

The Ulma Family – The Blessed Samaritans of Markowa

Faciamus bonum dum possumus – "Let's do good while we can"*

Józef and Wiktoria Ulma, along with their seven children, were murdered by the German occupiers for hiding Jews during World War II. During the German occupation of Poland (1939-1945), the entire Polish nation was subjected to brutal repression. Jews, who constituted almost 10% of the citizenry, were sentenced to extermination by the occupiers. Polish Christians, for their part, were to be relegated wholesale to the status of an enslaved race of the Thousand-Year Reich. The Germans used brutal forms of repression unknown in other occupied territories in Europe against all residents of the occupied Polish lands. Only in Poland did anyone who chose to offer help to his Jewish neighbors bring a

death sentence upon himself and his entire family. People knew this, and the Ulmas were likewise aware of it. Józef Ulma was a well-known farmer and social activist in the area, as well as an amateur photographer. Wiktoria Ulma, his wife, was a committed housewife, raising six children: Stanisława, Barbara, Władysław, Franciszek, Antoni, and Maria. In 1942 the Ulma family decided to hide eight Jews who were members of the Żegota, Goldman, Grunfeld, and Dider families in their home in Markowa. The Ulmas were denounced by Włodzimierz Les, a member of the "Blue Police"—the wartime Polish police under German command. Les was a displaced person from eastern Galicia as well

as a Greek Catholic considered "Ukrainian" by the locals. In the early morning of March 24, 1944, German gendarmes surrounded the Ulmas' home. In their brutal action that followed, all the Jews in hiding with them were dragged out and shot dead. Their the Ulmas – Wiktoria was heavily pregnant – and their six other children were murdered. The youngest of them was only a year and a half old. The German commander, Lieutenant Eiert Dieker, gave the order to murder the entire family so that "there will be no more Ulmas." The Polish underground, which pronounced death sentences upon anyone who betrayed Jews to the Germans, executed their denouncer a few months later.

*Inscription on the church bell in Markowa



INFOGRAPHIC: ORDO IURIS & CENTER FOR LIFE AND FAMILY, MACIEJ TURBOWICZ-KWIATKOWSKI



Markowa was a densely-populated village, almost a town, where 25 to 29 Jewish families were living. Of the 120 Jews there, 21 survived the war. The Ulmas' heroic attitude was not an exception. Their Jewish neighbors were saved by Michał and Maria Bar, Józef and Julia Bar, Antoni and Dorota Szulc, Michał and Katarzyna Cwynar, Jan and Helena Cwynar, Michał and Wiktoria Dreniński, Jan and Weronika Przytyk, and others. Each of the 21 rescued people survived only because someone among their Polish neighbors was willing to risk his own life as well as the lives of his loved ones in order to offer help.



A still from The Story of One Crime, a 2023 film by documentary filmmaker Marcin Pils. Pils discovered previously unpublished materials. He also followed the post-war trial of certain German war criminals, who never received punishment.



The beautiful honorific of the "Samaritans of Markowa" was awarded to the Ulmas in modern times. It was inspired by a copy of the New Testament that was found in their home after their execution. Among the numerous notes and comments made by the Ulmas in it, the most striking is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is underlined in red ink, next to which the following word was added in big letters: "YES!". This copy of the New Testament is on display in the Museum of Poles Who Saved Jews in World War II in Markowa.

Józef and Wiktoria were born in Markowa in Subcarpathia. They grew up there, and in 1935 they married in the St. Dorothy Parish Church. They welcomed six children and were expecting a seventh at the time of their deaths. In their native village they were considered honest, hardworking, devout, and passionate people.



Józef Ulma – Catholic, priest, farmer, innovator. Józef's parents owned a three-hectare farm where he helped out from his earliest years. He graduated from a four-grade general school, which he supplemented with studies at an agricultural school in Płock.

He founded the first nursery of fruit trees in Markowa and quickly began to make a living by selling seedlings. He promoted the cultivation of fruits and vegetables, bred livestock, and was a beekeeper. His ingenuity and commitment in this regard were rewarded at the Pławno District Agricultural Exhibition, which was organized in 1933 by the District Agricultural Society.

He was a man of broad horizons. To this day a part of his book collection has been preserved which bears the ex libris "Home library – Józef Ulma". Among these books, one can find A Handbook of Photography, and The Use of Wind in Agriculture. He built a household wind farm, making him the first in the village to light his house with electricity rather than kerosene lamps.

Józef's greatest passion was photography. However, at first he used a camera that he had built himself, but he eventually started using professional equipment. He was passionate about documenting the daily lives of Markowa's residents. Many of the photos have survived to this day; some of them appear in the infographic.

He was also an avid community activist who was active in the Catholic Men's Youth Association, and later in the Union of Rural Youth of the Republic of Poland (Wici). For some time, he was also the manager of the Daily Cooperative in Markowa.

In 1935 Józef married Wiktoria, née Niemczok, who was 12 years his junior. Children quickly followed: Stanisława born July 18, 1936; Barbara born October 6, 1937; Władysław born December 8, 1938; Franciszek born April 3, 1940; Antoni born June 6, 1941; and Maria born September 26, 1942.

Wiktoria, like her husband, was quite engaged in the community. She acted in the village theater and attended courses organized by the People's University in Gd. and in 1932 she presented Wiciety Wiciety with a harvest wreath when the leader of the People's Movement visited Markowa to open a new Community House.



Wiktoria Ulma, Franciszek, Stanisława, and Edward Ulma (Józef's cousin) with Barbara seated on his lap



From left: Franciszek, Stanisława, Barbara, and Władysław Ulma



Józef Ulma, Stanisława, Barbara, and Władysław Ulma



Józef and Wiktoria with their six children

The terror of the German occupation of Poland



The German Reich
The German state under the rule of Adolf Hitler (1933-1945)

Adolf Hitler
Chancellor of Germany from January 1933 until his death in April 1945, the founder and Führer of the Third Reich, leader of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), ideologue of National Socialism, and war criminal. He sought Lebensraum (living space) for the German people in Eastern Europe. He was personally responsible for the Third Reich's racial policies and the subsequent deaths of millions of people.

World War II resulted in the deaths of six million Polish citizens, or a full 17 percent of the total population (the highest percentage of victims among all the countries involved in World War II). Among them, three million were Polish Jews exterminated by the German occupiers.



Relics of the Blessed Józef and Wiktoria Ulma and their seven children