

# Vatican



# Notes

Vatican Philatelic Society

VOLUME XXX - No. 3

Nov. - Dec. 1981

## BLESSED JAN



On September 29, 1981 the Vatican issued two stamps commemorating the sixth centenary of the death of Blessed Jan Van Ruusbroec, a Flemish mystic.

One stamp's value is 200L; the other's is 300L. The upper margin of each stamp has the words B. JAN VAN RUUSBROEC; the lower margin shows the dates 1381-1981 and below the dates are the words POSTE VATICANE. The particular stamp's value is indicated in the right margin, about a third of the way above the bottom of the stamp.

The 200L depicts the Blessed in his hermitage writing his treatises on the mystical life; the 300L shows a figure of Jan.

The sketches were engraved by Francesco Tulli.

The stamps are vertical, measuring 30 x 40 mm. with a  $13\frac{1}{2}$  x 14 perforation and are issued in sheets of 40. They are produced on white chalky paper in multicolor printing, using both recess and offset, by the Polygraphic Institute and Mint of the Italian State.

1, 100,000 complete series were printed.

Peace

Season's Greetings

HAPPY HOLIDAY  
TO ALL

# Vatican Notes

Official Bimonthly Organ  
of the  
VATICAN PHILATELIC SOCIETY  
Org. 1953

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## INT. YEAR of the DISABLED



On September 29, 1981 the Vatican released a single horizontal stamp in commemoration of the International Year of the Disabled. The stamp has a value of 600 lire. The value is indicated in the stamp's lower right corner. Along the remainder of the bottom border are the words POSTE VATICANE.

The illustration reproduces the official emblem of the International Year of the Disabled superimposed on a drape on which appears Christ's head crowned with thorns.

The sketch was designed by Professor Giovanni Hajnal.

The stamp measures 40 x 30 mm with a 14 x 13½ perforation. There are 40 stamps to a sheet. They are produced on a special white paper, in multi-color photogravure print, by the Polygraphic Institute and Mint of the Italian State.

1,100,000 stamps were printed.

The issue was produced in response to the invitation of the Universal Postal Union concerning the United Nations' proclamation of 1981 as the International Year of the Disabled.

The hope of the U.N. proclamation is that the non-handicapped will become aware of the unique problems of the handicapped. At the same time, it is hoped that the realization of the fact that even though a person is disabled, he or she is still often able to perform most tasks will come about.

The Vatican's stamp issue is intended to show the sufferings of Christ, indicating his identification with the disabled.

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## CHAPTER NEWS

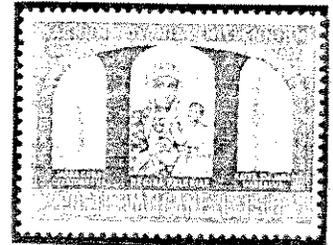
CHICAGOLAND CHAPTER - After the summer holiday the regular meetings were resumed on Monday, September 28, 1981.

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN CHAPTER - The chapter held their first meeting and a picnic on Sunday, September 13, 1981. The was followed up by the regular October meeting on Sunday October 4, 1981.



## OUR LADY of CZESTOCHOWA

By LOIS LUNSFORD CORBIN



On August 26th of this year, Pope John Paul II spoke to tourists and pilgrims at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, on the occasion of the 599th anniversary of the establishment of the shrine of the Black Madonna in Czestochowa, celebrating the Madonna as a centuries-old symbol of Polish Catholicism and patriotism.

For more than 500 years Our Lady of Czestochowa has been a center of inspiration for the Polish people. Her story is a fascinating one. When the Paulite Fathers took possession of Jasna Gora, site of the monastery where Our Lady is housed, in June 1382, a wooden church dedicated to Our Lady, Virgin and Mother, was already in existence. The first monks came from the Church of St. Lawrence near Buda in Hungary, where the Paulite Order had a richly endowed monastery. The real beginning of Jasna Gora came with the appearance of the picture of Our Lady.

Careful study of recent documents in Poland discloses that the picture was transferred to Jasna Gora in 1384, two years after the foundation of the monastery, by the Duke of Opole, Wladyslaw. A painting in the Knights' Hall at Jasna Gora shows the Duke placing the picture of Our Lady in the care of the monks. It is believed that the Duke acquired the picture in Ruthenia, where it had been surrounded with great reverence and worshipped as a priceless relic connected with the life of the Holy Family. True to Byzantine

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## IN MEMORIAM

It is with heavy laden hearts that we announce the death of Mrs. Elodia V. Aleandri on September 26, 1981 in Cape Coral, Fla. at the age of 61.

Ellie, as she was affectionally known to her many friends, headed the VPS Translation Dept. and in early 1979 took over the operation of the VPS Auction. Ellie was also very active in the New York Chapter until she and John retired to Cape Coral.

Last year it was my pleasure and great privilege to meet Ellie and spent some time in her company. She and John made my wife and I feel like old friends that had come to visit after an absence of many years. Ellie not only made you welcome in her home but she found room for you in her heart.

To know Ellie was to love her. She will be sorely missed by her family and her many friends.

MAY SHE REST IN PEACE

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

by Joseph Trent

The Prince of Flemish Mysticism, Jan Van Ruusbroec ( variations of the name are Ruysbroeck, Ruisbroeck and Rusbroek), was born in Ruysbroeck, near Brussels, in 1293.

Jan was born into a religious family. At the age of 11 he went to Brussels to live and study for the priesthood under the tutelage of his uncle, John Hinckaert, a priest and canon of St. Gudula at Bruxelles. Jan was ordained a priest in 1317 and was elected vicar of St Gudula.

From 1317 to 1349 Jan lived and taught in and around Brussels. He was a great defender of the faith, especially against the heresy of a group called the Brethren of Free Spirit, which preached the heresy that a person could obtain such a state of grace while still on this earth whereby he could no longer sin.

Desiring a life of greater contemplation, Jan, his uncle and several disciples withdrew to a hermitage at Groenendaal in the neighboring forest of Soignes in 1349 where they became a community of canons regular. They adopted the Rule of the Canons of Saint Victor, although they did not surrender their personal independence. Jan was prior of the group.

At Groenendaal he composed many treatises on the spiritual life. Among these were The Spiritual Marriage, The Blazing Rock, The Seven Cloisters and The Mirror of Eternal Salvation. It should be noted that these works were written in Middle Dutch at a time when Latin was almost always used when writing on Church and spiritual matters.

Perhaps the reason for Jan's writing in Middle Dutch was due to the times in which he lived. During most of his life, the Low Countries witnessed a number of heresies and questioning of Church doctrine. His greatest work The Spiritual Espousals, was written in defense of orthodoxy. The Espousals main thesis is that although man cannot become God, he must strive to attain the image of God.

Blessed Jan died at Groenendaal on December 2, 1381.

Season's Greetings

tradition, the picture was rightly ornamented in gold and jewels of great value. Why it was ultimately left at Czestochowa is unknown, but it is suspected that the Duke, banished to Opole by King Wladyslaw Jagiello, was carrying away his booty from Ruthenia; it may well be that fearing to lose the treasure and hoping to keep the major part of it for himself, he left the picture at Jasna Gora, where it was to remain.

Originally, the Paulite Fathers were a reclusive penitent order, but the picture brought great changes to their way-of-life. It had been an order committed to seclusion; and long periods of contemplation, hours of silence and severe penance, but within a few years the presence of Our Lady's picture made Czestochowa one of the best known centers of pilgrimage in the whole of Central Europe. The famous Polish historian Jan Dlugosz (Poland 1228, 1964), wrote of Jasna Gora that it had become the goal of pilgrimages from Silesia, Moravia, Hungary and Prussia. The monastery of Jasna Gora in Czestochowa rapidly became a rich and flourishing center of pilgrimage.

Jan Dlugosz repeated the legend according to which the picture of Our Lady was said to have been painted by Saint Luke the Evangelist, that it was painted on a board which had been the table-top at which the Holy Family worked and took their meals, and that the picture was painted in such a fashion that the eyes follow the viewer in every direction.

In 1430 an event of great importance in the history of the monastery occurred - it was sacrilegiously attacked during Holy Week and the picture of Our Lady was taken from the high-altar, profaned and damaged with sabre slashes and sword thrusts. Responsible for the crime were Hussites from Bohemia and Moravia, led by the Volhynian prince Fedor Ostrogski. Apparently a crime motivated by religious prejudice, there is reason to suspect that the real motive behind the crime was political.

The picture, seriously damaged, was taken to Cracow, where it was restored with a care and devotion not to be believed in medieval Poland. The picture was first displayed in the Cracow Town Hall, and placed in the care of the Council, so that it could "testify" against the parties guilty of the sacrilege. The painting had been very seriously damaged, and the story of its restoration is an interesting one.

Ruthenian painters employed at the Court, according to contemporary sources, were the first to try to restore it. They made three unsuccessful efforts, the cuts and bruises refused to take paint, each time the paint would run. Next, artists of the Imperial Habsburg Court were summoned by King Jagiello, but their first efforts failed; however, they succeeded the third time, and the painting was finally restored. After the King provided new wrought gold ornamental sheeting for it, it was returned to the monastery and installed over the high-altar in the Chapel of Our Lady.

As a work of art, the picture of Our Lady still contains elements of mystrey, despite two modern examinations by conservation experts. After two restorations and thorough expert examinations of the picture carried out at an interval of 25-years (1925-26 by Prof. Jan Rutkowski; 1948-52, by Prof. Rudolf Kozlowski), basic questions remain: Is the painting Italian or Byzantine-Kievan? Is it an original 13th-14th century painting or a work done in Cracow after 1430? Was it a gift of the Angevin dynasty or a Ruthenian trophy of Duke Wladyslaw of Opole? Research is only beginning; modern research techniques may one day unravel the whole story.

According to the theory of Professor Kozlowski, the original attempts at restoration were doomed to failure because the tempera paints in common use in 1434 would not hold on the wax paints of the original. He believes that the anonymous Imperial painters made a faithful copy of the original, with the greatest attention to detail, after which what was left of the original silk canvas was scraped off, and the board planed down and reinforced with a thick frame. Then their painting was fitted back on the

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original board. The efforts to preserve the original board stem from the very special role that the Jasna Gora picture played in the cult of Mary. This was not just a painting of Our Lady, but according to tradition, a relic connected with Her life on earth. This table-board from Nazareth was one of the most venerated relics in Christian Europe.

The painting itself, of course, was copied with the most meticulous care. To perpetuate the memory of the sacrilegious attempt to destroy it, two cuts were scored on the right cheek of Our Lady's face, and these filled with red paint. The most unusual aspect of this picture painted in the 1430's is that it combines ancient-Christian and Byzantine characteristics with a 14th century style of painting. Apart from its importance as an object of the cult, the picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa is a magnificent example of the Gothic school of painting in Poland.

It was probably on the occasion of its restoration under King Jagiello (see Poland 322 and 1230) that the picture was given the form of a triptych. The two closing wings were painted with likenesses of Saints Catherine and Barbara. The original Late-Gothic Chapel was given a star-vaulted ceiling at the beginning of the 16th century, and became a presbytery. After 1600 the setting around the picture was again changed, the original Gothic triptych was replaced by a Late-Renaissance gilded altar retable. After a time this retable was considered too modest for the picture, which had constantly won growing veneration. In 1650, Jerzy Ossolinski, Grand Chancellor of the Crown, endowed the chapel with the magnificent altar-piece seen there today. Considered one of the best examples of 17th century Baroque in Poland, the altar is of wooden construction, lined in ebony veneer. In 1673, a magnificent silver covering in repousse silver was made for the picture, representing the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. To this day it is ceremoniously raised to the sound of fanfares, usually during religious services only. The final decorative element which came to add splendor to the retable was a silver antependium, especially made for the coronation of the picture in 1717; it shows a contemporary view of Jasna Gora as a symbolic stronghold of Divine Power.

The ornaments of the Picture of Our Lady of Czestochowa are of enormous value; they are not only a priceless collection of votive offerings, but also a unique collection of historical heirlooms. In the early centuries, the ornaments were extended over the background of the painting behind the Madonna and Child, leaving the faces and figures free, except for diadems over their heads. The ornaments were in fact silver and gilt extensions of the frame, richly decorated and set in precious jewels, a custom which took root in the 15th century. Necklaces, gold chains and brooches set with precious stones were fixed on the board of the picture, and at times the figures were almost completely hidden by jewelry. Special caskets were placed on either side of the altar as more and more of the precious votive offerings were received.

The robes took on their present aspect in the second half of the 17th century, when the jewels were fixed on to a stiff velvet material, which was cut in a shape to fit the outline of the figures of the Madonna and Child. Because velvet is not a lasting material, the robes had to be altered from time to time, and each time the jewelry was sewn back on in a different pattern, with new pieces occasionally added. Each of the robes is known by a different name: the most valuable are the Diamond and the Ruby robes. The jewelry dates from between the late 15th and the end of the 19th century, the oldest pieces being Gothic. Some of the pieces originated in Hungary, Western Europe and the East, the rest are probably the work of Polish jewelers. The Diamond Robe has late Gothic ornament, with a figure of Christ carrying the Cross against a background of flowering vine and a sash with the name of Mary embroidered on it. The Ruby Robe, Patrona Hungariae, has late Renaissance ornaments from the mid-16th century, representing the Madonna and

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# Season's Greetings

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY AND PROPEROUS NEW YEAR from all Officers of the Vatican Philatelic Society.

## This & That

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We wish to thank VPS member Lois Lunsford Corbin for her excellent article on Our Lady of Czestochowa. We look forward to more of the same in the future.

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### "VATICAN NOTES" BACK ISSUES

A reminder that back issues of the NOTES, from VOLUME IV - No. 8 up to the current issue, are available. The price is 35¢ per copy plus 50¢ on orders of from one to three copies for postage. Orders of four to six copies add \$1.00 for postage. Send orders to Cmdr. William L. Meissner, 27 Lorraine Street, Roslindale, MA 02131.

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We want to express our deepest sympathy to John Aleandri. We also want to thank John for taking over the operation of the VPS Auction and the Translation service. John says that he will be able to continue the Translation service in Italian and Latin. John completed Auction #35 despite certain personal responsibilities. Thank you John and Welcome aboard.

### ATTENTION MEMBER DEALERS

Your pricelists, bulletins, publications, auction catalogs etc. etc., will be mentioned in the NOTES if the Editor is informed or placed on your mailing list.



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\*\*\*\*\*

OUR LADY continued from page 6

Child, and is of Transylvanian workmanship.

Our Lady of Czestochowa was depicted philatelically by the Vatican in 1956 (Scott 216-218), in an issue designed to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the proclamation of the Madonna as "Queen of Poland." To commemorate the 1000th-anniversary of the adoption of Christianity in Poland in 1967, Brazil showed the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, together with the Polish Eagle and Cross on Scott 1034.

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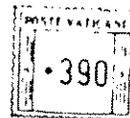
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German Francotyp machine with postal code number in townmark

(a)



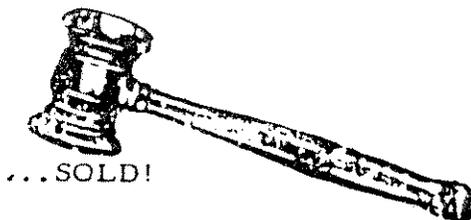
(b)



Francotyp meter with POSTE VATICANE in both indicium and townmark. Italian style ornaments at right and left of value. VIA AEREA above townmark.

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- a) 3 figures of value
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# PONTIFICAL STATES

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Prepared by FREDERICK J. LEVITSKY

## FORGERY OF THE 8 BAJ. (8 Baj. #7)

Attributed to Sartori, 1869.

(From illustration in German journal.)

1. Incorrect style letters in FRANCO BOLLO POSTALE.
2. Cross missing at top of tiara.
3. Key handle openings are too small.
4. Decorative border appears cut off like wood cut.
5. Dividing lines form rectangle.
6. Entire design is much thicker and heavier than original.



FRANCO  
LL

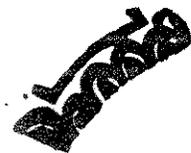
1.



2.



3.



4.

THE GENUINE 8 BAJ.

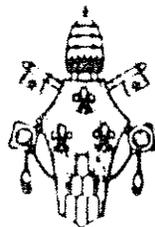
1. Letters in FRANCO BOLLO POSTALE are thinner with serifs.
2. Cross is located at top of tiara.
3. Key handles have large openings.
4. Decorative border much thinner with many inner markings being complete circles.
5. Horizontal and vertical dividing lines do not intersect.
6. Entire design has thin and lighter lines.





# Vatican City

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