

# Jasper



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Man of the day:

## Pope St. John Paul II

It's one of the moments that changed the world, and you are there.

The year is 1983, and the Solidarity movement has gripped Poland, whose people no longer want to live as puppets of the Soviet Union. The Polish pope, John Paul II, has come to Warsaw as he had promised his countrymen he would do. He has brought professional diplomats from the Vatican with him. They insisted on coming. He doesn't want them, though. They are standing on the outside of closed doors, cringing and clenching their teeth. That is because the two men on the other side, Pope John Paul II and a Polish general named Wojciec Jaruzelski (VOY-check yar-u-SHEL-skee), are in the middle of a shouting match.

It has been more than thirty years since western diplomats sold Poland to the Soviets, and the Pope will have it no more. Poland used to be a colorful Catholic nation. The Soviet

Union was grim and drab and cruel and atheist. The Poles wanted to govern themselves. The Soviets wanted to govern everybody else. Enough already.

There's a feature of manliness that I find across cultures and in the lives of many men.

Women don't write about it, maybe because men don't show it in the company of women. It's not easy even for men to talk about. I call it *dynamic enmity*. Isn't it true, men and boys, that sometimes you have a bond with your worst enemy that you do not have with your friend? Isn't it true that you and your

enemy can sometimes get something amazing done, by combining your forces even while you are still fighting?

It would make a neat and easy cartoon to dress the Pope in white – as he was – and Jaruzelski in black. It would be easy to picture the general as snarling, with a green complexion, and dripping with wickedness. But Jaruzelski thought of himself as a Polish patriot. He had fought against the Nazis in the world war. He had come to accept communism as the



truth about mankind, a truth that the world was coming to see. He did not *like* the Soviets. He did believe that their ideology was correct. And now the Pope, at the top of his voice, was accusing him of being a traitor for the Russians, for selling out his own countrymen, and for occupying the absurd position of one who was *crushing a labor union*, Solidarity, in the name of protecting the working people.

The two Poles knew more about one another from their common language and ways of life than any Italian in an office in the Vatican could know. They knew that they didn't love the Russians, and the Russians didn't love them. They knew that Poland was always in danger of being invaded by other peoples. Poland isn't protected by oceans on either side, as the United States is. It isn't blockaded by the world's tallest mountains, as India is. Poles had seen their nation carved up and devoured by the great powers in the nineteenth century. Poland only survived as a nation by acts of patriotic (and religious) remembrance. The pope and the general knew it. They knew how the Poles, abandoned by their allies, against great odds, shut the back door of Europe by repelling the Turks at Vienna, hundreds of years ago. The royal palace of London would be a mosque if it weren't for the Poles, time and again, keeping the Turks at bay. Each man knew that the other man in his way loved Poland, and each man believed that the other was *dead wrong*.

So they were shouting at one another, as men shout: arguing, fighting, taking the enemy

with dead seriousness, and holding out the possibility that something unexpected might come from the fight. For when men fight, they do not always fight to the death. They fight to the life. When one of them is a Christian, they may be fighting to the resurrection. Whether the general hated the Pope, I don't know. The Pope had a more terrifying power than hate. He had the ferocity of his love.

Making nice isn't always nice. People can make their nice and easy way straight to hell. The devil likes it that way. It means less work for him. He can spend his time reading the newspapers, or writing them. The Pope and the general did not make nice. John Paul had guessed that Jaruzelski was too intelligent and independent and *Polish* to want to take his marching orders from Moscow. He also guessed that somewhere in the general's heart the seed of his boyhood faith in Christ was still green. Nobody else would have made that guess.

The general had tried to repress Solidarity with brutal force, including assassination. But the Pope persuaded him to declare that Solidarity was within the law. A mere six years later, in 1990, Jaruzelski permitted the first free election in Poland since the war. Lech Walesa, the electrician and ally of Pope John Paul who had founded Solidarity, was elected president.

Now the year is 2014. John Paul has passed to his glorious reward. Jaruzelski has died, at the age of ninety. He is granted a military funeral in a cathedral, and his old enemy, but in more recent years his friend, Lech Walesa, is sitting in the front pew. A Catholic Mass for an

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atheist and a persecutor of the Church? Yes, a Catholic Mass. For Wojciech Jaruzelski had done something that the Pope had suspected he might, a long time ago. He had returned to the Church, and had made a sound confession while he lay dying, and he received the sacraments, including the Communion that we call the *viaticum*, the way-bread, food for the final journey.

If firm manliness hadn't prevailed back in 1983, I don't know whether Poland would now be free, but I do suspect that Jaruzelski would be in prison. It's a prison that you lock yourself into, the prison that men hide in when they cannot face the grace and the love of God. Do you know that prison's name?



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