

FR. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

Thrust of th story

- *Christ though innocent, willingly died for us sinners.*
- *Christians following the example of Christ, have to love one another even unto death*

A Martyr Of Charity

Maximilian was the second son of Julius Kolbe and Maria Dabrowska. His father was a German and his mother a Polish. He had four brothers, His father worked as basket weaver and his mother as a midwife and a shop keeper of groceries.

As a boy Fr. Kolbe was a great devotee of Our Lady. He narrated that: “One day, in a vision, Our Lady appeared to me, holding two crowns; one white, the other red, and asked me which of those two crowns I was willing to accept. The white one, meant that I should persevere in purity and the red one, that I should become a martyr. I told her that I accepted both⁷”

1907 Kolbe and his elder brother Francis decided to join the Priesthood. They joined the Franciscans in the junior seminary of Lwów. In 1911 Kolbe took his first vows and adopted the name of Maximilian, and the final vows in 1914, in Rome, adopting the names Maximilian Maria, to show his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

During the Nazi occupation of Germany he was apprehended and sent to Auschwitz, one of the Nazi extermination Camps.

The Camp Commissars in order to discourage escapees from the camp had a rule that if a man escaped, ten prisoners would be killed in retaliation. In July 1941 a man from Kolbe's bunker escaped.

Among the ten to be executed, there was a certain Franciszek Gajowniczek. After being selected, he cried out in anguish. “*Oh, my poor wife and my poor children! What will they do?*”

When Maximilian heard his cry of dismay, silently he stepped forward, took off his cap, stood before the commandant and said: *'I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children.'*

Astounded, the icy-faced Nazi commandant asked, *'What does this Polish dog want?'* Father Kolbe pointed with his hand to the condemned Franciszek Gajowniczek and repeated *'I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.'*

The by standards expected that the heartless commandant, in anger, would send both men to death. However, he remained silent for a moment. Amazingly, he acceded to Kolbe's request. Franciszek Gajowniczek was returned to the ranks, and the priest took his place.

Gajowniczek recalled: 'I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on, and the immensity of it! I, the condemned to die was spared and someone unknown to me freely was willing to die for me!

Father Kolbe was thrown down the stairs of Building 13 along with the other victims and condemned to die by starvation.

So it was. Father Maximilian Kolbe died on 14 August, 1941 at the age of forty-seven, a martyr of charity.

The heroism of Father Kolbe went echoing through Auschwitz. In that desert of hatred he had sown love... It was like a powerful shaft of light in the darkness of the camp.'