Did you know . . .

Blessed Among Us:
Blessed Bernard Lichtenberg

Bernhard (Bernard) Lichtenberg was born on Dec. 3, 1875 in Lower Silesia, Prussia. He was the second oldest of five siblings; his father was a merchant with a modest living.

He received his Abiturium (a high school diploma which qualifies one for university studies) around 1889. He was an excellent student, discerned a call to the priesthood and was ordained in 1899. He began his ministry in Berlin in 1900, and then served as a military chaplain during WWI.

On November 9–10, 1938, Kristallnacht pogrom in Germany (Night of Broken Glass, when German Nazis attacked Jewish persons and property) showed the world a brazen display of the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Fr. Bernard condemned the attack while other Church officials turned a blind eye to it. Fr. Bernard prayed publicly for the Jews and other victims of persecution and later denounced the Nazi policy of "euthanasia." In a letter to the Chief Physician of the state, he wrote, "As a human being, a Christian, a priest, and a German, I demand of you that you answer for the crimes that have been pperpetrated at your bidding, and with your consent, and which will call forth the vengeance of the Lord on the heads of the German people.

His home was raided in October 1941, during which the Gestapo found a sermon he had prepared to deliver that denounced the Reich Minister of Propaganda's claim that anyone greeting a Jew on the street was guilty of treason. He had planned to remind his parishioners of the commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

He was held for two years in Tegel Prison, then shipped to Dachau Concentration Camp, known as the "Clergy Barracks" because it housed more than 2,500 Catholic priests. Fr. Lichtenberg never made it to Dachau; he died enroute in a cattle car on Nov. 5, 1943.

He was declared a martyr and was beatified in 1996 by Pope St. John Paul II. During the ceremony, Pope St. John Paul said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

Judy Pearson