

Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz – martyr, lay apostle, patron of teachers.

"I love life and I love the earth". She called herself a poet, emphasizing that poetry is determined by her attitude to life.



Natalia was born on 9th April 1906 in Rzeszów (south-eastern Poland) the second of six children of Adam and Natalia Amalia née Bromnik. Her father worked as a tax clerk, her mother took care of the house and children. They were brought up in a very loving and patriotic family. Natalia was small and physically frail, but had a lively intelligence and was very affectionate. In 1915, her father was moved to Kraków on business. The whole family came there with him. Natalia started learning first at St. Andrew's School of the Poor Clare Sisters, and later at the Private Gymnasium for Women, from which she moved to the state secondary school after three years. In 1921 her father got better work so the family moved to Poznań (west Poland), where Natalia attended the Private Gymnasium of the Ursulines. At the same time she learned to play the violin at the Conservatory. Unfortunately, she soon had to stop playing the violin as a result of surgery on enlarged lymphatic glands on her neck.

At that time, after the death of her young cousin, a drug addict, Natalia as a sixteen-year-old girl, realized, that "no earthly good will fill a soul so that it does not long for something more beautiful, [...] only God can be the ultimate good, beyond which we do not long". Answering the question "why live" she outlined the aim of her life's mission: "to do good to others" (31st August 1940).

She graduated from the Ursuline school with a very good secondary school certificate. In 1926 she began to study Polish philology at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. From the beginning she was extremely active in the academic life and was involved in social and literary activities. A year later, the Tułasiewicz family went into mourning, as a result of the death of Maryla, Natalia oldest sister who died at the age of 22 from tuberculosis. Natalia tried to comfort her family, especially her father, who had diabetes due to a nervous disposition. Natalia and her sister were also diagnosed with tuberculosis. Natalia had already had several surgeries and so interrupted her studies for a year and went to live in the mountains in order to take care of her health. There she worked as a teacher in the school of the Nazarene sisters. After graduation she started working in two schools: at St. Casimir's Coeducational School and the Gymnasium of the Ursulines.

During her studies, Natalia met Janek, who declared himself a communist. In time they fell in love and became engaged. However, after eight years Natalia broke off her engagement,

because of Janek's ideas and personality which caused her great emotional suffering. This event was a painful experience for her. In her *Diaries* she often comes back to the years spent with him. After returning to good emotional health, she once again took up a very busy life. Natalia often gave lectures, held lively discussions at the Catholic Association *Congregatio Mariana*, met with friends and travelled a lot, including two trips abroad: to Norway and Italy. She gave loving support to her family and also helped them financially.

Natalia took care of her spiritual life. Almost every day she attended Mass and received Holy Communion. She celebrated monthly retreat days and sometimes went for longer retreats. She had a custom of performing night adorations in the church or just in her room. God was her most important love, her most beloved friend and she called him Beloved. She had got to know the Ursuline sisters well and their life of living religious vows and, although she realized that she felt ready also to live this type of life, she saw that her mission was to be in the world. "I completely and exclusively live for God. It's just about the form of life to realize this devotion. An inner voice tells me to follow my own path (rather, the one marked out by Christ for me), to remain in the world" (*1st January 1942*).

She wanted to speak about God to everyone and everywhere. "I want to carry Christ, who took my heart for living for himself, I want to carry Him to all the people I meet on the streets, in the tram, in offices, in shops, in restaurants, cinemas, theatres, everywhere! And if I feel a special artistic trait towards theatrical and film art, then the joy I derive from it, the joy given to me in advance, should be transformed into such values that they can be given to the people I meet in my life" (*1st November 1940*).

As a result of the outbreak of World War II, the Tułasiewicz family moved from Poznań to the East of Poland. From there, Natalia left for Kraków, where, after a few weeks, she brought the family. In Kraków, through the Ursulines, she became involved in secret teaching, also outside Kraków. She saw the war period as "a time of valuable but difficult retreats". After the war she wanted to "stand in the vanguard of fighting for a new face not only of Poland, but of the world". Through prayer and reading the signs of the times, she discovered her new way of life - "to be the Lord's apostle of love in a world raging with hatred".

Ready internally to make a sacrifice of her life to the Lord, she undertook a very risky mission. In 1943, she volunteered to work in Germany as an underground plenipotentiary of the Government Delegation and an envoy of the Pastoral Department of the underground organization "West". Positively verified and trained by the Home Army, she was sent to the "Pelican" factory (turned into an armoury) in Hanover (Germany) to help the forced labourers. Physically weak, strong in spirit, after many hours of daily, hard physical work, she performed her service, often during alarms and bombings.

Despite being prepared for difficulties unknown to her before her departure, she was surprised by the degree of demoralization in the camp (fights, thefts, drunkenness, prostitution). Natalia undertook tasks of broad social, cultural and religious scope. She documented this in letters sent to Poland. She was also apostolic among workers and forced labourers of other

nationalities. She spoke German, French, a little Italian, and was glad to have the opportunity of friends all over Europe after the war.

On 29th April 1944, as a result of carelessness of a courier from Warsaw who visited Natalia, she was arrested. She was taken for preliminary interrogation to Hanover prison, then imprisoned in the Gestapo prison in Cologne. She was again interrogated, beaten and tortured. In September 1944 she was sent to the women's penal camp in Ravensbrück. There she continued her mission of evangelization. In this hell on earth, she did not give up her poetic work. She organized services, combining teaching with education about what is beautiful and what is holy. She was preparing young girls for the secondary school-leaving exam after the war.

Exhausted by hard physical work, recurring tuberculosis and hunger, she was selected during roll call on Good Friday, 30th March 1945, and the next day died in a gas chamber, just a few days before the camp was liberated.

Natalia was beatified by John Paul II on 13th June 1999 as part of a group of 108 martyrs from World War II. In this way, the Church recognized that her desire to be a saint had been fulfilled. "I have the courage to want to be a saint. ...only holiness is the fullest love, so not only do I want to, but I must be a saint, a modern saint, a theocentric humanist! This is the finish line for which I openly and courageously strive" (*14th August 1943*).

Natalia wanted holiness not only for herself, but for everyone. "I want sanctity for thousands and thousands of souls... And to work with God for all eternity for his glory is a delight over all pleasures" (*13th August 1943*).¹

More about Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz in Polish:

[www.http://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/](http://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/)

Publications:

Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz. The way to love.

Author: Andrzej Rzesoś

Published: 2019 by Flos Carmeli

¹ Cf. "The memory of Zofia (nee Tułasiewicz), the sister of blessed Natalia". UR Ursulines Bulletin "Serviam". 1999 No 3; D. Tułasiewicz.

"A secular loner. Natalia Tułasiewicz (1906 - 1945)". "On the way" 22:1994 no. 9 – Dominican publication.

[www.http://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/](http://blogoslawionanatalia.eu/)

Fidelity to grace and word. Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz.

Authors: Jacek Hadryś, Barbara Judkowiak

Published: 2018 by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Department of Theology

Against barbarism - letters, diaries, memories.

Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz

Published: 2013 by Flos Carmeli

Through the earth, I loved heaven

Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz

Published: 2013 by Flos Carmeli

To be a poet of life. Dairies 1938-1943

Blessed Natalia Tułasiewicz

Published: 2006 by Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Department of Theology