News
Religious Life



A nun carries the reliquary during a ceremony on May 31, 2025, in Braniewo, Poland, as the church beatifies 15 nuns from the Congregation of St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr, martyred in 1945. (OSV News/Courtesy of Polish bishops' conference)

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Warsaw, Poland — June 3, 2025

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Their names may have faded from history books, but on May 31, the church officially remembered them forever. In a solemn ceremony in Braniewo, northeastern Poland, 15 nuns from the Congregation of St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr, were beatified — recognized as martyrs who gave their lives during the final, brutal months of World War II.

The sisters were killed in 1945 as Soviet troops advanced into the region. Rather than flee, these women of peace chose to remain with the vulnerable people in their care, offering comfort and protection amid chaos and violence. Their witness, long overlooked, was honored by the church in a liturgy rich with gratitude and reverence.

Sr. Cristofora (Krzysztofa) Klomfass and her 14 companions died horrific deaths, often while trying to protect patients, or defending their own dignity. According to Sr. Lucja Jaworska, the postulator of the beatification process, "All these sisters died at the hands of Soviet soldiers. They defended the purity they had vowed to God — this virtue, which today is so often questioned in different ways by the world."



A painting is seen during a ceremony on May 31, 2025, in Braniewo, Poland, as the church beatifies 15 nuns from the Congregation of St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr. (OSV News/Courtesy of Polish bishops' conference)

Despite the unimaginable violence they faced, the sisters never renounced their faith or their vows. "They died for their faith, in defense of dignity, purity and the people entrusted to them. They were victims of hatred against Christianity and the Catholic Church," Jaworska told Vatican News.

Pope Leo XIV in his remarks after the Regina Caeli prayer June 1 said that, "despite a climate of hatred and of terror against the Catholic faith," the sisters "persevered in their service to the sick and orphans."

Leo asked: "Let us commend to the intercession of the new Blessed Martyrs all those women religious throughout the world who devote themselves generously for the sake of God's kingdom."

Presiding over the beatification Mass, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, prefect of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints and papal envoy to the ceremony, emphasized in his homily that the newly beatified sisters offer a message.

"Sr. Krzysztofa Klomfass and her 14 companions offer us today a special lesson — resilience in the face of a culture of hatred and division, so prevalent in our society today," Semeraro said.

He went on to call the sisters' martyrdom a "supreme testimony of faith" offered in the context of "ideological warfare, which in their time in Europe brought persecution, death, violence and destruction."

With the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II approaching, Semeraro urged the faithful to remember not just the tragedy, but also the moral clarity and peace that can rise from such darkness.

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"Let this day, and this beatification of 15 nuns, become a call to peace for the whole world," he said, adding a poignant reminder of today's ongoing wars, including the one in Ukraine.

"Today, during this beatification celebration, we do not recall their stories to seek revenge or demand reparation through human justice," the cardinal explained. "Rather, we seek to receive what is most precious from them: forgiveness, mercy and love for every human being."

This message of forgiveness stood at the heart of the ceremony. The new blesseds call each of us, he said, to two words: forgiveness and conversion.

"They urge us to forgive — that is, to remove from ourselves the sadness of harboring resentment and hatred," he said. "They call us to conversion: in our communities, in our daily lives, choosing peace, fraternity, respect for others' freedom, and harmony in our human relationships."

The papal envoy said that the sisters' lives speak powerfully to contemporary questions about faith and the cost of moral conviction. In a world where Christian values often come under fire, the courage of these women stands as a challenge, Semeraro said.



Nuns and others attend a ceremony on May 31, 2025, in Braniewo, Poland, as the church beatifies 15 nuns from the Congregation of St. Catherine Virgin and Martyr, martyred in 1945. (OSV News/Courtesy of Polish bishops' conference)

"Today we need credible witnesses like these new blesseds," said Semeraro. "To strengthen a faith that is often fragile, to rekindle the flame of hope in our Christian communities, and to expand the horizons of our hearts to the boundless love of God."

The end of World War II was a horrific time for the St. Catherine sisters in Poland. As they resisted a "furious attack" of the Red Army and a soon-to-come Soviet ideological occupation of this part of Europe, 105 sisters and one postulant were killed.

"Half a million civilians died in Warmia," St. Catherine Sr. Angela Krupinska told Gosc Niedzielny Polish Catholic weekly. They "could not evacuate, and the sisters mostly did not want to flee, as they chose to stay with the civilian population, children and the sick," she said.

"The end of the war was indeed the most difficult moment in the 450-year history of our congregation. Its entire structure was shattered at that time."

She said that their martyrdom was marked by the "immensity of love."

"It amazes me: Those women suffered terrible torments, rape, beatings — out of hatred for the habit. And they did not stop loving, they did not stop believing. I look at these sisters not from a religious, but from a universal perspective: With their attitude, they stopped evil. They did not pass it on. In a terrible world of chaos, lack of meaning and hope, they stopped hatred, did not carry it further. They trusted God to the end, they all forgave."