

## 75<sup>th</sup> Reunion of Polish Refugees to New Zealand.

Earlier this year while I was in London, I visited the Jesuit Church in Farm Street. In that Church is a sculptured figure entitled "**Homeless Jesus**," it is a beautiful and powerful sculpture by an artist named Timothy Schmalzz. It is figure lying on a park bench, he is wrapped in a blanket and clearly trying to keep warm, he has nowhere to go, nowhere to call home. That sculpture of the "**Homeless Jesus**" has been reproduced in many places around the world. It has been reproduced and is on display in many Church and on actual park benches in all sorts of parts of the world.... reminding us that Christ is still homeless today in places like Chicago, Toronto, Detroit, Austin-Texas, Dublin...it could also be in Wellington

This weekend though, we mark the 75 years since 733 Polish refugee children and their 105 caregivers arrived here in Wellington and went straight to Pahiatua Camp. Many of you here today were numbered amongst those 733 homeless children ...." Homeless Christs." Many of your number have now ben called home to the place of the Father to be at home with Christ.

I have always been deeply impressed over the years I have had the opportunity to celebrate with the Polish community. I have been impressed because you have always shown such deep gratitude to the Government and people of New Zealand, and thankfully to the Catholic Church for the way you were made to feel at home here in New Zealand. It is an incredible thought to remember that 1.7 million Polish people were deported from your Motherland during World War II.....but despite that atrocity you who came as Refugee Children have been and still are a blessing to New Zealand and to the Church.

That same artist who sculpted 'The Homeless Christ' has been busy again. He has recently completed another sculpture called "**Angels Unaware**". This sculpture has just a few weeks ago been installed in St Peter's Square in Rome and blessed in September by Pope Francis. Just two days ago I returned from Rome and while there had the opportunity many times to look at this incredible sculpture. It depicts 140 migrants and refugees.

The 140 figures represent the 140 saints in the Colonnades of St Peter's...the artist wanted to show the connection between the new and the old, and the idea of the precious sacredness of all human life. Pope Francis asked him to do this because he is aware of how many refugees and migrants still suffer terribly today, how many lose their lives trying to find new homes.

This artwork is called "***Angels Unaware.***" There are the 140 people and in the midst are angels' wings. "***Angels Unaware***" came from a passage from the Book of Hebrews where the writer of Hebrews says "***Be not careful to entertain strangers; For thereby some have entertained angels unawares.:*** (Hebrews 13:2)

When people welcomed you to New Zealand, they were also welcoming angels, welcoming innocent young children and giving you a home. But you also encountered angels here, men and women, girls and boys who greeted you, welcomed you and were like kind hospitable angels to you, when your life was hard and very difficult. You have remained deeply grateful and once again today we express that gratitude in the Mass.

Timothy Schlamz spoke about creating this Sculpture showing a tapestry of people from historical periods of all time. From ancient migrant people to contemporary Syrians and Africans. He says "***I have a Jew escaping from Nazi Germany right beside a Syrian refugee who's right next to a Pole escaping Communism. I also have different emotions; The Joys, the hopes, but also the tragic story of leaving one's home and ones loved ones. It really is a sculpture that I believe will hold people's attention and cultural story.***"

In this huge statue I have no idea where the Pole is who was escaping from Communism, but he or she is there. The person can very easily represent you and all you went through on that arduous and difficult journey to New Zealand in 1944. The story of refugees and migrants continues today in many parts of the world.

There is a very beautiful excerpt in your Mass of Thanksgiving booklet. The excerpt is from the farewell speech of Sister Monika Alexandrowicz...we can do no better today than to repeat her words:

***“God saved us and brought us here.***

***He deserves gratitude from us.***

***I thank God each day for sending his little band of children who came with us to New Zealand and not to another country.***

***Let your children know that God has delivered you from hopeless years of misfortune. Let them be aware of your past, speak to them about it, and remind them of it, that they may thank God for your deliverance.”***

Today, we thank God for Sister Monika's words.

Today we thank God that once you were ***“the Homeless Jesus”*** but you were given a home.

We thank God that like you were once "***Angels Unaware***" and that "***Angels Unaware***" welcomed and loved you.

Today, we give heartfelt thanks to God.