

**Blessed M. Melusja (Marta) Rybka, Martyr
(Poland) 1905-1945**

Cared for the elderly and sick and girls under
the Congregation's care in Nysa.
Shot trying to protect a local girl, employed in the
Congregation's house, from a Soviet trooper.



Blessed M. Melusja (Marta) Rybka, Martyr (Poland) (1905-1945), was born July 11, 1905, in Pawłów Skabimierz, Brzeg, Poland to Victoria (Kurek) and Nicholas Rybka. She was baptized July 16, 1905.¹²

Marta entered the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (CSSE) on October 5, 1927 and took the name Sister Maria Melusja. Her novitiate was April 19, 1928-1929 at the novitiate house in Wrocław, Poland. Sr. Maria Melusja made her temporary profession on April 22, 1929. Her ministry from 1929-1945 was on the farm, garden and bakery at the St. George Congregation house at 25 Słowiańska Str in Nysa. She made her permanent vows on July 31, 1934 in Nysa.¹²

After the outbreak of World War II, she also cared for the elderly and sick, as well as the girls under Congregation's care in Nysa. On March 2, 1945 when victorious Russian troops were approaching, Nysa, Germans ordered the evacuation of the town. Many infirm and wounded, tended to in hospitals, among others, were unable to move. Many religious sisters decided to stay with them, mainly Elisabethan nuns.

Although the town of Nysa was largely untouched by the war, on March 24, 1945, Russians set alight the historic city center. In this burning city, drunken Russian soldiers initiated hunts for women. More than 150 nuns were raped and insulted numerous times --- some a few dozen --- soldiers formed long queues to their victims. They did not spare 80 year old and even paralysed nuns. Those that attempted to defend were murdered on sight or tortured. In effect 27 nuns were slaughtered. Many of those that survived were deported to Russia.¹⁰

Sr. Mary Rybka was shot trying to protect a local girl, employed in the Congregation's house, from a Soviet trooper at Nysa. She was murdered on March 24, 1945, in Nysa (aka Neisse Oberneuland), Poland at the age of 40.¹² Interestingly, the fire that the soldiers had set in the sister's house stopped at the room where Sr. Melusja's dead body lay. She was buried in the common grave of the sisters in the monastery garden at 16 Słowiańska Street.^a (Memorial – May 11)

Prayer for the favors that are needed and for the canonization of Sister M. Paschalis and IX companions:⁷

Lord Jesus Christ, Crucified and Risen, You strengthened Sister M. Paschalis and her companions to sacrifice their lives. For the price of the blood that was shed, they kept their virgin faithfulness, defended the female dignity of others, and performed acts of mercy. Let your Church raise them to the glory of the altars and show them their testimony to the faithful today. May this example encourage us to be generous in serving others and to be zealous in fulfilling Your commandments. If it is in accordance with Your will, grant me the grace through their intercession ... for which I am asking you with confidence, who live and reign for ever and ever.
Amen.

Our Father ... Hail Mary ... Glory be ...

Forward information on graces received to: General House of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Elizabeth, via Nomentana 140, I – 00162 R O M A, tel. 0039 068 638 89 89, fax. 0039 068 632 06 35, generalat.csse@gmail.com

**Ten Religious Sisters from the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (CSSE)
representing the many who were violated and murdered under the
Soviet Communist – 1945**

The Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (CSSE) was founded in the mid-19th century in Silesia by Blessed Maria Luiza Merkert to nurse cholera and typhus patients. In addition to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, the Sisters take a fourth vow to assist the sick and most needy. Ten (10) professed religious Sisters from the Congregation of Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (CSSE) were chosen for beatification based upon the availability of documentation and witnesses. The religious sisters ranged in age from 29 to 70. They were killed while resisting rape and facing other atrocities by Soviet soldiers in the final months of World War II. This mass beatification highlights a little known historical period and recalls the terrible sufferings faced by religious orders during the Soviet's presence in Poland. These religious sisters were chosen from the many religious orders faced brutality during the 1944-1945 Soviet sweep through Poland.

“Contemporary opinion still has trouble grasping the parallel criminality of Nazis and Communists, and isn't much interested in martyr stories,” stated Jan Zaryn, director of Poland's *Roman Dmowski and Ignacy Jan Paderewski Institute for the Legacy of National Thought*.¹ He further stated, “Poles experienced both totalitarian systems, and remember how Soviets brought terror, rape, arson and captivity with them, arresting and murdering priests and nuns in a bid to prove only lunatics believed in God.” Polish cities and towns had been “treated as conquered territory to be plundered and destroyed,” with Catholic churches torched and priests and nuns “raped, murdered and driven out.” Harsh anti-church measures continued in Poland as the Soviet-backed communist regime took power after World War II, viewing religious orders as secretive organizations threatening its absolute power. In the western region, 323 convents were



closed in August 1954 under a campaign code-named “Operation X2,” with more than 1,300 nuns rounded up by armed militia and bused to labor camps with no electricity and where tuberculosis was rife. In Czechoslovakia, up to 700 Catholic convents were seized in a coordinated action in 1950, leaving an estimated 10,000 nuns incarcerated in prison and detention centers.²

The Roman Catholic St. Sigismund parish in the Warsaw Archdiocese, Poland reports:⁸

During the capture in 1944-1945 of pre-war German territories and territories incorporated into Germany in 1939 after the German invasion of Poland, Russian soldiered committed mass, often multiple, rapes on mainly German, but also Polish women. Up to 2 million women might have been violated, from 8 to 80 or more years old. Many were murdered as a consequence. Rapes were tolerated if not encouraged by Russian military and the civilian NKVD commanders.

NKVD, the People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, was the interior ministry and secret policy of the Soviet Union from 1934-1946. The NKVD is known for carrying out political repression and the Great Purge under Joseph Stalin, as well as counterintelligence and other operations on the Eastern Front of World War II.⁹

A congregation statement said that the 10 religious sisters from the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Elizabeth (CSSE) had been recognized as martyrs from the time of their deaths, as recorded in a 1946 letter by their superior general, Mother Mathildis Kuttner. A statement from the congregation revealed that, “Many girls, women and nuns were raped despite heroically resisting until reduced to a defenseless state by beating. A gunshot often silenced such victims forever.” “For many years, we were not permitted even to mention their Christian heroism. But today their names belong to history, revealing these unbroken witnesses of faith to contemporary humanity.”³

The ten Sisters of Saint Elizabeth martyred in *odium fidei* under the Communist Regime in Eastern Europe were declared venerable with the promulgation of the decree of martyrdom on June 19, 2021, and their beatification was approved by His Holiness Pope Francis.⁴ The ceremony occurred on June 11, 2022, in Wrocław, officiated by Marcello Cardinal Semeraro, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, on behalf of His Holiness Pope Francis. (Memorial - May 11).⁶

The Beatification Process as documented by Sister M. Paula Zaborowska, Postulator:⁷

“When the Red Army soldiers entered these territories, the sisters endured a terrible ordeal, and the motives for their persecution were varied, including hatred of individuals and anything related to faith. Most of the Sisters died in defense of their own chastity or that of others, some died of torture and exhaustion. In the atmosphere of general terror and intimidation, our Sisters walked the “Way of the Cross”, following the suffering Christ. They suffered martyrdom and showed how God’s love triumphs in the midst of hatred.

In 2009, the General Government, taking into account the available documentation, decided to begin the cause of beatification of our Sister Martyrs: Sister M. Paschalis Jahn and the IX Companions (Sister M. Melusja Rybka, Sister M. Felicitas Ellmerer, Sister M. Acutina Goldberg, Sister M. Sapientia Heymann, Sister M. Adelheidis Töpfer, Sister M. Adela Schramm, Sister M. Sabina Thienel, Sister M. Rosaria Schilling and Sister M. Edelburgis Kubitzki). Sister Miriam Zajac was appointed the postulator of the Cause at the diocesan level, in the Archdiocese of Wrocław. She collected the necessary materials and documentation concerning the martyr’s death of our Sisters and handed them over to Archbishop Marian Gołębiewski. Then, after receiving the consent of the Polish Episcopal Conference, the Archbishop addressed a request to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints – Cardinal Angelo Amato for

Nihil obstat to begin the beatification process of our Martyr Sisters. On June 28, 2011, to our great joy, we received a positive response.

Archbishop, the Metropolitan of Wrocław, has already established the Diocesan Procedural Tribunal and since the moment of issuing the decree, the candidates have been entitled to the title of Servants of God. The solemn opening of the beatification process of Sister M. Paschalis Jahn and the IX Companions and the first public session of the process took place in the Archcathedral of Wrocław on November 25, 2011 at 10:00 a.m. All Sisters were cordially invited to the opening of the Process and ask for prayers for this intention, which is so important for our Congregation.

To Sister Miriam, the postulator of the Cause, for her further difficult ministry, we wish a lot of light of the Holy Spirit, the necessary graces and a special intercession of our martyr sisters. Taking this opportunity, we also thank her for the effort related to conducting the process of the Servant of God M. Teodora Witkowska in the Archdiocese of Warmia, which, as we hope, will soon be completed at the diocesan level. May the martyrdom of our fellow sisters be an encouragement for us to work intensively on the development of Christ's Kingdom in ourselves and among those to whom we are sent.

THE NEXT STAGE OF THE BEATIFICATION PROCESS

In our century, martyrs have returned. And these are often unknown martyrs, as if unknown soldiers of the great cause of God. If possible, their testimonies should not be forgotten in the Church" (St. John Paul II)

As we all remember, the solemn opening of the diocesan beatification process of Sister M. Paschalis Jahn and the IX Companions: Sister M. Edelburgis Kubitzki, Sister M. Rosaria Schilling, Sister M. Adela Schramm, Sister M. Sabina Thienel, Sister M. Sapienti Heymann, Sister M. Adelheidis Töpfer, Sister M. Melusja Rybka, Sister M. Felicitas Ellmerer and Sister M. Acutina Goldberg, took place in the Archcathedral of Wrocław on November 25, 2011. Whereas, 4 years later, that is, on 26 November 2015, the closing of the Process took place and the transfer of the Procedural Acts to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, where the stage of the Process at the Roman level began.

The prepared Position (Positio), under the direction of the Relator of the Cause – Fr. Prof. Zdzisław Kijas, PhD, concerning the martyrdom of our Sisters, was handed over on October 19, 2018 to the Prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints. At the present Roman stage, the Position will be studied by the Consultors of Historians and subjected to their judgment. In this regard, we kindly ask the Dear Sisters, the young men and the members of the Apostolic Community of St. Elizabeth to pray fervently that the opinions of the Historical Consultors will be positive. Then the Item will be forwarded for further proceedings, i.e. for the judgment of the Theological Consultors. We ask you to pray every day for this intention, which is so important for all of us.”⁷

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Note: This biography is for all desiring to grow in holiness and follow His Holiness Pope Pius XI address to 2000 nurses assembled at Castel Gondolfo on August 27, 1935 for the II World Congress of Catholic Nurses (www.ciciams.org / www.nacn-usa.org): *to first and foremost bring the Christian supernatural, Christ to our patients, bring salvation to souls*. May it also help nursing students with your Nursing History course. Source: Diana L. Ruzicka (2022). *The Book of Nurse Saints*. Available at www.lulu.com/spotlight/Ruzicka