

A Meditation Retreat in Poland 6-8th June 2008

In June three Oblates from England; Giovanni Felicione, Kukasz Graszka and Stefan Reynolds went to give a School of Meditation Retreat in Poland. We had done one last year but this year it was in Auchwitz. There is a Centre for Dialogue and Peace there next to the camp. It wasn't, one might say, the most cheerful place but had a deep sense of stillness and, dare I say it, holiness. We flew in to Krakow where Lukasz and another polish oblate Woychek showed us the beautiful city. It is really a gem. Then we drove on for a weekend at the Centre.

The group was quite new to meditation but enthusiastic. Giovanni led us in movement and relaxation and gave a talk on 'the stages of the journey', Lukasz did the readings for the meditation and helped co-ordinate the meeting and I gave a talk on 'the tradition of the mantra'. We had an excellent translator. At the end of the weekend we went on a visit to the concentration camp. I was reflecting on a comment Lukasz had made over the weekend and I wrote this poem in dialoguing that with the gospel passage about the swallows and the hair of our heads. As someone partly German I felt there was a spirit of forgiveness in the place, even in the terrible room where the hair of the victims, (shaved so as to make clothes) has been kept.

Meditating In Auchwitz

"The birds dont sing in Auchwitz"
I heard Lukasz say.
But they do! Full voiced and exuberant.
And well, why shouldn't they?
For this was no natural disaster
but a human one. While we pray,
and recognise the wrong,
they can sing their joyful song.

For the hurt we do each other
they would never do.
Still, if we listen in humble silence
there is no moral to their tune,
there's no judgement for the violence
that we put each other through.
Though what we did was so cruel
God makes all things new.

For not one swallow falls from the sky
without our Father knowing

and we are precious in his sight
beyond all human counting.
And all the hair that we shaved
from the heads of the dead
has been numbered and saved
for forgiveness instead.

Stefan Reynolds