

## FROM THE PASTOR

Dear Brothers and Sisters



When he was ten years old, the Immaculate Virgin appeared to him and offered him two symbolic crowns: the white crown of chastity and the red crown of martyrdom. She asked him to choose one. The young boy answered, "I will take both."

Maximilian Kolbe entered the Franciscan Order at the age of sixteen. So intent were he and his brother, Francis, on becoming religious, that they crossed secretly in a hay cart from the Russian to the Austrian partition of Poland to enter the seminary. Max was sent to the Order's International Seraphic College in Rome for his philosophical and theological studies.

On October 16, 1917, while still a student-friar in Rome, Maximilian founded the Militia Immaculate (MI) Catholic evangelization movement. Its purpose was to bring about the reign of the Sacred Heart of Jesus by encouraging each and every soul to make a total consecration of themselves to the Immaculate Virgin Mary. "Through the Immaculata to Jesus" was a lifelong motto. The immediate stimulus for this movement was Maximilian's desire to counteract the militant naturalism of International Freemasonry that year. He had personally witnessed Masonic activists blaspheming under the windows of the Vatican. He was ordained a priest in 1918 and returned to Poland in 1919, with doctorates in philosophy and theology, and he had contracted tuberculosis. Nevertheless, he immediately began spreading the MI Catholic Evangelization and in January of 1922, began publishing the monthly magazine, Knight of the Immaculata.



So great and rapid was the growth of the magazine Knight, today known as Immaculata, and the community of Conventual Franciscans that formed around Kolbe, that in 1927 he founded a large apostolic center near Warsaw call Niepokalanow, the "City of the Immaculata." Kolbe's method of evangelization through the sponsorship of Mary was a major development of the Franciscan chrism, stimulating considerable growth in the Franciscan Order itself. For instance, the city saw its original staff of eighteen friars grow to over 650 members in just twelve years.

When the Nazis overran the country in 1939, they eventually imprisoned Kolbe in the Auschwitz death camp, where in 1941 he offered to take the place of a man condemned to die in reprisal for an escaped prisoner.

The Nazi guards picked 10 prisoners to be beaten and starved to death in reprisal for the one who escaped. Amongst the ten was a married man, Franciszek Gajownicek, who wept because he would never see his wife or family again. Maximilian offered to die in his place. No one had ever done this before in Auschwitz.

Through two weeks of beatings and starvation - not even a drop of water, Maximilian encouraged the other nine men imprisoned with him in the dungeons of Auschwitz. The guards were especially merciless and cruel with him, with brutal beatings and harsh treatment.

He remained calm, and lifted up the other prisoners with his prayers, which he said out loud so that the others could hear him.

He was the last of the ten men to die, being injected with carbolic acid on August 14th 1941. He died while sat upright on the floor of his cell, with his eyes open, gazing in peace.

The guards later testified that they could not bear for him to look at them. They would yell at him to keep his eyes down. His glance had no fear, and looking into his eyes was unbearable for them.

Pope Paul VI beatified Maximilian in 1971. In 1982, St. Pope John Paul II canonized him as a "martyr of charity," calling him "patron of our difficult century." He is the patron saint of journalists, media communications, the family and the chemically addicted.

Fr. Sean