

## **The Sixth Sunday of Easter** **May 9, 2021**

Jozef and Wiktoria Ulma were a Catholic couple who lived in the Polish town of Markowa with their six children during the Nazi occupation of World War II. They had a large farm just outside of town where they grew fruit trees and raised bees. Jozef also worked in Markowa as a librarian and photographer.

When the Nazis arrived, they immediately rounded up Jews to be sent to concentration camps. Jozef and Wiktoria knew they couldn't stand by and allow their friends to be taken away to their deaths. So, when the Szall family came to them looking for help, they agreed to hide all eight of them in their attic. They were well aware that, if the Nazis found out, their lives would also be in danger. But they also knew that they couldn't turn their backs on their friends when they were in need.

Then, on March 24, 1944, a Nazi patrol arrived on their farm. They barged into their home and discovered the Jewish family hiding in their attic. They executed all eight members of the Szall family on the spot. Then they grabbed Jozef and Wiktoria and shot them in front of their children. At the time, Wiktoria was pregnant with their eighth child. Finally, the Nazis shot all their children.

The story of their heroism traveled all over Poland and they became known as the "Good Samaritans of Markowa." They have been given the title "Righteous Among The Gentiles" by our Jewish brothers and sisters because of their resistance to the Nazi holocaust. And Pope Francis is now considering making them saints in the Catholic Church.

In today's gospel, Jesus gives us the great commandment - "Love one another as I love you." Then He tells us what it means to love others as Jesus loves us - "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."

The type of love that Jesus calls us to show to each other is not just kind words and thoughtful actions. It is not just the affection we feel for our family and friends. It is more than having warm feelings and good thoughts for others. Rather, it is a love that is willing to go so far as to surrender one's life for our neighbor. It is the type of love that the Ulmas showed for their Jewish friends. It is the type of love that Jesus showed us by dying on the cross.

What sets us apart as Christians is not just the type of ceremonies we perform or the beliefs that we have. Those are all important but they do not go to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Our rituals and beliefs are meant to support what our crucial mission is - to love as Jesus loved. The Ulmas showed that in a heroic way under dire circumstances. We must show that love every day to everyone we meet.

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What does Christian love look like in action?

Christian love is sacrificial. It is a love that is willing even to die for others. Such love requires me to put the needs of others before my own. Spouses show that type of love by caring for each other in good times and in bad times, in sickness and in health, for richer and for poorer. Priests show that type of love by forgoing marriage to serve the People of God. Jesus showed that love to us on the cross. The measure of true Christian love is its ability to sacrifice for the beloved.

Christian love is also universal. It reaches out to every person. There is no one who is not loved by God, no matter who they are or what they have done. Likewise, there is no one whom we are not called to love. Jesus tells us we must even love our enemies and those who do us harm. The measure of true Christian love, then, is its ability to love even the most unlikeable and offensive persons.

Christian love is unconditional. God does not only love us when we are good but also when we sin. Likewise, we must love others no matter how they treat us. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you love those who love you back, what reward is there in that?" Christian love shows itself most strongly in us when we continue to love even when we get nothing in return.

Christian love desires the good of the other. Everything God does is for our good, even if it doesn't always seem that way. Everything we do for others must be for their good. And the greatest good is their salvation. Sometimes loving others means speaking hard truths to them so that they will return to the right path. Sometimes it means letting our friends know that we don't agree with their lifestyle choices. Sometimes it means saying "no" to our children. As St Paul says, "Love takes no pleasure in evil but rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor 13:6). The measure of Christian love is our willingness to do the right thing even if it means our family and friends will judge us or reject us for it.

Finally Christian love is contagious. When we love others from the heart, it inspires others to do the same. The reason why the Christian faith grew so much in those first few centuries was that people saw the love that Christians had for each other and they wanted to have that love for themselves. The reason why the Church continues to grow today is because of the example of love that our living saints show today. If we are interested in seeing our parishes grow, one thing we can do is follow Jesus' commandment to love one another.

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Jesus says, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy might be complete." The fruit of love is joy. The Ulmas experienced that joy in helping their friends, even if it meant sacrificing their lives. Otherwise, they would have been condemned to a life of fear and regret. When we choose love without counting the cost, we experience boundless joy because we were made for love. We can be satisfied with nothing less.

At this Mass, we will receive Jesus who is love - who becomes small in the Eucharist so that He can live large in us. Let us take Him along with us, then, into this world and continue to transform it with His love.