News
Polish priest stabbed

Father Adrian Mantykiewicz, still bearing bandages and bruises from the Sept. 24 knife attack at the Benedictine sisters' abbey in Jaroslaw, Poland, celebrates Mass Sept. 26 and delivers a message of forgiveness, praying for the attacker and urging respect and solidarity between Poles and Ukrainians. (OSV News screenshot/courtesy Radio Fara)

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Warsaw, Poland — September 28, 2026
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Two days after surviving a knife attack that killed a fellow priest, Father Adrian Mantykiewicz returned to the altar at the Benedictine sisters' abbey in Jaroslaw with a message centered on forgiveness.

"As a disciple of Jesus Christ, in my own name, in Father Marek's name and in Father Stanislaw's name, I want to say very clearly that we forgive," Mantykiewicz said during a Sept. 26 Mass at the Benedictine Sisters' abbey in Jaroslaw in a homily that has since gone viral in Poland, sparking thousands of reactions from politicians, clergy and other users on social media.

It was the first Mass celebrated at the abbey after the Sept. 24 attack, in which five people were stabbed. Father Stanislaw Zbojniewicz died from his injuries. Mantykiewicz was treated and released from the hospital the same day. The abbey said Sept. 25 that Father Marek Pienkowski remained hospitalized in serious but stable condition.

"In a special way, I ask you to pray for our attacker and for the grace of conversion for him," Mantykiewicz said. "I say these words from the depths of my heart. He needs this prayer most of all."

"Whatever happened, the evil that took place here in our abbey, we must overcome with goodness, love and forgiveness," he said.

The suspect in the attack is a 31-year-old Ukrainian citizen. Mantykiewicz directly addressed the danger of allowing one man's crime to become a reason for hostility toward Ukrainians living in Poland.

"I also want to ask you not to blame the nation from which the attacker came, because the evil was committed by a specific person," he said. "A specific person, who has his own name, his own life and is responsible for his own actions. Other people did not do this. It was one person."

He urged those listening not to "respond to evil with evil," but with "love, support, understanding and care."

"I ask you to respect the people who live in our abbey, in our city, in our province and in our country," he said. "I ask you to respect and support one another as two brotherly nations."

Right after the Russian invasion of Ukraine started, Poles engaged in a massive charity campaign, accepting Ukrainians in their homes, and the border city of Jaroslaw was first on this front. But today, amid colder political relations between the two nations over historical disputes, the sentiment of the society faded as well, and some Poles were quick to blame an attack of this kind on the whole Ukrainian nation.

The priest connected his appeal to the abbey's experience after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

"When the war in Ukraine broke out, you remember well what was happening in our abbey – that we were open to people who came here, people who needed help,

support, care, love, sometimes simply ordinary human kindness," he said.

"No one here was left without help," he added, recalling that members of the community sometimes worked through the night assisting those who arrived. Mantykiewicz asked that the abbey's efforts to help Ukrainians after the war began not "go to waste."

Meanwhile, prosecutors have drawn up charges against the suspect, identified as Ihor M., including murder, attempted murder and causing grievous bodily harm. Prosecutors said psychiatric experts found that he was experiencing acute psychotic symptoms that currently prevent him from participating in procedural actions.

On Sept. 26 a court ordered him held for three months, with the detention to be carried out in a hospital ward with enhanced security. The Polish daily Rzeczpospolita reported that Ihor M. has a police record in Germany regarding an incident with officers and was entered into a Czech database as an undesirable person. The newspaper said the preliminary information had been obtained by Polish police from foreign law enforcement services. Prosecutors have not publicly established a motive for the attack.

The abbey said funeral rites for Zbojniewicz, 67, who had been a priest for 40 years, would begin Sept. 28 in Jaroslaw with a rosary and Mass celebrated by Archbishop Adam Szal of Przemysl. His funeral Mass and burial are scheduled for Sept. 29 in his home village of Grzeska.

"Let us care for one another," Mantykiewicz told the congregation. "And let us love all those whom we meet on the road of our lives."

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