

ENCOURAGEMENT ENCOURAGEMENT

October 2023 – Issue 147

The Good Samaritans... Martyrs

October is the month of the Rosary and the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. It is the month when we celebrate so many great saints like St. Faustyna, St. Francis of Assisi and St. Teresa of Avila. Although it will be celebrated on July 7th there is another set of 'Blessed' that we can add to a Roll of Honour. In a 'little town' of Markowa, Poland, a remarkable Beatification took place last month, on the 10th of September 2023. Remarkable, as an entire family was Beatified at the same time. Who was this family?

Let us unpick this story for it is an extraordinary one. This family lived at a time that many people can still recall, especially grandparents, or those who were born about that time. This was the time of the Second World War and much strife. The family surname was Ulma. Wiktoria and Josef were married in 1935 and had hoped to purchase a larger piece of land when the war broke out. They decided to stay and work the smallholding that they had. They were successful and became known to the village as industrious and with a growing family they worked hard to support, always willing to help anyone.

At the onset of World War II, Józef Ulma (born 2nd March 1900) was a prominent citizen in the village of Markowa: a librarian, a photographer, active in social life and the local Catholic Youth Association. He was an educated fruit grower, developed a small orchard, started a silk farm and was a beekeeper. His wife Wiktoria (born Wiktoria Niemczak in 1912), was well educated for the time, finishing school and a homemaker...The Ulma's had six children: Stanisława, age 8, Barbara, age 7, Władysław, age 6, Franciszek, age 4, Antoni, age 3 and Maria, age 2, (Stanleyette, Barbara, Walt, Francis, Anthony and Maria). In a short period of time another child was due to be born.



They were a devoted couple and a prayerful one. They became members of the Worldwide Rosary Association. They were a couple known for helping others and got the title from friends as the 'Good Samaritans' of the village. They were always ready to help their neighbours who needed practical help or advice. The village that they lived in had a Jewish community too and the relationships were cordial but separate. As the war progressed the Jewish community became more and more threatened.

The Ulma's realised the dangers for them if they helped them, and that it would put their family at risk. Extended family and friends asked them not to get involved because of their children. However Józef, who knew the dangers and had been asked for help took in a family or two..... saying 'they are people'...

In the summer and autumn of 1942, the Nazi police deported several Jewish families of Markowa, the Nazi plan to exterminate Polish Jews in the district of German-occupied Poland. Only those who were hidden in Polish peasants' homes survived. Eight Jews found shelter with the Ulma's: six members of the Szall family including father, mother and four sons, as well as the two daughters of Chaim Goldman, Golda and Layka Didner. Józef Ulma put all eight Jews in the attic. They learned to help him with supplementary jobs while in hiding, to ease the incurred expenses. It was no mean feat to have that many extra people in the house.

They all thought that they could ride it out... but they were betrayed, and tragedy struck. On the 24th March 1944 the family home was surrounded and the armed guards / soldiers, rushed into the house firing up into the loft. Many were struck and killed, others pulled out and murdered. The Gendarmes then taking no notice of the fact that Wiktoria was at full term,

"Pray to be ever ready for God's will even when it takes you by surprise." Saint Mary MacKillop

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...dragged the parents out and in front of all the children shot them many times. The terrified children were then treated in the same way, even the youngest of not many months. When the senior Commandant asked 'why the children?' a junior officer replied just 'to get rid of the problem for you'.

The distraught villagers buried their bodies once the soldiers left. It was then discovered that the expected baby was actually being born as they shot Wiktor and his little body had just emerged. This tiny person received the Baptism of Blood and so was counted as a martyr together with the eight other members of the family.

Such heroism was also recognized by 'The World Holocaust Remembrance Centre', as the '*Polish Righteous Among the Nations*', for saving Jews from extermination during the Holocaust in World War II.

It is an extraordinary story and it is the first time that a whole family was beatified, and as Martyrs. There are other families too where many members are recognised such as the Family Martin, parents of St Thérèse of Lisieux, (Feast 1st October).

Luigi Quattrocchi (1880-1951) and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi (1884-1965) were two married laypeople who became the first couple to be beatified together. This time the whole family were beatified together and in such numbers.

The martyrdom of this family and beatification also highlight one important point: Their death was heroic but their real saintliness began with the full knowledge of the risks and their YES.

So too the children who kept the secret and who took food up and down the stairs... Their courage was a response to a situation that many today have to face in various part of the world. It is never an easy decision to take risks for another human being. But for those who follow the teachings of Jesus in the Gospel the sacrifice has to be faced with all its dilemmas. After the war The Ulmas bodies were buried properly with a small memorial. Inside the bible of the family, underlined was the parable of the Good Samaritan. How well they lived it.

The ceremony exemplified, and bore witness to the whole family as did the Gospel reading used. So did Maccabee's, the story of the woman who encouraged her seven sons to stay faithful to the Jewish Tradition

at the cost of their lives (2 Maccabees 7).

It should also be an encouragement to us that there is goodness in the world and that many people did and still do put their faith into action and with prayer, find the heroism to live it out even unto death.

Saints come in many forms and it is worth pondering that we are all called to be Saints but have we got the courage and faith to be so. Halina Holman ©

(There are 7,177 (as of 1 January 2021) Polish men and women conferred with the honour, and thousands more that are not listed.)

Pope Francis

"The Good Samaritan indicates a lifestyle, the centre of which is not ourselves, but others, with their difficulties, who we meet on our path and who challenge us. It's us who choose this lifestyle or choose to reject it, the attitude of the Good Samaritan tests our faith, since faith without works is dead. Let us ask ourselves: is our faith fertile? Does it produce good works? Or is it rather sterile, and so more dead than alive? Do I make neighbours, or do I just pass by? These questions would be good to ask ourselves often, since in the end we will be judged on the works of mercy."

Rome 2016.

Feast Days in October

1st 26th Sunday in Ord. time

(St. Thérèse of Lisieux)

2nd The Holy Guardian Angels

4th St. Francis of Assisi

5th St. Maria Faustyna Kowalska

7th Our Lady of the Rosary

8th 27th Sunday in Ord. time

9th St. John Henry Newman

10th St. Paulinus of York

11th St. John XXIII, Pope

12th St. Wilfrid

15th 28th Sunday in Ord. time

16th St. Margaret Mary Alacoque

18th St. Luke, Evangelist

19th St. Paul of the Cross

22nd 29th Sunday in Ord. time

26th Ss. Chad & Cedd

28th Ss. Simon & Jude, Apostles

29th 30th Sunday in Ord. time

30th The Martyrs of Douai College

While the feast day of Catholic martyrs usually is the day of their death, the feast day chosen for the Ulma family is July 7, Józef and Wiktor's wedding day.

