

Blessed Regina Protmann (1552-1613) and the Simon Well in Sayn

To commemorate the 400th year since the death of the founder of the Catharine Sisters

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Since August 1983 there has been a new well next to the old well house that was donated by people from Ermland. It is made of granite and is formed with a six-cornered column bearing a statue of the apostle Simon. The rim of the well basin shows a relief picture of Regina Protmann with the dates 1552-1613, the time when she lived and above this her chosen saying „As the dear lord wishes“, on the left hand side there is a depiction of the bishop church of Ermland in Frauenburg (nowadays Frombork) and on the right hand side a cross. Furthermore you can see the coat of arms of the diocese of Ermland, an Easter lamb with a flag as well as a relief of Saint Elisabeth and the widow of Sarepta from the Old Testament, who herself, close to starvation gave the Prophet Elia some of her food.

About 500 pilgrims from Ermland, who lived in various parts of Germany came on the 3rd and 4th September 1983 to Sayn to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Order of the Catherine Sisters and to take part in the solemn inauguration of the well as donated by them. It was the beginning of numerous pilgrimages from Ermland to Sayn. The merchant's daughter, Regina Protmann, who was born in 1552 in Braunsberg (today Braniewo) in East Prussian Ermland left the safety of her parents' home at the age of 19 to live with two female companions to live only for God and her neighbours. Many young women joined them. In 1583 the rule of the order was confirmed by the responsible bishop in Freiburg, although her wish to look after the sick outside of the convent and to live from the work of her own hands was seen unfavourably by many. She followed a different path than the orders that lived strictly separated from everyone. However she did not want to lose herself in external activity. Her driving forces were the love of God and enlarging his kingdom. She wanted to be God's instrument by looking after the sick in their homes, working in hospitals and schools. Regina Protmann died on 18th January 1613 this being exactly 400 years before. She lived at the time of the Reformation and (Catholic) Counter reformation, in which the search for the „right doctrine“ was often usurped by the fight for political power, as was the case in Ermland with its Prince bishop trying to assert himself with the order of the knights in the middle of a region that had become Protestant. He was aided by the fact that Ermland had been under the fiefdom of the Polish king since 1466. When Ermland fell to Prussia in 1772 the confessional relationships had become so clear that there was a „Catholic island“ in East Prussia that was to remain intact until the German inhabitants were driven out in 1945. 102 Catherine Sisters died during this period, 420 came to West Germany where they founded a new provincial order in Münster. Polish sisters

founded in Braniewo a new Ermlandish provincial order. The head quarters of the order were transferred to Rome in 1951.

From there it was easier to create a basis for understanding and the coordination of the work across borders. Meanwhile there are almost 1000 sisters in Brasil, Germany, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Togo.



In 1961 there was the first campaign to beatify Regina Protmann, which was subsequently approved by the Polish bishops' conference. In 1999 Pope Johannes Paul II beatified Regina Protmann and Polish martyrs of the Nazi Regime during a visit to Poland. In this way this women connects the Polish and German. On 25th October 2012 a group of a branch of the Catherine Sisters from Daun visited the abbey church. They established a tie with the pilgrimages of the people from Ermland in the 1980s. The reason for the visit had been the fifty year anniversary in the order for the sister Maria Goretti, who had wished to visit Sayn because it commemorated Regina Protmann. The guests from Daun reported that since then many people from Ermland, also children and grandchildren, have visited their old homes and that they were cordially received there. What was started by the Polish and German bishops 50 years ago at the Council , when there was reciprocal asking for forgiveness from the wrongs done, has turned into understanding and friendship between the Germans and Poles. Blessed Regina Protmann, Saint Hedwig of Schlesien, Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe help us, to see rather the connecting element between peoples than the separating element. How else could our church, be called Catholic as the word means general and relevant for all.

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