

NOVENA TO THE ULMA FAMILY

DAY ONE

Friday, 21st Week in Ordinary Time, 1 September 2023

JESUS IS OUR BLESSING

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them (Mt 5:1-2)

INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE MOST SACRED HEART OF JESUS

In preparation for the fruitful experience of the beatification of the Ulma family on 10 September, for the nine consecutive days of the novena we will reflect on their path to the glory of heaven. For all Christians, this is the path of the eight beatitudes delivered by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3-12). However, the martyrs of Markowa walked it to a heroic degree, which will be acknowledged by their solemn beatification. Thus, they will become genuine and living role models in the Church. During the novena, we will get to know this model and pray for the graces we need, so that we too, following in the footsteps of the Ulma family, may persevere on our way to holiness.

We begin this novena on the first Friday of the month, gathering at the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus to renew and strengthen our relationship with our only Teacher and Lord through First Friday Confession and Holy Communion. This is because on our own, we are unable to advance on the path to holiness and towards full happiness in the glory of heaven. It is only in Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, that we are granted access to the fullness of all God's blessing. In Him, as St. Paul indicates, "we do not lack any gift of grace" (1 Cor 1:7). On the first day of the novena, let us desire especially the gift of God's life and holiness. Let us open our minds and hearts to it, humbly acknowledging our weaknesses, sins, and negligence at the beginning of Holy Mass, so that we may obtain the salvation and sanctification we need from Jesus' sacrifice.

FIRST FRIDAY DEVOTION

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Acknowledging in faith the presence of Jesus among us in the Blessed Sacrament, let us bless Him and give thanks that in Him and through Him, like the Ulmas, we can experience God's blessing, and that by the power of His Spirit we can grow in holiness and Christian perfection, overcoming the evil and sin that threaten us.
- As we pay homage to the Heart of Jesus, let us apologise to Him for any coldness towards Him, for our ingratitude and forgetfulness. Let us thank for all who worship the Heart of Jesus, especially the martyrs from Markowa, whom the Church offers us as models to follow.
- As a sign of reparation for our transgressions, and at the same time of gratitude for the graces received, let us pledge to belong entirely to Christ and to do everything out of love for Him, renouncing everything that is particularly offensive to His Sacred Heart.

DAY TWO

Saturday, 21st Week in Ordinary Time, 2 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3)

INTRODUCTION ABOUT THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

The second day of the novena before the beatification of the Ulma family occurs on the first Saturday of the month. Poles traditionally dedicate such a day to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. As we gaze upon this Heart, today we realise that the key to Mary's happiness is her consent to her poverty, so that she can rely entirely on God and His salvific action.

This should likewise be the attitude of every Christian, as evidenced by the lives of the martyrs from Markowa. Through their freely embraced poverty, like Mary, they tangibly experienced the power of God, who sanctified and saved them.

We face much the same task, all the more so because every day we are practically confronted with materialistic atheism and a culture often stripped of reference to God. Let us therefore entrust ourselves to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and ask for Jesus' blessing promised to those who are poor in spirit. At the beginning of Mass, let us apologise to God for all the sinful manifestations of placing our trust in material goods alone and closing our hearts to God and people.

DEVOTION TO THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Let us rejoice in the presence of Christ in our midst and thank Him for entering into the life of each one of us so as to be with us as a Saviour always ready to help. Let us open ourselves up to His help in a spirit of great trust, so that we may be faithful to Him in the midst of the trials and tribulations we face.
- The life of the Ulma family confirms that characteristic of spiritual poverty is not just contentment with what one has, but an effort and commitment to multiply it and use it for the good of others. In our prayer, let us open ourselves to such a way of life; let us desire it, even though it seems something impossible to achieve in a world that absorbs us so much.
- The martyrs of Markowa are a great treasure for our Church. Let us ask for ourselves to experience the same inner strength which they experienced to the point of martyrdom. Let us pray that their example be followed by all those who occupy important positions in our society and in the Church, in our local community and homeland.

DAY THREE

Sunday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 3 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO MOURN

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Mt 5:4)

INTRODUCTION

Since last Friday, during the evening Mass, we have prayed the novena before the beatification of the Ulma family, reflecting on Jesus' beatitudes, which became for them the way to heaven. Today, on the first Sunday of September, we want to open up and receive the message of the third beatitude, dedicated to those who mourn.

Guided by common sense, we ask whether such people can be indeed blessed. After all, sadness is the opposite of joy and happiness. In our plans and dreams for the future, we constantly hope for success, craving an easier and more comfortable life. In so doing, we believe that faith will save us from problems, that God will free us from suffering and hardship. What, then, must we do to discover God's consolation in sorrow?

Before we find an answer to this question in the Divine Word, let us apologise to God for all the failed attempts of our faith, by running away from suffering and sorrow, and seeking comfort and joy at all costs, often in sinful ways, at the expense of our dignity and faithfulness to Christ.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- United with Christ after the Eucharist, let us confess our sorrows to Him and embrace the attendant suffering. Let us ask for perseverance, if God wants to test our faith. Following the example of the Ulmas, let us ask that sorrow and pain may never completely overcome us.
- Gazing at the Blessed Host, let us ask for comfort and support for ourselves. It need not, however, interrupt the experience of trial, but always leads to an understanding of its salvific role in the mysterious plan of God's love. Let us ask for the ability to experience trial in such a way that we can draw from the reality of the cross the strength to die to ourselves, in total trust in God's faithful love.
- Let us learn from the example of the Ulma that by finding consolation in the Lord, we are able, like them, to offer consolation to others. This will involve showing them the possibility of sharing in the mystery of God's redeeming love. Let us ask for the ability to understand and uplift our fellow human beings, to show them compassion and empathy. In the depths of our hearts, let us discover what comfort we will be able to give to those of our loved ones who particularly need it.

DAY FOUR

Monday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 4 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth (Mt 5:5)

INTRODUCTION

On the fourth day of the novena before the beatification of the Ulma family, today we want to consider Jesus' beatitude that emphasises gentleness and patiently enduring life's adversities. We do this during Mass, referring to the word of God from the Mass readings. In the light of these, we will draw attention to the nature of gentleness, which should characterise His disciples in imitation of their Master.

Józef and Wiktoria Ulma were meek. It was thanks to their gentleness, which was the extraordinary strength of their souls, that they were able to face all the challenges of life up to martyrdom. Thanks to this, they were always able to behave with dignity, as befits disciples and followers of Jesus Christ. Let us awaken in ourselves the desire for a similar lifestyle. As we embrace this grace, let us apologise to God for all our sins and negligence in situations that require us to be particularly meek and humble.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Jesus invites us to learn gentleness and meekness from Him. We do this when we approach Him and take up "His yoke", that is His teaching. This teaching strengthens our love and we are increasingly capable of denying ourselves and taking up our daily cross. Let us be drawn to the gentleness and meekness of Jesus. May it move our hearts so that they do not become hardened and insensitive to the voice of God's revelation.
- We can win others for Christ through our witness of respect and gentleness in the spirit of the Gospel. In the first place, this applies to people who are outside the Church, to strangers and unbelievers. Within the Church, gentleness is especially needed towards indifferent and sinful people. Let us ask to be able to act like this towards others and to "bear with one another through love" (Eph 4:2).
- Meekness should in particular be the attribute of pastors, parents, teachers, and educators. It is not a sign of weakness, but rather, as in the case of the Ulma, a testament to an inner strength which helps control emotions and more vehement reactions. Not being meek, we are unable to offer spiritual support to others, listen to them, understand them, and admonish them as our sisters and brothers. Let us apologise to Christ for our violent, pretentious, and malicious behaviour towards those who annoy or criticise us and those who are disobedient or unkind to us.

DAY FIVE

Tuesday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 5 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HUNGER AND THIRST FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied (Mt 5:6)

INTRODUCTION

Today we are invited to consider the fourth beatitude of Jesus, which sums up the previous ones and, through the motif of justice, links up with the following ones, especially the last one. This beatitude calls for reflection on the object of our human hungers and desires. We know well that they are a natural, primordial, and powerful urge of every human being. However, the ability to discern and satisfy such needs is truly essential.

Today we have so many possibilities to satisfy human desires, yet we can conclude that modern humans are increasingly insatiable. This is because their desires are often distant from what pleases God and what is consistent with His will. The example of the Ulma family shows us that not much is needed for true happiness and fulfilment. All that is needed is to fulfil God's will in the reality of one's life, as revealed to us by Jesus Christ. May this desire accompany us during the celebration of the Eucharist and become the guiding principle of our efforts and endeavours in daily life. Let us acknowledge before God that we are still far from being truly faithful in fulfilling His will. Let us therefore ask for forgiveness and the power of the Holy Spirit, so that in the midst of our many desires, we may always be able to prioritise what pleases God.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Let us confess before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament that we want to be people who hunger and thirst for justice. Meanwhile, as a result of the deception of advertising, pride, and selfishness, we are ever in danger of going astray in some way. If this happens in our lives, let us apologise to God if we expect more happiness from the use of the world than from Him. Let us apologise if we deceive ourselves with surrogates of happiness, instead of being concerned about the things of the kingdom of God.
- Like the Ulmas, let us rely on God without being discouraged by the fact that justice is a long way off in the world. Despite this, let us not lose hope for a better world. Let us desire justice but let us not impose on God what He must do; the Kingdom of God comes imperceptibly, inconspicuously, in tiny steps. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to awaken a desire for justice in the powerful of this world, so that the structures of evil are overthrown.
- Let us rejoice in the consolations God offers us. May they awaken in us a desire for even greater things for the sake of God's glory. Only in this way can we open ourselves to new fulfilment and thus to God's blessing. Complete fulfilment, which is God Himself, will only be had in eternity. Before this happens, on earth it must be marked by the pain that God, who is Love, is not loved fully. In prayer, let us reward the Lord for human callousness and ingratitude.

DAY SIX

Wednesday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 6 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy (Mt 5:7)

INTRODUCTION

On the sixth day of the novena before the beatification of the Ulma family we want to reflect on another beatitude of Jesus, which shows that mercy is the way to happiness. We cannot allow the desire and concern for justice to make us hard and cruel. Perfect justice can only be attained through mercy. The Psalmist points this out when he states that "the righteous one is merciful" (cf. Ps 37:21). This means that showing mercy is the actualisation of justice.

Every Mass is a school of mercy, as here Christ constantly teaches us about sacrificial love. To learn this lesson today, let us humbly stand before God and apologise to Him for any offence we may have committed against brotherly love. Following in the footsteps of the martyrs of Markowa, let us believe with renewed fervour that by opening ourselves to God's mercy, we too, in our times, will be able to be apostles of mercy.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Lord Jesus, present among us in the Most Blessed Sacrament, we thank you for the Gospel verses about the merciful Samaritan. The Ulmas frequently referred to them to learn mercy, right down to the heroic gift of their lives for the persecuted and murdered Jews. Let us resolve to follow in their footsteps and, in our own circumstances of life, let us see those around us who need help, and by being compassionate, let us try to help them in a concrete way.
- Showing forgiveness to those who trespass against us is the hardest form of mercy. If we struggle with the decision to forgive, with humility and faith let us ask this favour of the merciful Christ. Let us do it, mindful of His words from the Cross: "Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34).
- Showing mercy is the ultimate argument in the face of violence and evil. Mercy offers a chance for a new beginning. Let us pray so that our communities, especially families and parishes, be increasingly inclusive of those who, living by mercy, renew human relations and strengthen the Kingdom of God on earth.

DAY SEVEN

Thursday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 7 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THE CLEAN OF HEART

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God (Mt 5:8)

INTRODUCTION

Today, on the first Thursday of the month, we give thanks to Jesus for the Eucharist, which is a gift of His infinite love for humanity. It continually embodies the mystery of His Passover - His passion, death, and resurrection. It is through the Eucharist, by repeating His salvific sacrifice, that Christ makes us “the clean of heart”, so that we can respond to His love with our lives.

Having a clean heart is therefore a precondition for the beatitude that Jesus promises to his disciples. Today we want to open ourselves up to His message, which concerns the very essence of our consciousness and actions. Whenever Jesus speaks of the heart, he has in mind the whole “inner man”.

He is not just referring to feelings, but to the deepest self, the source of all attitudes and aspirations. Thus the source of man's life, the whole person, should be pure. Józef and Wiktoria Ulma, who preserved their hearts from everything that could taint their love towards God and people, became models of work in this direction. Let us experience the First Thursday Eucharist with the desire to follow in their footsteps. Let us begin by acknowledging our own sinfulness in an act of penance, so that by the grace of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can cleanse our hearts and be strengthened to live a life of sacrificial love.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Let us praise Christ that, through Him, we have received the gift of a new heart, which can be made chaste by recognising God and His truth in our daily lives. Let us remember, however, that purity of heart is not given once and for all, but is a task assigned to everyone. It must be guarded against the various forces of evil that seek to tear us away from God. Let us therefore ask for the strengthening of our faith and the determination to stand up for God and His commandments on a daily basis.
- One special threat to purity of heart is to undermine and deny the value of chastity. This is because it can inflict wounds or even kill an appropriate relationship between people. Let us apologise to God for sins from the area of emotional and sexual life. Let us give thanks for Wiktoria and Józef Ulma, who valued the virtue of chastity in their lives and marital vocation, asking that our marriages too may have the courage to live in and defend chastity.
- Purity of heart may be identified with a truthful life. We want our lives to be transparent, visible to all, without ambiguity or hypocrisy. Care for purity of heart therefore requires everyone to be concerned about the sincerity of convictions and conduct. In prayer before the

Lord, who knows best the depths of our hearts, let us purify our intentions, let us tear off our masks before Him, so that we may experience the promise of seeing God's intervention in our daily lives, and one day seeing Him face to face in Heaven.

DAY EIGHT

Friday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, 8 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God (Mt 5:9)

INTRODUCTION

In our novena prior to the beatification of the Ulma family, today we celebrate the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. We can therefore link the seventh beatitude, dedicated to the peacemakers, with Mary, who gave birth to Jesus the Messiah, the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5). No wonder we call Her the “Queen of Peace”. And because the fruit of Her womb was the Blessed One, She is the first to be blessed. This was first expressed by Elizabeth, who during the visitation addressed a blessing towards Mary: “Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled” (Lk 1:45).

Thanks to Mary, Her blessing in Jesus Christ remains open to each and every one of us. It becomes a reality when, like Her, we accept the word of God in the spirit of faith and live it out, bringing true peace to people. Mary, the irreplaceable Guide on the paths of salvation, helps us in this. This is also confirmed by the testimony of the life of the Ulma family. They were people of peace, which was evident in relation to their family, neighbours, and friends. As the Queen of Peace, Mary was particularly close to them during the atrocities of the war. Firmly believing in Her intercession, they faithfully entrusted themselves to Christ, the only provider of peace and hope for them.

Let us ask Mary to support us too in our efforts for peace. Also, since every sin brings disharmony, discord, and hatred into human life, let us apologise to God for anything we may have contributed in this regard.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- The world alone will not give people peace if they break God's law, departing from Christ and His Gospel. As we abide in prayer before the Lord, let us enter into communion with Him, that He may grant us the peace that the world cannot give (cf. John 14:27). Let us then express our consent to our lives, for Christ is stronger than any sin and evil we are confronted with.
- The need for peace making is revealed wherever people make up a community of daily life. This applies to every community, starting with one's own family. Let us therefore turn to Christ, praying in the words of St. Francis: “Lord, make me an instrument of your peace”. And if, instead of bringing peace, we instil anxiety, agitation, and tension, let us earnestly ask for the transformation and tranquillity of our inner selves through closeness to Christ.

- In life, we are often confronted with conflicts and disagreements. When this happens, we should not hide or ignore them, but rather try to resolve them, guided by the wisdom of the Gospel. This will always require great humility, modesty, as well as a willingness to accept suffering and sacrifices. In prayer, let us revive our trust that, with God's help, we will be able to resolve all the difficult and conflicting situations we are currently struggling with.

DAY NINE

Saturday, 22nd Week in Ordinary Time, 9 September 2023

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO ARE PERSECUTED FOR THE SAKE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:10-12)

INTRODUCTION

We conclude our novena before tomorrow's beatification of the Ulma family in Markowa. At the end, we are left to contemplate the final beatitude of Jesus promised to those “who suffer persecution for the sake of righteousness”. This beatitude was lived to the full by the Ulmas at the hour of their martyrdom. It was the culmination of their earthly journey to the glory of heaven, in accordance with the spirituality of all Jesus' beatitudes. As a result, they enjoyed the blessing of God already during their lifetime, while on their way to eternal blessing in heaven.

Today, we implore the same grace for ourselves, so that the path of the eight beatitudes may also become our path to the happiness of eternal life. This is possible thanks to Christ, for this path requires sacrifice, self-denial, and taking up one's cross, sometimes to the point of martyrdom. We learn this at every sacrifice of Holy Mass. In humility, let us stand before this mystery of our paschal journey to the glory of heaven, apologising to God for all our infidelities and sins.

PRAYER

Personal prayer of Holy Mass participants before the Blessed Sacrament guided by cues from the celebrant:

- Our acknowledgment of Christ can give rise to resentment and intolerance, and we may run into various difficulties and grievances with other people. Whenever we experience such situations, let us unite in prayer with Christ so that He may “take them on Himself” and thus share in the salvation of the world through sacrificial love.
- Our love for Christ will always be put to the test. And if we love Him truly, nothing will separate us from Him (cf. Rom 8:35). Let us rejoice before the Lord in every victory we have won over ourselves by being tested in our faith. Let us thank Him that, supported by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been able to bear genuine witness to the salvific power of Christ's cross.

- Our strength in suffering for justice is the witness of the martyrs. Let us thank Christ for the martyrdom of the Ulma family. Laying down their lives for fidelity to the Gospel, they showed us that this is possible even in the most difficult circumstances of life. In prayer, let us invoke their intercession with God, so that we too may faithfully cling to Christ, His Gospel, and the Church until the end of our days on earth.