families to St Michael, millions wear his scapular; we had no choice but to stop counting. It was beyond our wildest dreams and expectations. It is a great grace from God for our congregation as well as for people who believe in the power of St Michael's protection and intercession. They are not tired or bored, the churches are constantly full.

When I see how wonderful God's work is, I feel the joy and happiness that

God used me as a part of His plan. I do not know how long I will be involved in that wonderful work of God's, maybe tomorrow I will be standing before God's throne, but I am trying to enjoy every moment of my life. God needs and loves each of us and no one should be seen as a second-class product or some bargain item.

## Satan will do everything to tempt and bring priests down

Our founder blessed Fr Bronislaw Markiewicz called us, his spiritual sons, to pray daily for the perseverance of our vocations. Being a priest, being able to be faithful to God day after day, is a great grace. The Devil hates priests and will do everything in his power to tempt them and bring them down. I am always asking God for the spiritual strength to persevere my ministry of serving the people of God, to be a holy priest and a specific instrument God uses to manifest Himself daily to the Church.

As a priest I need to be conscious of the fact that I must remain connected to Christ. God, I believe, is the loving God and I constantly experience His love. I have never been upset with Him and always felt grateful for the way He has guided my life. I could always feel God's hand leading me through the most difficult moments in my life. I have witnessed the loss of loved ones, prayed but my worship had not been bearing any fruits. However, deep inside I was having that sense of peace, that feeling of Jesus saying, 'I am the Lord and I have the final say'. That was a great comfort for me.

## God's intense love does not measure, it just gives

God is always a God of love despite our actions and attitudes towards Him and such a loving God I want to proclaim. God's love is unconditional, in a sense, that love is His nature. Unconditional love does not mean that when I 'add' value to my life He will love me more or when I commit a sin, God will love me less. There is never a moment when God does not love and His intense love does not measure, it just gives. I am also convinced that only a strong bond with our loving God gives us an opportunity to transform our lives. He will not only provide a way to find Him but He will also give us spiritual strength to correct our lives and achieve heaven.

## Faithful Speedway riders

The Polish speedway league has become the best league in the world that competes with all the biggest names from England, Australia, Sweden, Denmark and Russia.

I meet various groups of people worldwide and I really enjoy spending time with the laypeople. I have been providing pastoral and spiritual care to the professional speedway riders and speedway supporters in my country. It is difficult to find non-believers among riders or fans. Those people are aware of dangers associated with the racing. Speedway is an extreme sport and everyone involved recognises the risk when competing

on the track. Some of them make the Sign of the Cross before the start of a race, some perform with the images of various saints being attached to their helmets or racing suits.

Speedway riders from different countries like talking to a man with a clerical collar. Some approach only to say 'hello', some ask for a touch, a prayer or a blessing with holy water. You can never have too many blessings or graces in your life. The use of the holy water can do no harm.

I do not hide my faith but I also do not impose it into other people. I do not evangelise others without reflection. I learnt that a friendly and human approach opens people's hearts. Let us play chess together, go for a swim, play a tennis match, or attend a speedway event together. After the fifth or sixth meeting one would see me as ok and say, "Father, please tell me now something more about the One for Whom you are wearing your clerical collar". It is usually one's free initiative to ask me about my faith. Now the door is open and I can say something about God and St Michael.

Once I met a woman who had never seen a priest before. She came from a non-believing family, the word 'God' meant nothing to her. Seeing a Catholic priest was a great phenomenon to her. Of course, we did not speak about faith at the first meeting, her mind just did not get or understand any religious terms. And I needed to respect that.

## Angels in my life

When I became one of the Michaelite Fathers my knowledge about angels was very basic indeed. I needed to learn almost everything from scratch. It was

as if St Michael wanted to say, "Now I am responsible for you and I will have a leading role in shaping you".

People have often asked me about St Michael, the patron saint of my congregation. Due to the great interest in St Michael, I looked into the scientific and systematic study of many English, Italian and Polish authors throughout the ages internationally. My information also came from Holy Scripture and the traditions and teachings of the Doctors of the Roman Catholic Church whose works are true and timeless. With time and learning I'm now an expert in angelic matters and have learnt a great deal.

St Michael the Archangel is my defence against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. He protects me, guides my priesthood. I often call on St Michael, "Please be at my side, allow me to learn something new about you. Please light my mind up with your Divine light in the way that wherever I go people will be inspired and their faith will grow".

Sometimes people ask me whether I have ever seen an angel. No, I have never experienced an encounter with an angelic being and do not consider it necessary – "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe" (John 20:29). From time to time I meet people so obsessed with their desire of meeting an angel that they forget about God Himself, Jesus Christ and their daily life. I find it a quite dangerous attitude of putting angels in the place of God. Angels are not God; they are His creatures like you and me. Of course, they surpass us with intelligence and the ability to love but still – they are only creatures, not God. They were created to help us people, know the will of God and give us suggestions, protection and all we need to

find God in this life and reach happily our eternal destination – heaven.

## Angels are like oxygen to me

Now the presence of the angels is like oxygen to me. I pray a lot to the angels particularly to my guardian angel and to St Michael the Archangel. I ask daily for many things – from basic things like a safe trip to huge spiritual or material projects like missions, conferences, retreats and the publishing of the magazines. I am so used to angelic presence that if I forget to pray or to talk to them, I have an impression that I missed something significant during the day. This is a very uncomfortable feeling that you forgot, of something essential but you have no idea what it was. I treat such a discomfort as a reminder from my guardian angel, like "Hey, Peter, I'm here by your side. Don't ignore me just because you don't see me. I'm here to help you live your day to the best of your ability and talents given to you by God".

I have never regretted becoming one of the Michaelite Fathers. I would like to express my deep gratitude to God for my vocation and wish everyone to experience so much God's grace.

The intimate relationship with Jesus gives a man a feeling of being important and needed. The kingdom of Jesus Christ does not suffer from unemployment or retirement problems. There will always be someone to pray for, absolve sins, give Holy Communion to, offer a shoulder to lean on or feed the people with the Good News.

Who is Like God!

Fr Peter Prusakiewicz CSMA