

Mission to Lithuania

By Bohumir Zivcak, PhD

IT IS NOT EASY to put deep experiences into a few words, but I will try. The first word that comes to my mind from our last mission trip to Lithuania is privilege. We felt greatly privileged to be part of an historic event for Lithuania. I am not exaggerating. Although Lithuania is experienced in organizing national events, this was the first real City Mission in the country whose focus was meant to be evangelization.

Our team of eight lay people and Fr. Patrik Grotkovsky CSsR, all from Slovakia, were invited by the Archdiocese of Kaunas to prepare about 100 lay missionaries and the seminarians there to go into the streets, marketplace, restaurants, public parks and of course the churches and bring the message of the Gospel. We had five short days to prepare our team for this monumental task. The Kaunas City Mission lasted six days and the time was chosen well as the schools had been out since mid-June in Lithuania and the feast of St. John the Baptist is a national holiday there.

Speaking frankly, working in the post-communist countries of Europe it is pretty rare to see real evangelization happening in the Church and evangelization that occurs outside the church building is rather sporadic. But from the first moment we met Sigitas Tamkevicius S.J., the Archbishop and Kestutis Kevalas, the auxiliary bishop of Kaunas, it was very clear that the Catholic Church is coming out of its building.

Pope Francis has repeatedly called for the Church to go to those "at the periphery." I was in tears when Bishop Kestutis stretched out his hands and prayed aloud: "I am anointing you by the Holy Spirit and I am sending you. Go and bring Jesus to the streets, marketplace, bars and prisons!" We went and the priests and bishops went with us. Not to conduct cultural events, but to bring Jesus.

Every night the bars were packed as the priests spoke about Jesus, and the streets of old Kaunas were full of smiling missionaries. It was impossible to avoid us. Every evening we gathered in the big amphitheatre at the bank of river Nemunas to pray, to preach and to worship Jesus in the sunshine as well as in the rain.

The whole country of Lithuania was watching Kaunas; even the secular media wanted to see how the Church would express herself outside her secure buildings. And the outcome was surprising - joy and more joy every day. When we sat at

supper with the bishop at the end of the mission, talking until late in the night about the joy that came from sharing Good News, I was smiling and shouting in my heart - Yes! Yes! This is the Church of the Risen Lord. And this is only the beginning... +



Bohus leads a time of worship during the City Mission in Kaunas.



Each evening of the City Mission, hundreds gathered in the large amphitheatre near the river to pray, preach and worship Jesus.