

Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe

His Life, Apostolate,
and Spirituality



Militia Immaculatae

St. Maximilian
Maria Kolbe

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and Spirituality



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Contents

Foreword	6
Part 1: The Life and Apostolate of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe	7
Chapter 1: The Early Years of the Saint	8
Chapter 2: The Conception of the <i>Militia Immaculatæ</i>	19
Chapter 3: The Priesthood	26
Chapter 4: The Apostolic Life	31
Chapter 5: The Missionary Soul	40
Chapter 6: Martyrdom	46
Part 2: The Spirituality of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe	61
Chapter 1: St. Maximilian and the Miraculous Medal	62
Chapter 2: Mary Obtains and Distributes All Graces	68
Chapter 3: The Immaculate Conception	72
Chapter 4: Our Lady of Lourdes	76
Chapter 5: Pray the Rosary Every Day	82
Chapter 6: The Carmelite Scapular	86
Chapter 7: The Motherly Heart of the Immaculata Among Her Children	90
Chapter 8: Through the Immaculata to the Sacred Heart of Jesus	94
Chapter 9: The Work for the Conversion of Sinners	98
Chapter 10: The Conversion and Sanctification of Everyone through the Immaculata	102
Chapter 11: "I Live Only for Souls: That Is My Mission"	108
Chapter 12: St. Therese of the Child Jesus — the Patron of All Mission	114

Foreword

Numerous biographies of St. Maximilian Kolbe have been written. Some concentrate on his heroic self-sacrifice in the German concentration camp at Auschwitz while others put more emphasis on his unsurpassable love for the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This book not only portrays his great love for the Blessed Mary Virgin, but also includes many examples from his spirituality, his writings, from the prayers he composed and used, and from his publications. Its aim, above all, is to enthuse faithful Catholics, and non-Catholics for that matter, with a love greater than his own for “his Immaculata”, and through her and his own example, to win souls for Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Taken as a whole, this little book should be an essential part of the armoury of all Catholics who love the Blessed Virgin Mary and who wish to assist her in the saving of souls.

PART ONE

The Life and Apostolate
of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe



CHAPTER ONE

The Early Years of the Saint

1.1. His childhood

Raymond (Rajmund) Kolbe was born into a humble family in the small Polish town of Zduńska Wola, not far from Łódź, on the 7th of January 1894. He was the second of five sons, although two of the younger ones died soon after they were born, such was the poverty and hardship of his family circumstances. Francis (Franciszek) was the firstborn, then Raymond (Rajmund), then Joseph (Józef). Walenty and Anthony (Antoni) were the two who died.

Nonetheless, his parents, Julius (Juliusz) Kolbe and Mary (Maria) Dąbrowska, who had grown up in that town and were imbued with the strength of faith typical of its inhabitants, accepted God's will and strove to do the best they could for their remaining sons. Mary set a great example to her children, as did Julius, both being members of the Franciscan Third Order and it was from this environment that young Raymond absorbed his early concepts of

the part religion was to play in his life. Even so, this did not prevent him from displaying his individualism with occasional flashes of obstinacy and audacity for which he expected to be disciplined.

As time passed and the family required more space than their single roomed apartment could permit, it became necessary to relocate to Pabianice, where Julius was eventually able to open a shop and rent some land for a small-holding and where Mary obtained work as a midwife, as well as helping Julius and discharging her duties as mother and housewife.

The time came for their three sons to begin their schooling, and Julius and Mary entrusted them to Fr. Włodzimierz Jakowski, so that they might receive a sound religious formation and instruction. Raymond's individualism showed itself in that when he had done anything for which he knew he deserved to be punished, he would not only admit it, but would fetch the stick so that his mother or father could administer his punishment, and then, with no complaints — indeed with thanks for his punishment — he would take it back again. This was by no means commonplace in a young lad.

Around this time, in 1904, when he was ten years old, young Raymond had an experience which was to transform his life. It occurred after an innocuous act of mischief which displeased his mother, and she said to him: 'My little Raymond, who knows what will become of you?' She thought nothing more of her question, but it brought about a sea change in his life in so far as he suddenly became very serious, one could almost say he became older than his years, and he was often in tears during his prayers. Fearing for his health, his mother pressed him for an explanation saying: "You ought to tell your mother everything." His mother received his explanation but told no-one except Julius until after Raymond's



death when she revealed it to the friars in a letter dated the 12th of October 1941.

This is what her letter said about how he related his experience:

“Trembling with emotion and with tears in his eyes, he said, ‘Mother, when you scolded me, I prayed very much to Our Lady to tell me what would become

of me. Later when I was in church, I prayed to her again. Then the Madonna appeared to me, holding two crowns in her hands. One was white and the other was red. She looked at me with affection and asked me which of the two crowns I wanted. The white one meant that I would remain pure and the red one meant that I would be a martyr. I answered that I would accept both of them. Then the Madonna looked kindly at me and disappeared’.”

His mother knew from the change that had come over him that he was telling the truth, and she said that his acceptance of both crowns prepared her for what was to happen later. Raymond became a great helpmate around the home, undertaking all manner of duties to assist whilst his parents were away from the house earning a living — scrubbing and sweeping, preparing and cooking the food, doing the laundry, making the beds — and all with the greatest of diligence and obedience, and in a spirit of being of service. Sometimes he was able to help his mother in the shop.

Time passed, schooldays came to an end, and the thoughts of Julius and Mary turned to the future careers of their three sons. Despite knowing about the visitation that Raymond had received from the Blessed Virgin Mary, it did not occur to them that God had His own thoughts about this matter. His parents proposed that Francis, their firstborn, should continue his education with a view to entering the priesthood; Raymond, who had been such a willing helper, was to follow in his father's footsteps as there were insufficient funds to support further formal education for him, and the same may well have applied to the third son. Nonetheless, deep down, Julius and Mary knew that it was not Raymond's destiny to enter commerce.

This is where God let them see that their uncertainty was well-founded. It happened when Raymond was sent to the pharmacy to buy some herbal *Foenum Graecum*. Dr. Kotowski was intrigued that a young peasant lad was able to pronounce the name of the herbal and from Raymond's explanation he learnt a little of his circumstances. This prompted him to volunteer his services as a tutor saying: "Listen, lad. You come to me every day



In the Church of St. Matthew in Pabianice, young Raymond Kolbe had a vision: Our Lady offered him two crowns: the red crown of martyrdom and the white crown of purity

and I will give you your schooling free of charge. I will prepare you and you will pass the examinations with your brother at the end of the school year.”

Raymond was overjoyed at this chance to return to the aspirations of purity and martyrdom offered at his apparition, and devoted himself wholeheartedly to his studies with the good doctor. The result was that he was promoted with his elder brother Francis in the state examinations.

1.2. The beginning of the Saint’s priestly life

A mission was being held in the town of Pabianice and Fr. Peregrin Haczela, a Conventual Franciscan friar, was preaching. The two brothers, Francis and Raymond, were present and were clinging to every word. They heard the friar say that a seminary had opened in the town of Leopoli (Lwów) for boys who want to consecrate themselves to Jesus in the Order of St. Francis. Directly after the sermon the two boys went to meet the missionary priest in the sacristy. They spoke with him and told him of their desire to consecrate themselves to God as St. Francis had, and asked him to be so good as to accept them into the new seminary at Leopoli, although it was some 300 miles (500 km) from their home.

Their parents were not too willing, given the distance, but they eventually consented, and in October 1907, the two boys entered the Seminary at Lwów.

Raymond made good progress in his early days at the seminary, up to the point where he was to apply to take the habit and begin his novitiate, and then came an intervention from Satan, anxious to disrupt Raymond’s progress. Into Raymond’s head he implanted the unsettling thought of earning his martyrdom through a military

death, saying: "If you want to win the two crowns promised by the Madonna, then rather than continue in the seminary you should leave at once and take up a military career so that you can go into combat duty and die for the heavenly Queen, and in that way earn the privilege of being crowned by her."

So convinced was Raymond by this deceptive thought that he decided not to apply to begin his novitiate, and also persuaded his elder brother Francis to do the same.



Again, the Blessed Virgin Mary was watching over her protégé, and she caused his mother to accede to the urge to visit that distant seminary without delay. Mary Kolbe did just that, arriving on the porch of the seminary just as the boys were about to go to the office of the Father Provincial to announce their decision. At the sound of the bell, the two boys were instructed to come and welcome their mother, thus delaying their planned announcement.

Explaining their intentions to their mother led her to open their eyes to the deceptions of Satan with only the holy words that a devoted mother could know, and they quickly changed their minds, making them now eager to request reception of the habit of St. Francis and admission to their novitiate. See how the bond between Raymond and his heavenly mother was strengthened even further with his recognition that: "An infinitely merciful Providence, by means of the Immaculate One, sent our mother at that crucial moment."

Three years later, on the 4th of September 1910, at the foot of the altar of the Immaculate Virgin, Raymond Kolbe, at the age of sixteen, became a brother. From that moment on, his name was Brother Maximilian Mary. He had chosen to receive the names Maximilian, a name belonging to brave soldiers and renowned rulers, and Mary, after his own mother and his heavenly mother. His superiors sensed that there was something exceptional about him; and Brother Maximilian's sentiments were those of someone strongly determined to live up to his Franciscan vocation, seen in all its strength and beauty. Remember that he had told no one, other than his earthly mother, about the apparition he had had from the Blessed Virgin Mary as a ten year old boy. Little did his superiors know of the real driving force behind that determination.

During the twelve months of his novitiate, Brother Maximilian prayed, studied, worked and exercised the virtues of a religious, together with getting to know the Franciscan common life of shared prayer, poverty and penance — a discipline which was to stand him in good stead in the years to come. He was greatly helped to overcome a period of scruples by a providential meeting with a truly holy priest, Father Wenanty Katarzyniec, and by employing docility and obedience towards his superiors.

At the end of the year of Novitiate, on the 5th of September 1911, Brother Maximilian Mary consecrated himself to God with vows of obedience, poverty and chastity, promising to observe faithfully the Rule of his Seraphic Father, St. Francis of Assisi.

One year later Brother Maximilian had completed his junior college studies at Kraków. His Father Provincial offered him the option of continuing his studies there or of going to the Gregorian College in Rome to study for a doctorate in philosophy and theology



The International Seraphic College in Rome. In the chapel of this College St. Maximilian conceived the idea of founding the Militia Immaculatæ.

in 1912. Brother Maximilian opted to remain at Kraków despite the efforts of his Father Provincial to lead him to accept the chance to study in Rome, and his name was removed from brothers destined for the International Seraphic College.

What led Brother Maximilian to decide as he did? In the presence of his Father Provincial, he claimed that his poor health was deterring him from going to Rome, but secretly, he had other reasons. He had heard talk of licentiousness, corruption and public immorality in Rome, albeit possibly exaggerated, but disturbing nonetheless. He was mindful of his boyhood promise from Our Lady of the white crown of purity and he was determined not to have his virginal purity put to the test. For these reasons he preferred the safer environment of Kraków where Christian modesty prevailed.

However, during the night, he did not feel at ease with his decision, so the next day he visited his Father Provincial to apologize for putting his personal preference ahead of the obedience he owed, at which his name was reinstated on the list. This is another example of the great importance which Brother Maximilian attached to obedience.

1.3. An academic phase in the Saint's life

Brother Maximilian began to earn a reputation for himself shortly after arriving at the Gregorian College through his outstanding goodness and his noticeably high level of intelligence. The Rector of the College, Fr. Stephen Ignudi, described him as a "holy young man" and entered this description in the college register.

It was whilst at the College that more of Brother Maximilian's attributes manifested themselves. His fellow students noted how meticulous he was at observing the Rule, and yet he made no great show of it, maintaining an impressive humility throughout. At the sound of the monastery bell, he would stop everything, even in mid pace or mid sentence, in order to give all his attention to whatever was expected of him at that instant. In his piety, his love for Our Lord knew no limits as demonstrated by his enrolment in the Perpetual Adoration meaning that every hour he would make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament. His devotion for and affection towards the Madonna was sincere and childlike. He was a true son of Mary Most Holy and gave her the sweet name of 'My Mother' (Mamusia), and when out walking with fellow students he would invite them to join him in reciting the rosary and other prayers.



Library of the Pontifical Gregorian University in 1930. On the 22nd of October 1915, Brother Maximilian received his Doctorate in Philosophy at the Gregorian University

This mode of conducting himself caused him to stand out as a source of spiritually uplifting enlightenment for those fortunate enough to be in his company.

Another part of Brother Maximilian's character, and one which was to reveal its depths later, was his unremitting generosity to those less fortunate than himself. At the College, this showed itself partly in his communication skills through which he would absorb the content of lectures delivered by the lecturers, make copies of them, and pass them round to his fellow students, especially when examinations were drawing near. Who could have known at this stage the heights he would scale when he turned to publishing bulletins by the hundred thousand not many years hence?

Eventually, on the 22nd of October 1915, Brother Maximilian received his Doctorate in Philosophy at the Gregorian University, after which he undertook further studies in the School of Theology at the International Seraphic College.

It was here that Brother Maximilian experienced another intervention by his “Mamusia” who, for sure, was lovingly watching his progress towards the objective she had in mind for him. He got a badly infected right thumb which the physician said was in urgent need of amputation. This shocked him, as, if he were to fulfil his hopes of becoming a priest, the absence of a right thumb could be a serious obstacle to offering Mass. His Rector visited him that evening and related how Lourdes water had healed an abscess on his own foot during childhood, where amputation had been proposed as the only solution. Putting a bottle of Lourdes water on Brother Maximilian’s table, he took his leave saying: “I shall not tell you any more.”

When the physician arrived the following morning, Brother Maximilian asked him to apply some of the Lourdes water to the wound to which the physician, being a good Christian man, agreed and postponed the amputation he had arrived to perform. He was astonished on returning the following morning to see that the index finger was healed and no amputation was required. Through the Rector and the Lourdes water applied by the physician, both instruments in the hands of the Immaculate Virgin, she had intervened demonstrably to meet the needs of her favoured son.



CHAPTER TWO

The Conception of the *Militia Immaculatae*

Brother Maximilian made good use of his time in the Eternal City. Not only was there his studying and his prayers, but also he set eyes upon the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XV, the basilicas, the catacombs and many of the features which still attract tourists today.

Sadly, in 1917, he also saw the celebrations for the 200th Anniversary of the launch of Freemasonry — everywhere he looked he could see flags and posters depicting St. Michael the Archangel being conquered and trampled underfoot by Lucifer. Long processions wound their way through the Eternal City toward St. Peter's Square. The marchers sang blasphemous songs and carried banners with slogans such as: "Satan will reign in the Vatican and the Pope will be his servant."

This distressing spectacle caused great anguish to Brother Maximilian, and here is what he recorded in his notebook:

“Is it possible that our enemies must carry on their work to the point of taking over, and that we remain idle, or, at the most, just pray without taking any action: Do we not have weapons more powerful than theirs — the protection of Heaven and of the Immaculate Virgin? ... The Immaculate and undefeated Queen who fights off every heresy will not give the field over to the enemy that is raising his head again; if she finds servants who are faithful and docile to her orders, she will win new victories greater than we would imagine ...”

Ideas began to form in his mind.

Subsequently his Rector gave a meditation on the conversion of the Jew Alfonse Ratisbonne, which was brought about by his wearing a Miraculous Medal, together with the vision Ratisbonne had had of the Blessed Virgin in the Church of St. Andrea delle Fratte. Brother Maximilian, with fervent joy, confided afterwards to a fellow friar: “Now we simply have to pray to the Madonna to drive away the devil and all heresies, especially the Freemasons...”

The ideas were beginning to gel into a strategy.

2.1. The Inspiration for the *Militia Immaculatæ*

Although already comprehensively motivated by the promise of the two crowns, and by the hope of being ordained as a priest, Brother Maximilian now felt that there had to be yet another purpose in his life — the recruitment of an army of militants for doing battle with the enemies of the Church — an army under the command

of the Queen of the Universe, the Immaculate Virgin, and Conqueror of all Heresies. For ammunition, its bullets were to be the Miraculous Medals proposed by the Blessed Virgin Mary to Saint Catherine Labouré on the 27th of November 1830.



Manifestation of Freemasonry

This army, which he resolved to call the *Militia Immaculatæ* was to be the instrument by which the Blessed Virgin Mary would save souls for her Son Jesus Christ. It would be an ever-growing army of souls, who would consecrate themselves to the Immaculate as her property, her slaves, and who would be her docile instruments in doing battle for the sanctification of their own souls and for the conversion of the enemies of the Church, the Masons in particular, who are infernal foes of Christ and of His Divine Bride, the Church, and for all the non-committed souls who are so embroiled with the world and its attractions.

Having learned by now a considerable amount about human nature and the various levels of commitment shown towards redemption, he visualised that there would be three degrees for categorizing the adult men and women, adolescents and children who would be enrolled into the *Militia*.

All would consecrate themselves to the Immaculate, but the First Degree of membership would be for those who pledged themselves to love her and to endeavour by way of their own apostolate to attract others to consecrate themselves to her and have themselves enrolled into the *Militia*. By doing this they would

be recognised as true Knights of the *Militia Immaculatæ*. He knew that there would be many who, although enrolled, would never actively participate — but this was something to leave in the hands of the Immaculate.

The Second Degree of membership would be attained by those who strove to offer the Immaculate a greater commitment to her cause. Rather than working as individuals, handing out flyers, giving away Miraculous Medals, talking about the learning resources that are available for any who want to know more, these Second Degree Knights would take on a more corporate role. They may join together to form a group, perhaps for Catechesis; they may take on an administrative role such as that of local co-ordinator; become Keeper of an M.I. Corner; an organiser of events aimed at raising the profile of the apostolate in their parish — anything which may encourage First Degree Knights to become more committed and play a greater part in making the *Militia* better able to achieve its objectives.

The Third Degree of membership would be reserved for those consecrated souls who would give themselves to the Immaculate Virgin unconditionally, placing themselves at her disposal with all their energies and resources, holding back nothing of their time, effort or faculties, making of themselves a complete offering to God through the Immaculate.

Brother Maximilian envisaged that all who wholeheartedly supported the *Militia* would develop the loftiest heights of love for the Immaculate. This was the structure he had in mind, and he was soon to draw up the statutes for the guidance of this *Militia* that he intended to build for the Immaculate. O, how the enthusiasm welled up in his breast!

2.2. The Birth of the *Militia Immaculatæ*

On the evening of the 16th of October 1917, at First Vespers of the Feast of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, Saint Maximilian and six other friars formed the first company of the new Marian army. Three were priests and three were students of theology. They were the Rumanian Father Joseph Pal, Fathers Quirico Pignalberi and Antonio Głowiński, and student friars Antonio Mansi, Henry Granata, and Jerome Biasi. They all signed Brother Maximilian's notes about the aims, objectives and the proposed statutes of the *Militia Immaculatæ*.

Brother Maximilian's enthusiasm for his new objective knew no bounds. He even wanted to visit the Grand Master of the Italian Freemasons in Rome there and then to convert him to the cause, but was persuaded by the Rector to pray for the Masons as the time for converting them was not yet ripe.

His love for the Immaculate was growing more strongly with every passing day. This is evident from his reaction on meeting a group of workmen in the street who were blaspheming the Madonna as they went about their work. He approached them and asked the reason, and remonstrated with them so forcefully that they calmed down and apologized, and said they had acted from habit as a way of letting off steam when provoked to extreme anger.



"The Knighthood of the Immaculate" in Polish

This intense love for the Immaculate, and his abhorrence at anything being said against her, was to motivate him for the rest of his life. This often called for great bravery on his part, and he attributed it to the boundless powers given to the Immaculate Virgin. Let people put themselves in her hands and be her “docile instruments” — that is sufficient, and this unconquerable exemplar will defeat “the children of this world” (Luke 16:8) and the “works of darkness” (Rom. 13:12).

The chief thrust of the *Militia Immaculatæ* was to be the dissemination of Marian literature and the Miraculous Medal, and giving strength to its activity by prayer and good example, such as uttering the prayer: “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee, and for those who do not have recourse to thee, especially the Freemasons, and for all who have been commended



to thy mercy”, and wearing the Miraculous Medal. Indeed, so confident was he of the powers of the Miraculous Medal that he always went about with a supply of them in his pockets, referring to them as his “bullets” or “little bombs”. They were the ammunition of the *Militia*, together with the Rosary which he would openly recite on the streets of Rome. He would leave Medals where they would be found, and his enthusiasm knew no bounds.





CHAPTER THREE

The Priesthood

3.1. The Culmination of the Saint's student life

The day came when Brother Maximilian Kolbe attained his childhood dream of becoming a priest, and he was ordained on the 28th of April 1918. The next day he celebrated his first Mass in Rome in the Basilica of St. Andrea delle Fratte at the "Altar of the Miracle", the place where the Blessed Virgin Mary had appeared to the Jew Ratisbonne, who was instantly converted after having agreed to wear a Miraculous Medal to humour his friend.

Priests who want to love Jesus in the Eucharist can be inspired by the devotion with which Fr. Maximilian celebrated Holy Mass. Priests can take him as their model in order to become giants of love, of zeal, of sacrifice, of immolation, provided they entrust themselves entirely to the hands and Heart of the Immaculate One who is the Mother of Jesus, the Supreme High Priest.

The faithful who attended the Masses he offered would inquire about that priest who inspired such devotion at the altar. Such was his devotion that when he was so physically exhausted that he could hardly stand, he would ask two friars to support him while he celebrated Holy Mass.



Fr. Maximilian celebrated his first Mass in Rome in the Basilica of St. Andrea delle Fratte at the "Altar of the Miracle"

Having been awarded his Doctorate in Theology by the Pontifical Faculty of the Franciscan Conventuals on the

22nd of July 1919, Fr. Kolbe returned to Poland, which was suffering poverty and famine at that time, to take up a teaching post at Kraków. Whilst he was Professor of Philosophy for the student friars and Professor of Church history in the major seminary, his mind was generating thoughts on how he could breathe life into his hopes for a *Militia Immaculatæ*, and he spent much time in prayer.

3.2. The Beginning of the Saint's Mission

Here, at the very threshold of his ambition, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis which was so severe that his physicians declared that he had, at the most, "three months more to live." One lung had collapsed altogether and the other was damaged. His condition deteriorated to the stage where his superiors took him off his teaching duties and restricted him to hearing confessions and preaching a few sermons.

Debilitating though his illness was, he saw his heaviest burden as the apathy, indeed the antagonism, the indifference, the mockery amongst his fellow friars towards his efforts to promote his new apostolate. Despite this, and the prognosis of having only three months left to live, Fr. Kolbe refused to lose his trust in the Immaculate. Help was at hand.

On the Feast of the Holy Rosary on the 7th of October 1919, his trust was rewarded when six friar-clerics together with their master, Father Keller, signed their names during recreation that evening in the book that would serve for enrolments in the *Militia Immaculatæ*.

From that point onwards, the apostolate began to grow. Despite his condition, Fr. Kolbe organised meetings and conferences, and founded Marian circles which quickly spread in communities and family homes throughout Kraków. He used expressions like “snatching the masses from Satan”, “having no right to rest as long as a single soul remains under Satan's dominion” and “victory being based on the salvation of souls.” It is no wonder that the *Militia* grew when fuelled by the unlimited love Fr. Kolbe had for the Immaculate, without regard for his health.

Certainly there were setbacks. Misinterpretation of his intentions, inertia, disdain, sometimes even from enrolled Knights — these were factors which beset the early growth (and, unfortunately growth today as well) — but he remained steadfast in his determination to build a *Militia* to offset the growing influence of the Freemasons.

Determination alone was unable to overcome his illness. He fell victim to a fever and delirium resulting in admission to the hospital at Kraków, whence he was transferred to the sanatorium



The St. Francis of Assisi Church in Kraków. St. Maximilian stayed in this convent from 1919 until October 1922

at Zakopane in June of 1920 where he spent eighteen months taking in the mountain air.

This enforced absence from his work of growing the apostolate would have stopped most ordinary self-motivated priests in their tracks, but here again we see evidence that Fr. Kolbe was no ordinary priest and that he was motivated by his beloved Immaculata. There was so much to be done and here he was, confined to the sanatorium. *Nie ma problemu!* (No problem!) Unable to go out into the town, he put his efforts into talking individually to the other patients in the sanatorium, and was soon organising groups for meetings and religious conferences, all the time handing out Miraculous Medals to all who would accept them.

The sanatorium had a reputation as a stronghold for atheists, perhaps for obvious reasons, but nevertheless the Immaculate

Virgin rewarded his efforts with numerous conversions to the faith. Amongst these was that of a young Jewish student who had attended Fr. Kolbe's talks until his worsening illness rendered him unable to continue and he was confined to his bed. What was to become of this young man's brave initiative?

Fr. Kolbe obtained permission (normally refused in the circumstances) to visit him, took him a Miraculous Medal which he



put around the young man's neck and, in preparation for his death, administered the sacraments of Baptism, Holy Eucharist and Extreme Unction. And yet the young man seemed troubled, confiding to Fr. Kolbe that his mother would curse him for converting from Judaism to Christianity. Fr. Kolbe assured him that he would be in Paradise before his mother arrived. This was the case, and her words of disapproval on seeing the medal around his neck were too late.

At the end of eighteen months, Fr. Kolbe was well enough to be able to return to Kraków. Refreshed, indefatigable and full of zeal, he went back to work in earnest.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Apostolic Life

4.1. Knight of the Immaculata

Success with the growth of the apostolate brought its own problems. Community groups in towns and parishes could be handled on a smallish scale, but how was one to retain those Knights, to keep them together and to feed them the knowledge they needed to satisfy their urge to serve the Immaculata? As the movement grew, Fr. Kolbe realised the need for a means of communication more effective than the spoken word delivered from a street corner or the stage of a hall. Though lacking the World Wide Web with its emails and its text messages and twitters and tweets of the early 21st century, newspapers, radio, motion pictures and telegraphic communications were firmly established and readily available. Cars, trains and airplanes were also well established for covering journeys that would have taken St. Francis weeks on horseback or by sail boat.

Fr. Kolbe determined to begin with the printed word that could be read and reread and passed on countless times thus expanding any initial print run, and the obvious candidate was going to be his bulletin *Knight of the Immaculata* — but how would he finance even a modest first issue? Could the Order help?

His Father Provincial could only offer him prayers and encouragement, but no financial support. His dreams lay in his own hands — and those of the Immaculata! Although well used to starting conversations and addressing meetings filled with total strangers, he had never had to beg in the streets before. Nonetheless, he pitched himself at the world and rebounded in embarrassment and confusion at being so often rebuffed — yet he persisted out of his unquenchable love for the Immaculata, and little by little he gathered the money he needed to cover the publication in January of 1922 of the first issue of *Knight of the Immaculata* with five thousand copies.

There was no lack of takers and the whole of the first number quickly sold out. Buoyed up with this initial success, his thoughts turned to a second issue, this time of ten thousand copies, but this was clearly a bigger operation and he had not the funds to cover it. Again, the Order was unable to offer financial help, so he went to the altar of the Immaculate Virgin in the church to pray for inspiration. There he found an envelope bearing the words: “For Thee, Immaculate One.” Opening it, he found it to contain exactly enough to cover the shortfall between his meagre funds and the cost of the second print run. It went ahead, and attracted many regular subscribers meaning that he had an income with which to assure future issues and to expand the circulation. Copies went to anyone who asked for one, and more subscriptions came in

by that means. Clearly his heavenly Mother was taking care of him.

For these early issues, Fr. Kolbe wrote the whole of the text using simple and clear expressions aimed at the level of those with only moderate schooling. He succeeded in teaching them, encouraging them, and moving them towards a knowledge and love of the Immaculate Virgin. It is a small wonder that the bulletins were so well-received.

Later that year, in October of 1922, his Father Superior ordered him to move from Kraków to Grodno. Before very long Father Kolbe had raised the circulation of *Knight of the Immaculata* to fifty thousand copies a month, and he was weighing up the advantages to bringing the work in house, i.e., of buying his own printing machines and cutting out the middleman.



Illustration from the title page of the first issue of Knight of the Immaculata. In the middle stands the Immaculata, who crushes the head of the serpent underfoot, encircled by the texts: "She will crush your head", and "Thou alone hast vanquished all heresies throughout the world." Above, in Polish, is the title of the publication, Knight of the Immaculata, which spans two swords, which wage battle against and defeat the embodiments of the serpent here on earth. The defeated foes are depicted as books, which signifies that we fight against errors but love those who are in error. These erroneous doctrines are heresies and Freemasonry (to which we can add Modernism and ecumenism)

Any doubts that Fr. Kolbe had about this step were dispersed when, with the help of the Immaculate Virgin, the *Knight of the Immaculata* acquired its own printing machinery — “Brother Machinery,” as Fr. Kolbe called it. This was installed at Grodno where, assisted by the friars assigned to him, he continued the work unceasingly, to the stage where sixty-five thousand copies of *The Knight* were being printed each month. Whilst at Grodno, Fr. Kolbe declared on the 12th of September 1924:

“To conquer the whole world, all hearts and each person individually, for the Queen, not only of Heaven, but also of Earth. To give true happiness to those poor unfortunates who seek it in the ephemeral pleasures of this world, this is our aim”.

4.2. The expansion of the Saint’s plans

Fr. Kolbe drove himself very hard in the service of the Immaculata. He wrote text, edited text submitted by other contributors, oversaw the printing, all in addition to the time devoted to prayer, Mass, Divine Office, the confessional, and teaching catechism in a town about two miles from Grodno. No matter if he felt weary, or feverish, he was dedicated to the service of the Immaculate Virgin, and frequently insisted that he did not have time be sick.

Given this determination, and the rate of expansion of the operation, it emerged that the site at Grodno would soon be outgrown. Always looking towards the future, and now thinking also of a *City for the Immaculata* (*Niepokalanów* in Polish), Fr. Kolbe set out to find a new home in the vicinity of Warsaw to ease the distribution of his bulletins and mailshots.

He found a suitable site in the Teresin acreage which was owned by Prince Drucki-Lubecki, whom he arranged to visit. The Prince was impressed by Fr. Kolbe and agreed to his plans subject to the condition of the perpetual celebration by the Franciscan Order of two Masses a year for his parents. This was wonderful news to Fr. Kolbe and he agreed to request the necessary permission. In the meantime, he erected an impressive statue of the Immaculata



Altar in the Franciscan church of St. Mary of the Angels in Hrodna. St. Maximilian stayed from 1922 until November 1927

in readiness for taking possession of a site that was to serve her interests.

Sadly, for reasons unknown to us but predictably accepted by Fr. Kolbe with obedience, the Franciscan Superiors declined the condition laid down by the Prince, and Fr. Kolbe had to break the news to him. The prince was not pleased, and asked what he was to do with the seemingly redundant statue of the Immaculata on his land. Here we see another miraculous intervention by Our Lady in the furtherance of her intentions because she inspired Fr. Kolbe to reply: "Let her stay there. It will show that this time the Madonna could not find a home."

The prince was taken aback at this response, and then, shaking hands warmly with Fr. Kolbe, announced that the condition was withdrawn and that he could use the land, whereupon Fr. Kolbe returned to the friary and knelt down with his fellow friars to offer a prayer of thanks to the Immaculata.

4.3. The first city of the Immaculata

With nothing more than basic hand tools of pickaxes and shovels, Fr. Kolbe and his fellow friars began clearing the land at the end of August 1927, sleeping on straw in a farmhouse, and surviving only on subsistence rations.

Naturally, the first building to be erected was a wooden chapel where Fr. Kolbe celebrated Mass and consecrated the site to the glory of God and the salvation of souls through the Immaculata. This was followed by living accommodation with tar paper roofs for the friars on the lines of military barracks, and then by sheds where the various sections of the printing plant were to be installed.

On the Feast of the Presentation, the 21st of November 1927, Fr. Kolbe with 12 friars and 4 candidates took up full-time occupation of the buildings they had constructed on the Teresin land of Prince Drucki-Lubecki, and named it Niepokalanów — the *City of the Immaculata*.

The statue of the Immaculata that had played its part in bringing about the change of heart of the Prince was impossible to miss as it was placed at the entrance to welcome all comers. Fr. Kolbe fostered the habit of greeting the friars as “Mary” and expected to be greeted similarly in return because he wanted the name of the



The first chapel in Niepokalanów today. In the chapel is a small museum with items St. Maximilian had used to celebrate Holy Mass

Immaculata to be heard everywhere. He saw her as the Patroness and Protector of the Madonna's house.

Regardless of the calls of the commercial aspects of running a printing house, Fr. Kolbe nonetheless insisted that he and his friars would perfectly observe the Rule and Constitutions of their Seraphic Father, St. Francis with a loyalty to be obeyed to the point of heroism, and with no compromises. Absolutely everyone had to demonstrate unmeasured generosity in which all had to offer up their whole lives in sacrifice and satisfy every call upon them. He wanted Niepokalanów to be a model of religious life for everyone.

It is this *modus operandi* which nourished the apostolate and upheld the remarkably zealous apostolic activity of the City of the Immaculata. Absolutely no time was wasted in frivolous talk

or physical slackness — the friars either worked, or prayed, or ate or slept (these latter two but meagrely) — and by that means, production and distribution of the *Knight of the Immaculata* were maximised.

The example that held sway here, with its call for total commitment to making the Immaculate the Queen of all hearts, served well to attract new hands and new hearts to the cause. Not only was Fr. Kolbe achieving his wish to bring the Immaculata to the attention of a great number of souls through his printing press, but he was also attracting religious vocations from amongst those souls. The results of both activities brought him great happiness and cause to rejoice. And yet, he knew there was still so much more to be done. His print runs for the *Knight of the Immaculata* were now topping 100,000 per issue, and word of the ambience at the establishment had spread with such good effect that men of all ages and levels were seeking to join the community of friars. In 1939, after only a small number of years there were 762 inhabitants: 13 priests, 18 novices, 527 brothers, 122 boys in the junior seminary and 82 candidates for the priesthood. There was barely room to accommodate the growing number of vocations and it was clear that something had to be done.

4.4. The Saint takes stock

Consider where Fr. Kolbe now finds himself: from the irrepresible little lad in Pabianice, whose scholastic progress came to depend upon the kindness of a local pharmacist, Dr. Kotowski, who taught him the Latin he needed to progress to higher grades, through the seminary at Lwów, through the Gregorian University

and the International Seraphic College, through a period of recuperation from tuberculosis at the sanatorium at Zakopane, through having to beg for funds on the streets for his first print run, right up to his present circumstances.

He had organised his resources to produce five main titles, ranging from the *Knight of the Immaculata*, through bulletins for adolescents and for small children to a Latin quarterly for clergy and seminarians, all of which were produced in the thousands and even hundreds of thousands. He was producing books on the lives of certain Saints who were inspirational to him. He had, by 1929, two postulancies, and a few years later two novitiates, one for religious brothers and one for aspirants to the priesthood. Not only had he these achievements, but he also created a Brigade of Firemen for the protection of his City and the neighbourhood, all of whom wore a Rosary as well as the Franciscan habit so that they would be recognised as not only Franciscans but as Knights of the Immaculata as well. There were now a thousand members at the friary — a thousand hearts consecrated to the glory of the Immaculata.

He had five departments embracing some seventy sections, all under his central editorship, to manage this huge enterprise. What a talent he had for organisation! Despite all of this his modesty was such that he attributed every morsel to the Immaculata in whose hands he considered himself no more than a paintbrush — a mere instrument for her to use just as she wished.

Things, however, could not stay as they were. It was time once again to expand.



CHAPTER FIVE

The Missionary Soul

5.1. The next phase of the Saint's progress

The direction for this came from an unexpected source.

Pope Pius XI launched an appeal for a missionary initiative, and the Franciscan Superiors responded with a call to friars with the necessary experience and zeal to take up assignments in other lands.

Fr. Kolbe recognised the opportunity to use his experience to date to establish a second Niepokalanów, or City of the Immaculata, and submitted his application to the Minister General of the Order who readily accepted it. Successful though his first City of the Immaculata had become, and puzzling though it may seem to part company with it, Fr. Kolbe had a wish to encircle the world with Cities of the Immaculata, and even prophesied that one day a statue of the Immaculata would surmount the Kremlin, where

she would be Queen of a converted Russia. He also had in mind visits to India, Latvia, Syria and Turkey, such was his infatuated, zestful love for the Immaculata.

After the acceptance of his application came a summons to Rome to meet the Father General, on whom his humility and extraordinary history made a good impression, and who asked whether he was fully prepared for the journey to his chosen destination of Japan. Fr. Kolbe assured him that all that was necessary had been provided and that he was all prepared. In fact, he had only a ticket which had been bought for him, and a suitcase containing a small number of personal items. There were 4 friars travelling with him. The Father General asked whether they needed anything additional, to which Fr. Kolbe replied: "The Immaculata will provide." The Father General wept at this demonstration of faith, and could only repeat the response to himself afterwards.

The journey to Japan ended in Nagasaki. The friars had no funds, no knowledge of the Japanese language, and no accommodation awaiting them, but they set off to find the Cathedral where they came across a statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the churchyard. These were early days in May 1930, the month of Our Lady, and Fr. Kolbe was quick to exclaim that: "If we have



Cover of issue of the Knight of the Immaculata (Seibo no Kishi) — Japanese edition

found her, all goes well." What other sign did they need that the Immaculata was looking after them?

Somehow, they made contact with an Archimandrite (the superior of a large monastery or group of monasteries in the Orthodox Church) and were able to obtain shelter in an attic with broken windows, no beds and only the meanest of stuffed quilts for protection. Fr. Kolbe relates how, on one winter's night, snow blew in through the broken windows and covered them as they lay on the bare boards of the floor, and the water in their washbowls froze. He was fearful for his companions, but they all stoically and happily offered up their hardship in their love for the Immaculata. This heroism underpinned them whilst they established a foothold, and called it "Mugenzai no Sono" (Japanese for "Garden of the Immaculate").

The friars had been in Nagasaki for less than a month, and the resourceful Fr. Kolbe had already managed, in exchange for teaching philosophy at Nagasaki University, to obtain a licence to print his bulletin. He also obtained the use of a printing press, on which he produced the first Japanese version of the *Knight of the Immaculata*, which he called *Seibo no Kishi*. He then sent a telegraph wire to his colleagues in Poland to announce the fact on the 24th of April 1930.

The pattern of development he had refined at his first City of the Immaculata in Poland repeated itself in Nagasaki with the constant support of the Immaculata. The circulation grew to more than 50,000 copies, and as before, many previously-unbelieving people who read it were converted to the faith and thence added to the number of Knights of the *Militia Immaculatæ*. By 1936, the circulation had risen to 65,000.



The Seminary building in Nagasaki. Now, it is a museum of missions in Japan. In one very big room is a museum of the the life and mission of St. Maximilian

This was not due solely to the bulletin and its contents. It was because Fr. Kolbe was like an inexhaustible power house. He prayed to the Immaculata, he mortified himself, he taught Philosophy at the Seminary in Nagasaki, he wrote the text for the next issue of the Knight, he supervised the formation of friars, and still he made time to manage the operations of the printing press, including the resources it needed and the shift schedule for his friars.

It was not unusual for him to show signs of fever, or of muscular aches and pains, but he drove himself onwards relentlessly. If any friar suggested that he ease up, he would reply that he would take his rest in Paradise. His diet was very meagre, and the hours of sleep he allowed himself were few. The sum total of all this work and deprivation served perfectly to illustrate the

truth of the inspired response he had made to his Father General in Rome before setting off for Nagasaki with his four fellow friars: “The Immaculata will provide.”

As before, some of the new Knights showed signs of potential vocational interest, and Fr. Kolbe was able to begin a novitiate and a small seminary at Mugenzai no Sono within a few months. The graces of the Immaculata continued to descend upon his efforts and in this way the family grew until it became a flourishing Marian community — a second City of the Immaculata.

5.2. The Saint’s taking of stock leaves him still unsatisfied

Fr. Kolbe now began to dwell on the possibilities for new Cities of the Immaculata in other countries, and his thoughts turned to China, India, Turkey, the Arab world and the entire continent of Africa. He had said how much he would like to see the world encircled by Cities of the Immaculata, and true to form, he set off to China and India, researched suitable locations, found contacts and even began negotiations. His enthusiasm and his trust in the Immaculata inspired him to keep detailed notes, and he even drafted a hand-written letter to the Immaculata on the Feast of the Most Holy Name of Mary (12th of September 1932) describing the perils of his travels and reminding her that they were all for her sake.

Unlike his Seraphic Father, St. Francis, who travelled on foot, or by donkey, or by sail boat if there was a river nearby, Fr. Kolbe was able to travel by car, by rail, by boat and by air and he extracted the maximum utility from each one of these modes of travel. For



Community in Nagasaki (Japan)

that reason, he insisted that his Cities of the Immaculata would be located not only in areas with good road, rail and air links, but in places where there would be a cinema, radio transmitter, teaching facilities at University level and, had he lived long enough, a television transmitter too.

This immense level of activity was beginning to take its toll on his health at 38 years of age, and Fr. Kolbe returned to Poland in 1936, leaving Japan for the last time.



CHAPTER SIX

Martydom

6.1. The Saint shares his philosophy with his fellow friars

In 1936 St. Maximilian returned from Japan to Poland for a General Chapter and was elected Superior of Niepokalanów in Poland.

Fr. Kolbe held a particular maxim very close to his heart: "A man's life has three stages, namely, his preparation for his work, the work itself, and suffering." Insofar as his circumstances are concerned, there were no clear dividing lines between the three stages. Consequently he could be relied upon to explain very meaningfully the nature and interrelationship between these three stages.

In August of 1939, when it was inescapably obvious that the second Great War was very close, Fr. Kolbe addressed the 837 or so friars of the City of the Immaculata on the edge of Warsaw specifically about the third stage: "Suffering". He reminded them that they could not know the hour nor the means of their death, but urged them all to shed their blood in the service of the Immaculata to seal a true love for her. He quoted the words of Our Saviour that: "There is no greater love than this, that a man give his life for his friend." For himself, this was indeed to be a prophetic statement.

6.2. The persecution begins



By the 13th of September 1939, Niepokalanów was occupied by the invading Germans and on the 19th of September 1939 most of its inhabitants had been deported to Germany; among them was Fr. Maximilian; but that exile did not last long and on the 8th of December (the feast of the Immaculate Conception) the prisoners were set free

Poland suffered invasion in September 1939 with dreadful force and frightful consequences for its people and its infrastructure. Eight hundred of the friars at Niepokalanów had to leave. Only about thirty-seven remained, Fr. Kolbe being amongst them. He knew that his publication, the Little Daily, regularly published in runs of 200,000 each day, irked the German Police and that retribution was not far ahead. Sure enough, on the 19th of September 1939, some of the Nazi elite guard, the Schutzstaffel (or S.S. for short), came to Niepokalanów, gathered the thirty-seven remaining friars, and carried them off in two trucks. Fr. Kolbe, trusting as ever in the protection of the Immaculata observed to his companions that maybe it was her way of founding a new City in Germany through them.

Love always knows how to turn something evil to good.

The two trucks brought the friars firstly to Lambinowice and later to Gębice, both of them preventative camps, as the Schutzstaffel had no intention of underrating the ingenuity of Fr. Kolbe. As when Fr. Kolbe had earlier been obliged to undergo



ID card of St. Maximilian Kolbe in German; in Poland during German occupation, all personal documents were in German

confinement (at the sanatorium in Zakopane in June of 1920, and on that occasion for health reasons), he now busied himself by instructing fellow prisoners, organising prayer groups and holding conferences in a similar manner, insofar as he could get away with it under the watchful eyes of the camp guards.

His charitable generosity knew no bounds. For example, when an admirer managed to smuggle a portion of cheese from the camp kitchen and presented it to Fr. Kolbe, he did no more than share it out amongst the others near him. The rations were barely enough to live on, and yet he would share his portion with the others. On another occasion, a prisoner awoke in a fit of shivers from the cold to find that Fr. Kolbe was covering him with a blanket. These little acts of mercy may have had their origins in the privations that Fr. Kolbe had undergone earlier in his life, and also being buoyed up by his trust that the Immaculata would make up any shortfall for him.

6.3. One last gasp for the *Knight of the Immaculata* bulletin

After a few weeks, they were moved to the camp at Ostrzeszów on the 9th of November 1939. The friars managed to gather a little clay from which they made a statue of Our Lady to celebrate the Feast of her Immaculate Conception on the 8th of December 1939. As if to thank them for their devotion, they received a surprise from the Immaculata on that day — they were released from prison without explanation and returned to Niepokalanów!

What a sight greeted their eyes. The once well-ordered city lay in ruins, devastated by bombs and looting and it was no more



St. Maximilian's room after it had been trashed by German soldiers and the arrest of St. Maximilian

than heaps of rubble. The first building they had erected there — the chapel — had been levelled to the ground and many of the statues of the Immaculata had been mutilated.

Undeterred, Fr. Kolbe gathered around him the people who were sheltering in the city — wounded and discharged Polish soldiers, homeless civilians, fugitives — and assisted them as best he could. Then, during the next few months, assisted by his friars and other friars who came back after hearing of his return, he recovered his printing machinery and got it working again, and applied for permission to print an issue of the *Knight of the Immaculata*. He was given permission but it was to be the final edition he wrote because on the 17th of February 1941 officers of the Nazi elite guard, the S.S. again came to Niepokalanów to question him. At the end of the prolonged session, they arrested Fr. Kolbe and three other friars and took them away. As he left, Fr. Kolbe was submissive and calm and he assured those left behind that he was going to serve the Immaculate in another field of work.

Despite the arrest he was not distressed. Within himself, he knew that he was assured of a place in Paradise, although he would not reveal from whom the assurance came, nor the date

when it was to be, but it was enough for him, for it is impossible to be distressed at anything when one has been assured of paradise. Twenty of the friars stepped forward and offered to be arrested in the place of Fr. Kolbe, such was the esteem, the veneration and the affection that the friars had for him. Their offer was refused, and he was taken to the Pawiak prison in Warsaw.

6.4. The Saint is cast into prison

Early in March of 1941 Fr. Kolbe was put into cell 103 of Division II and an inspection by the Division Captain took place five days later. This man seemed to have a hatred for clerics, particularly those with a crucifix and a rosary on display, and he tried



The prison Pawiak in Warsaw

unsuccessfully to tear the crucifix away from Fr. Kolbe, bellowing: "And you believe in this?" Calmly Fr. Kolbe replied: "Indeed I do", at which the Captain became apoplectic and struck him in the face. This happened three times, and then the Captain left. The other prisoners in the cell were very angry but could do nothing for fear of further retribution against all of them. They were rather surprised at the calm which Fr. Kolbe was emanating as he strolled up and down the cell praying quietly. He urged them not to worry, and confided that it was nothing serious, and it was for his dear Madonna.

On the 28th of May 1941 along with many other prisoners, he was transferred in a railway cargo truck to Auschwitz as prisoner #16670. Despite their predicament, Fr. Kolbe strove to raise their spirits with prayers, and got them to sing national songs, and to join him in discourse, to the point where they could almost forget what had befallen them.

6.5. The Saint in Auschwitz

The procedure on arrival at Auschwitz was for prisoners to be subjected to cold showers and belittled by the barbs and obscene remarks of the guards after which they had to don a prison uniform with blue and grey vertical stripes and carrying an identification number. Fr. Kolbe's uniform had a red triangle over his heart to identify him as a priest. Priests and Jews were singled out for especially inhumane treatment, and could be assured of an early death. His Division Captain at Auschwitz bore the name of Krott and he had a reputation for being particularly fiendish and merciless, giving the very worst of the tasks to those in his keeping. Examples



The main gate of the concentration camp at Auschwitz

of these tasks were to load and carry gravel, cut and carry lumber on their backs, clear away manure, move away corpses, all in silence and with no rest breaks. Any sign of slowing down earned the prisoner a lashing, a kicking and a pitiless beating. Having lost one of his lungs to tuberculosis, Fr. Kolbe struggled to keep going, and was beaten, kicked and insulted every time he fell over. No-one could help him, much as they wanted to, because anyone who tried was severely beaten. He urged his sympathisers not to expose themselves to these beatings, assuring them that the Immaculata was helping him and that he would manage alone. He reminded them on other occasions that their sufferings were in the service of the Immaculata. He treated his sufferings as if he were doing the Stations of the Cross, just as Our Lord did on His painful journey to Calvary.

Fr. Kolbe continued to display incredible calm in the most provocative of assaults. In one instance a guard approached him

with a police dog. In his opinion, Fr. Kolbe was not working hard enough, so first he struck him and then set the dog on him. There was no complaint from Fr. Kolbe, much to the amazement of the prisoner with whom he was working. In another instance, it was Captain Krott's turn to vent his spite on Fr. Kolbe. He had Fr. Kolbe loaded with an enormous amount of logs and then ordered him to run with it. After only a very few steps, Fr. Kolbe collapsed, as might be expected given his age and state of health. Captain Krott then went berserk and kicked Fr. Kolbe in the face and stomach, and also beat him with a rod and shouted furiously, "So you don't like to work! I will let you see what work means!" Shouting and blaspheming, Krott made him stretch out on a tree trunk before everybody and had one of the huskier guards give him fifty lashes with a whip. This left Fr. Kolbe almost lifeless. He appeared dead. His body was thrown into a ditch and covered with brushwood. Later some companions helped him regain consciousness. Somehow he was smuggled into the infirmary, where his case was diagnosed as "pneumonia with general weakness." Poor Fr. Kolbe, in imitation of his divine Model, chose to remain meek and sweet as a lamb throughout it all.

6.6. What could be the Saint's secret?

This question must have been in the heads of so many of his fellow prisoners, noting his reaction to being so mercilessly beaten, insulted, belittled, and yet never complaining. All of them were hungry and not far from death, and yet Fr. Kolbe acted as though these were mere trifles which did not concern him — he simply did not discuss them — it was as if he were in another world, immersed

in God and deep in prayer. In fact, the first thing that many of them came to learn about him was his spirit of prayer.

He never failed to use an opportunity to turn his fellow prisoner's attention to the holy Virgin. When someone who was in desolate spirits approached him, Father Kolbe knew how to turn him to the Immaculate Virgin by saying, "She is the Comfort of the Afflicted. She is listening to us all and helping us all." No one could deny this because all had seen how he had triumphed despite beatings and whippings, insults, deprivations — he had been through them all. "Love is a creative power" he would declare to them. Rosary beads were forbidden at the camp, so Fr Kolbe would say his rosary on his fingers, and this was a common sight which remained in the memories of many of his fellow prisoners.

One day he discovered that a prisoner was an artist, and asked him to make two pencil sketches of Our Lord and of the Blessed Virgin Mary. He carried these with him regardless of the fact that to be caught with them would have earned him another beating — but he placed great store by them. Sadly he lost them, but he quickly managed to have them replaced, such was their importance in his prayer life. This prayer life was indeed a major part of Fr. Kolbe's ability to cope with his beatings.

He could have lain in his bed and recited his rosary unbeknown to the guards — but no. That was not acceptable to him, and he would kneel at the side of his bed instead. A fellow prisoner warned him that he ran the risk of a beating if a guard saw him, but he answered: "Go to sleep, son, I'm already an old man and I shall pray for you."

Another sign of his fearlessness was that he would bless himself with the sign of the cross before starting a meal, with no thought that he might be struck by a guard for his action.

On two occasions, but only two, Fr. Kolbe was able to celebrate Holy Mass which was strictly forbidden there. At other times, to symbolically and reverently commemorate Holy Communion, he used to take his portion of bread, bless it, and give a little piece of it to each one. St. Francis of Assisi had done the same with his friars a few days before his death.

6.7. The Saint defies the circumstances

It was exceedingly difficult for Fr. Kolbe to live out his vocation in the circumstances prevailing at Auschwitz, with guards constantly looking out for any signs of religious practice and administering beatings for even small transgressions. There have been many examples already to show that Fr. Kolbe was not deterred by this. He managed to hear confessions, to preach uplifting sermons, to distribute Miraculous Medals when he was able to obtain any. He continued to be true to his vocation in the huts for prisoners and in the hospital, crawling across the floor from bed to bed if necessary in order not to be seen by the guards as getting caught carried the risk of being shot.

One prisoner related an event where he and Fr. Kolbe were ordered to take corpses to the crematorium. One particular corpse showed signs of having been brutally tortured and the prisoner felt rooted to the spot. The guard showed his impatience and the prisoner heard a familiar voice saying calmly: "Let us take him, brother." He forced himself forward and lifted the corpse on to the barrow, and then a second one. He was wishing to himself that he was that corpse when he heard that same voice saying: "Holy Mary, pray for us." He shuddered as if having received an electric

shock, and he felt strength flowing through him. After delivering the corpses to the crematorium and beginning the walk back, he heard Fr. Kolbe whisper in Latin: "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord." This was followed by: "And the Word was made Flesh."

So even in the greatest of danger had he been heard, Fr. Kolbe managed to do the best he could for those poor souls he had just delivered to the crematorium.

The food was of poor quality and came in very small portions. Men fought over it in order to have enough to stay alive, but Fr. Kolbe set an example to all by giving away his own portion to those who really needed it, and his friends had to insist that he kept some of it for himself. He never missed an opportunity to try and restore peace when such quarrels broke out.

He was never heard to criticise their cruel captors, in fact he prayed for them and for their conversion to the faith, and urged others to do the same. Whenever he received a beating he would say: "May God forgive you" and: "Father forgive them" just as Our Lord prayed from the Cross for His executioners.

His selflessness was well known. He even exchanged his own sandals for a pair in worse condition from another prisoner, and he washed another prisoner's porridge bowl for him after that prisoner had been beaten for not doing the job well enough in the first place.

6.8. The Saint moves a step closer to earning his two crowns

Late in July 1941 a prisoner escaped from the section where Fr. Kolbe was being held. The Commandant declared that if he did not return by the following day, ten men would be selected

at random and condemned to death by thirst and starvation in a dungeon. All the prisoners were made to stand and wait until the expiry of the deadline, none knowing whether or not they would be amongst the selected ones. The escaped prisoner did not come back.

As the sun was setting, the camp Commandant came and picked the ten men who were to die in the dungeon. Fr. Kolbe was not amongst them, but he heard the anguished cries of those who were and he prayed to his heavenly Mother. The last sobbing cry came from Francis (Franciszek) Gajowniczek: "Farewell! Oh my poor wife! My poor children! From now on you are fatherless!" Fr. Kolbe could stand no more. Breaking rank he stepped out and stood before the Commandant, saying in German: "I ask to die in place of that father of a family."

This was absolutely unprecedented and the Commandant was bewildered for some minutes. "Why?" he eventually asked. "Because I am old and feeble, and he has a wife and children." replied Fr. Kolbe. "Who are you?" the Commandant asked. "I am a Catholic priest," answered the martyr. This answer helped the Commandant to make his decision. "I accept," said the Commandant, and from that moment on Fr. Kolbe's fate was sealed.

He and the other nine condemned men were taken to cell 21 which was empty and dark. They were stripped naked and locked in by the guards who sneered at them saying: "You will wither up like tulips." From that day on, the unfortunate men had nothing more to eat.

The only contact the prisoners had with outsiders was when guards arrived with other prisoners each morning to take away men who had died during the night. Fr. Kolbe led his little group in reciting the rosary and in singing hymns to the Blessed Virgin

Mary. Prisoners from other cells within earshot would join in. If the guards approached during the day, all would fall silent.

As thirst took its grasp, they were reduced to croaking, but always Fr. Kolbe was amongst them, consoling them and watching out for the guards. They knew that he had volunteered his life, and that the others were innocent anyway, and they were heard saying to each other: "That priest is certainly a good man. We have not had anyone here like him up to now."

6.9. Release at last for the Saint

After three weeks, only Fr. Kolbe and three other men remained. It was the Vigil of the Assumption, and the Commandant sent the Director of the infirmary to the cell to administer an injection of carbolic acid to each of them to end their lives. Fr. Kolbe extended his arm to the executioner, obedient to the last, and with a prayer on his lips. A prisoner who served as interpreter in the dungeon,



Bruno Borgowiec, reports that he went to the cell after the guards had left, and he saw three of the dead men whose bodies, stretched out on the floor, were soiled and whose faces showed suffering. By contrast, the dead body of Fr. Kolbe was very clean and luminously glowing. His face gleamed with peace and was glowing with light in an unusual manner. His eyes were wide open and concentrated on



The starvation bunker

one point. His whole appearance was of one in ecstasy. He had won those two crowns, offered to the bright-eyed ten year old boy in his childhood, white for purity and red for martyrdom, and now he was for evermore with his heavenly Queen, his Mamusia, his Immaculata to whose service he had dedicated his whole life.

The next day, the 15th of August 1941, on the Feast of the Assumption, his body was vaporised in the ovens. He had always said that he wanted to die on a day important to the Immaculata, and he got his wish. His ashes were scattered over the camp and over the waters of the Vistola, and all traces of his earthly remains were lost.

His beatification process was successfully completed in April 1969 with the decree of the heroicity of virtues. He was beatified in 1971 and declared a saint in 1984. He was Saint Maximilian Maria Kolbe at last.

PART SECOND

The Spirituality
of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe



CHAPTER ONE

St. Maximilian and the Miraculous Medal

Why did Saint Maximilian choose the Miraculous Medal for the *Militia Immaculatæ*? The second condition for belonging to the M.I. is very clear:

“To wear the Miraculous Medal”.

What’s more, the M.I.’s first required intention is “If possible, to pray the following ejaculatory prayer at least once a day: ‘O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee, and for all those who do not have recourse to thee, especially for the Freemasons and for those who are commended to thy care.’” So, we have the expanded prayer from the Miraculous Medal. Why? The answer can be found in the story of the medal, told many times by St. Maximilian:

"The so-called Miraculous Medal is universally known. Its origin dates back to the 27th of November 1830, and the fortunate soul to whom the Most Blessed Immaculate Virgin Mary showed it was Catherine Labouré, at that time a novice of the Sisters of Mercy, in Rue du Bac, Paris. (...) Amazing miracles of conversion started to occur immediately, and demand for the medal became so high that as many as 80 million of them were struck in the first ten years. Is it not fitting, therefore, that as we consecrate ourselves to the Immaculata without reservation, we should grace our breast with the Miraculous Medal? This medal, then, is the external sign of consecration to the Immaculata: it is the second condition."

St. Maximilian Kolbe therefore, as he explains in his letter to Brother Paolo Moaratti dated the 26th of January 1926, was conscious that the inner devotion to the Immaculata is crucial if one wants to belong to the M.I. and that the Miraculous Medal is its important external expression:

"Strictly speaking, the essence of the M.I. is consecration, even by an internal act, to the Immaculata; a consecration that makes us her unconditional and total instruments in life, death, and eternity; a consecration that makes us her property. Her medal is the external sign of one's consecration and the source of the many graces that she promises. It is therefore an integral, yet not essential, part. So, if there are no medals, we can do without them, without immediately diminishing the M.I."



It is indeed the grace of Ratisbonne's conversion that contributed to the inception of the M.I.: "Ratisbonne, an intelligent and wealthy young Jew from Strasbourg, had been raised away from religion. 'I did not even believe in God,' he writes of himself. 'I had never opened a book about religion.'"

With obvious reluctance, he accepted the Miraculous Medal from Baron de Bussières. Shortly afterward, on the 20th of January 1842, Monsieur de Bussières came with him into the church of Saint Andrea delle Fratte, to the sacristy, to deal with the matters of the service in the memory of the late Monsieur Laferronnays, whose body had been already laid on the catafalque. Here the Immaculata appears to him and converts him in an instant.

On the 75th anniversary of Ratisbonne's conversion, on the 20th of January 1917, during his morning meditation, St. Maximilian received an inspiration to establish the *Militia Immaculatæ*. St. Maximilian Kolbe was convinced that the Immaculata desired to make use of the Miraculous Medal.

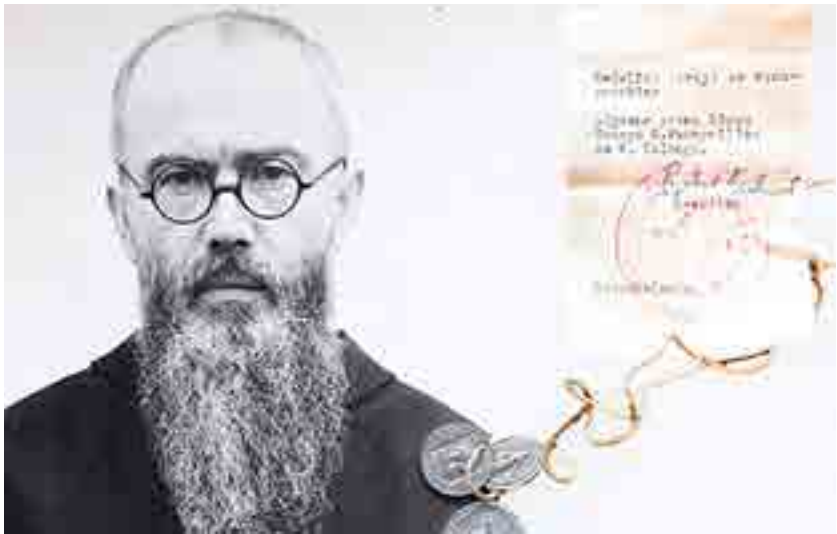
"The means are those that she herself desires. During the apparition of the Miraculous Medal, she dictated an ejaculatory prayer. That is our prayer; in it we include all men. She gave us the Miraculous Medal, to be the bullet [we need] to strike hearts."

The battle with Satan is very difficult; therefore we need help from the Immaculata and her medal:

"We wear the Miraculous Medal, because the Immaculata told us to do so and she promised her protection to those who wear it. We sorely need such protection. Experience shows that when the devil wants to lead someone astray, the first thing he does is to make one find some pretext to lay aside one's Miraculous Medal. How powerful is the Immaculata's protection!"

Saint Maximilian Kolbe encourages everybody to spread the medal, widely and prudently:

"Distribute her medal wherever possible, even to children, so that they may always wear it round their necks, to the elderly and young people in particular, that under



Medals which used St. Maximilian



her protection they may have sufficient strength to reject the countless temptations and pitfalls that beset them in our times. Even to those who never come to church, who are afraid to go to

Confession, who make a mockery of religious practices, who laugh at the truths of faith, who have immersed themselves in the mud of immorality, or who live in heresy outside the Church. Oh! To these it is absolutely essential to offer the medal of the Immaculata and make them want to wear it, and at the same time, pray fervently to the Immaculata for their conversion. Some manage to give a medal even when someone does not want to accept it in any way. They sew one right into the person's clothing, hiding it well, then they pray, and the Immaculata, sooner or later, will show what she is capable of doing. The Miraculous Medal, then, is the bullet of the *Militia Immaculatæ*."

Thus, St. Maximilian Kolbe had chosen Miraculous Medal for the effective realisation of the main goal of the *Militia Immaculatæ*:

"To work for the conversion to God of all men, be they sinners, heretics, schismatics, Jews, Moslems etc., in particular the Freemasons; and that all become saints, under the patronage and through the mediation of the Immaculate Virgin."

In 1939 St. Maximilian wrote:

"In 1920, in the Zakopane hospital, where for a time I lived as a patient and chaplain, a woman was breathing her last. She was already preparing to die, yet she spoke with great sorrow of her husband, whose conversion at this late stage she could no longer hope for. Then he came to the hospital. I tried to suggest appropriate reading to him, conversing with him on religious subjects, but his only response to me was: 'I need clearer evidence.' Yet he took no pains at all to read more serious books. When he came to salute me at the time of departure, I made one last attempt. I handed him the Miraculous Medal, and he accepted it. After that I asked him to go to confession: 'I am unprepared, no! Absolutely not!' was his answer, yet... he seemed compelled to kneel down and made his confession in tears."





CHAPTER TWO

Mary Obtains and Distributes All Graces

The Catholic Church honours our Blessed Mother with so many beautiful titles including that of

“Mediatrix of all graces”.

That Mary obtains for us and distributes to us all graces is a doctrine, according to what Jesus said to St. John about the mother of all men: “Behold thy mother” (John 19:27).

As a beatified mother knows in heaven the spiritual needs of her children whom she left on earth, Mary knows the spiritual needs of all men. Since she is an excellent mother, she prays for them and, since she is all powerful over the heart of her Son, she obtains for them all the graces that they receive, and which are received by all those who do not persist in evil.

With what motherly affection is she always endeavoring to assist us! In the same manner as Jesus is our mediator of right with His eternal Father, because by the merits of His Passion He obtains pardon for penitent sinners, so Mary is Mediatrix by divine favour with her Son, and is such a Mediatrix that her Son grants her every request.

The Church turns to Mary to obtain graces of all kinds, both temporal and spiritual; among these last, from the sanctifying grace, the gifts of the Holy Ghost, to the grace of conversion up to that of final perseverance. In brief, everything which produces, conserves, increases, or perfects the supernatural life of man.

All kinds of graces are distributed by her, even, in a sense, those of the sacraments; for she merited them for us in union with Christ on Calvary. In addition, she disposes us, by her prayer, to approach the sacraments and to receive them well. At times she even sends us a priest, without whom this sacramental help would not be given to us.

Not only every kind of grace is distributed to us by Mary, but every grace in particular. We say in the words of the Hail Mary: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.





Amen". This "now" is said every moment in the Church by thousands of Christians who thus ask for the grace of the present moment. This grace is the most individual of graces; it varies with each of us, and for each one of us at every moment. If we are distracted while saying this word, Mary, who is not distracted, knows our spiritual needs of every instant, and prays for us, and obtains for us all the graces that

we receive. This teaching, contained in the faith of the Church and expressed by the common prayers (*lex orandi, lex credendi*), is based on Scripture and tradition.

During Our Lady's earthly life, Mary appears in Scripture as the distributor of graces:

1. Through Mary, Jesus sanctified the Precursor when she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and sang the Magnificat.

2. Through His mother, Jesus confirmed the faith of the disciples at Cana, by granting the miracle that she asked. Also she gives us her command "Do whatever He tells you."

3. Through her, He strengthened the faith of John on Calvary, saying to him: "Behold thy mother."

4. By her the Holy Ghost came down upon the apostles, for she was praying with them in the cenacle on Pentecost day when the Holy Ghost descended in the form of tongues of fire.

After the Assumption and her entrance into glory, Mary is the distributor of all graces.

St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe said:

"The Holy Ghost acts through Mary. In recent times especially we are perceiving the Immaculata, the Spouse of the Holy Ghost, as our Mediatrix. The Immaculata at Lourdes began to act in her capacity as our Mediatrix."





CHAPTER THREE

The Immaculate Conception

For St. Maximilian, the words Our Lady spoke to St. Bernadette, “Que soy era immaculada councepciou”

“I am the Immaculate Conception”

contain an unfathomable mystery.

Writing in 1933, he said:

"Who and what is the Immaculata? Who can understand Her perfectly? We all understand what 'mother' means; but 'mother of God' is something that our reason and our limited intellect cannot really grasp.

So too, only God really understands what 'immaculate' means. 'Conceived without sin' we can fathom up to a point; but 'Immaculate Conception' is an expression that abounds in the most consoling of mysteries."

A few hours before his arrest on the 17th of February 1941 Father Maximilian Kolbe writes about Mary Immaculate. This text has a great importance because it is the whole essence of his Marian teaching.

St. Maximilian wrote:

"Immaculate Conception: these words came out of the mouth of the Immaculate Herself; and so, they must indicate most precisely, most essentially, who She is. (...) not only the fact that She was conceived without sin, but also the manner in which this privilege belongs to her. It is not something accidental; it is something that belongs to Her very nature. For She is the Immaculate Conception in person. (...) Immaculate Conception is the name of Her, in whom He lives by the fecund love in the whole supernatural order."

In this same "Final Sketch" Kolbe arrived at a profound insight, an "answer" it seems (at least in part) to his persistent question, "Who are you, Immaculata?": he calls Mary the created Immaculate Conception, created sinless and from conception uniquely filled with an abundance of grace, in order to be made superabundantly fruitful when she would become the Mother of God through the work of the Holy Ghost. As St. Maximilian says:

"The Holy Ghost makes her fruitful, from the very first instant of her existence, all during her life, and for all eternity."

Additionally, he calls the Holy Ghost the Uncreated, Eternal Immaculate Conception, who is "conceived" from the love that



flows eternally between the Father and the Son; a love so perfect that it is personified. St. Maximilian explains:

"Everything that exists, outside of God Himself, since it is from God and depends upon Him in every way, bears within itself some semblance to its Creator... because every created thing is an effect of the Primal Cause.

It is true that the words we use to speak of created realities express the divine perfections only in a halting, limited and analogical manner. They are only a more or less distant echo — as are created realities that they signify — of the properties of God Himself.

Would not 'conception' be an exception to this rule? No, there is never any exception...

And who is the Holy Ghost? The flowering of the love of the Father and the Son. If the fruit of created love is a created conception, then the fruit of divine Love, that prototype of all created love, is necessarily a divine 'conception.' The Holy Ghost is, therefore, the 'uncreated, eternal conception,' the prototype of all the conceptions that multiply life throughout the whole universe."

Mary's sinlessness from conception is the fruit of God's love. At Mary's conception the Holy Ghost conformed her to Himself. The

Blessed Virgin, by reason of the singular grace of her Immaculate Conception, is totally receptive to the love of God. At the Annunciation she receives God's love and in cooperation with the Holy Spirit makes that love fruitful — infinitely so — in conceiving the Incarnate Word.

Mary's receptivity and fruitfulness did not end with the Conception and Birth of Christ. Now in Heaven, Mary remains the living, human conduit for the graces that the Holy Ghost distributes to us. As St. Maximilian says:

"The Holy Ghost manifests His share in the word of Redemption through the Immaculate Virgin who, although she is a person entirely distinct from Him, is so intimately associated with Him that our minds cannot understand it. So, while their union is not of the same order as the hypostatic union linking the human and divine natures in Christ, it remains true to say that Mary's action is the very action of the Holy Ghost."

What most attracted St. Maximilian to Mary was her beauty: the beauty of the deep and unfathomable mystery of her Immaculate Conception, and the beauty of her spotless purity throughout the entirety of her earthly life, which now radiates forth in Heaven.





CHAPTER FOUR

Our Lady of Lourdes

Saint Maximilian venerated Our Lady with the name she herself proclaimed in Lourdes:

“I am the Immaculate Conception”

The life and works of Saint Maximilian were inseparable from the Immaculata and her name.

In the grotto of Massabielle in Lourdes (France), Our Lady appeared to a 14-year old girl, Bernardette. Our Lady appeared eighteen times, from the 11th of February to the 16th of July 1858.

The 11th of February, which is the annual memorial of the apparitions of the Mother of God in Lourdes, was celebrated by St. Maximilian with great devotion. Before this feast the Saint, together with his brothers, were in the habit of saying a novena. The octave (the 7 days following the feast) was also the time of

bestowing wonderful graces by the Immaculata, as well as a time of special commitment to the fight for the Kingdom of God.

Often on that feast the Immaculata would bestow special temporal (for example important matters of the apostolate) and spiritual graces on Saint Maximilian.

The whole of February, the month that commemorates Our Lady's apparitions in Lourdes, was always regarded as a blessed month by St. Maximilian:

"The blessed month of February has come again. I say blessed, because every year on the 11th of February we celebrate the memory of the apparition of the Immaculate Virgin at Lourdes."

For Knights of the Immaculata, the 11th of February is always a very special day. Saint Maximilian encouraged all Knights of the *Militia Immaculatæ* to celebrate this feast worthily, by receiving Holy Communion and giving themselves more wholeheartedly to the Immaculata, mainly through the battle with evil, limitless trust in God and Mary, as well as meditating on her and reciting the rosary.

On the 12th of January 1933, a month before the feast, he encouraged everyone to make proper preparations for the celebration of the 75th commemoration of the apparitions of the Immaculata in Lourdes:

"It is almost a whole month to the feast of the apparition of the Immaculata in Lourdes on 11th February. It is necessary to prepare oneself, to receive as many graces as possible. How to prepare? By becoming more and more her property; firstly until the feast of the apparition of the Immaculata in Lourdes, and then throughout the whole

year, working on belonging to her more and more, because she has prepared special graces."

This sentence contains two very important elements:

In the first element, St. Maximilian calls for good preparations for the coming of the jubilee.

This preparation should most of all consist of experiencing and putting into practice our total abandonment to the Immaculata, while striving for even greater perfection in our daily lives.

The second element is the clear anticipation of the special graces (or one great grace), that Mary can obtain for her Knights during this jubilee year.

On the jubilee day, namely the 11th of February 1933, St. Maximilian wrote two letters to Niepokalanów (the City of the Immaculata). In those letters he gave testimony to the saving of a young Japanese girl from suicide, as well as a few conversions of Japanese people who received the Sacrament of Baptism.

He wholeheartedly appealed for the reception of the words of the Immaculata from Lourdes, the development of the *Militia Immaculatæ* movement and taking the Immaculata as the model of life for every Knight.

Writing about the apparitions in Lourdes, the then Father Kolbe stressed the role and mission of Saint Bernadette Soubirous. Saint Maximilian gave her as an example of somebody completely devoted to Mary and capable of suffering enormously for God and our Heavenly Mother. Saint Maximilian upheld Saint Bernadette as an exemplar for the Knights of the Immaculata.

In 1914, as a clerical student Saint Maximilian was miraculously cured by means of water from Lourdes. To have lost his right thumb could have prevented him from receiving priestly orders. His miraculous cure was a visible sign of Mary's care of his priestly vocation.



During his life, Saint Maximilian Kolbe visited Lourdes only once. It was on the 30th of January 1930, before undertaking his mission to the Far East. In Lourdes Saint Maximilian celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the Basilica, he prayed the rosary in the Grotto, he drank the miraculous water and he sank his finger in the water, he kissed the rock in the Grotto and he commended his prayers to Mary. Summarising his visit to Lourdes, he stressed the experience of a great love of His “Mamusia (Mammy)”, as he fondly called the Immaculata.

The apparitions in Lourdes had a special place in the Marian treaty, commenced by St. Maximilian (which he never completed).

The Saint gave a description of the apparitions. However, most of all, St. Maximilian discussed the meaning of the name ‘Immaculate Conception’.

"'Immaculate Conception' — these words came out of the mouth of the Immaculata herself. Therefore, they must indicate accurately and in the most essential manner who she is. Who are you, O Immaculate Conception? Not God, for He has no beginning; not an angel, created directly out of nothing; not Adam, formed with the mud of the earth; not Eve, taken from Adam; and not even the Incarnate Word, who existed from eternity and is 'conceived' rather than a 'conception'. Prior to conception, the children of Eve did not exist, so they may be better called "conception". Yet you differ from them also, for they are conceptions contaminated by original sin, while you are the only Immaculate Conception."

Also, in Lourdes, the Immaculata did not define herself as: "Conceived without sin", but, as St. Bernadette herself recounts: "At that moment the Lady was standing above the wild rose bush in the same way in which she is depicted on the Miraculous Medal. Upon my third question her face took on an expression of gravity and at the same time of profound humility... Joining the palms of her hands as if in prayer, she lifted them up to her chest... turned her gaze toward Heaven... then, slowly opening her hands and bowing to me, she said in a voice in which you could notice a slight tremor: 'Que soy era Immaculada Councepsiou!' ('I am the Immaculate Conception!')".

The whole meaning of the life, sufferings and death of Saint Maximilian was to underline the answer given by the Most Holy Virgin Mary to Bernadette, when she asked the Lady to reveal her

name. Saint Maximilian had a desire to live by that answer as well as to feed others with it.

Countless times and without rest Saint Maximilian repeated: "The Most Holy Mother, asked by Bernadette what was her name, replied: 'I am the Immaculate Conception'. This is a definition of the Immaculata."





CHAPTER FIVE

Pray the Rosary Every Day

The Immaculata, during her apparition on the 13th of October 1917 in Fatima, said to the three children:

**“I am Our Lady of the Rosary.
Continue to say the Rosary every day.”**

In every apparition at Fatima Our Lady urged the daily recitation of the Rosary for the salvation of the world. The Rosary is Mary's gift.

There seems no doubt that today Our Lady wants to use the Rosary to save us and inundate us with graces. Let us realize that it was not just by chance that she chose to appear at Fatima under the title of “Our Lady of the Rosary”. She appears to have linked the most important affairs of our age to the Holy Rosary.

In the personal diary of St. Maximilian Kolbe, we find this passage: “So many Rosaries means so many souls saved”.

And in the magazine *Knight of the Immaculata* of October 1925, St. Maximilian wrote:

"It is true that the recitation of the Rosary is not compulsory under pain of sin, but what kind of love is it that confines itself to bare duties, whose neglect may very well turn into serious transgressions? Such a course of action would seem more like slave bondage than the love of a child towards the great heavenly Father and the most loving Mother. No, that would be unworthy of someone who loves of Mary!

A true lover seeks the opportunity to approach her as often as possible, to remain at her feet longer (within the limits allowed him by the duties of his state).

He entrusts all his troubles and his concerns to her. Also he himself, as far as his energies allow, meditates and acts to ensure that the works of Mary proceed in the best way, that her kingdom may be expanded in the souls of all those who live now and in the future, acquaintances or strangers, friends or enemies, relatives, fellow citizens, countrymen or foreigners, Catholics or non-Catholics. These are his aspirations, his desires; this is the goal at which his efforts aim. And where could one obtain the light one needs in order to know when and how to act, if not at her feet? Could one possibly go elsewhere to draw strength for so sublime a task?

'Our Father...' 'Hail Mary...'

Into grieved hearts, there drops a comforting balm; in desperate souls, a ray of hope shines again. The poor, the afflicted, those who are bent under the burden of worries,

tribulations and crosses, now more and more clearly and explicitly start sensing that they are not orphans, that they have a Mother who knows their sorrows, has compassion for them, comforts them, and comes to their aid.

They feel they have to suffer a little longer, but then a reward, a reward that is eternal and infinite, will follow. They even realize that it is worth suffering in this short life in order to wipe out the sins committed and give a proof of their love to God.

They understand that suffering purifies the soul as does fire with gold, because the soul is detached from those passing illusions the world calls happiness, and rises higher and higher, infinitely higher and higher, to the source of all happiness, God. They realize that the soul may only find rest in Him, while everything else is far too little..."

To recite the holy Rosary is like welcoming the Madonna among us, letting her enter and tarry within our poor souls. We all ought to be as pure and zealous as the virgin Apostle, the one



whom Jesus loved, St. John the Evangelist, who "took Mary into his home" (John 19:27).

Lucia of Fatima assures us that in this greatly troubled world "if everybody said the Rosary every day, the Madonna would obtain miraculous favours."



When St. Maximilian Kolbe was in the Auschwitz concentration camp and had offered to die in the place of the father of a family, he was detained in a starvation dungeon, making it into a new Christian catacomb, echoing with prayers to the Madonna that were heartbreakingly beautiful.

“It no longer seemed like a starvation dungeon down there” — wrote one of the keepers.

“It was like going down into the crypt of a church with those unlucky men enclosed; one heard them saying their prayers aloud every day. One heard the Rosary and hymns, and the condemned men in neighbouring cells joined in. Every time I went down there, fervent prayers and hymns to the holy Virgin echoed throughout the underground area. It was Father Maximilian Kolbe who would start them, and all the others would respond...”

CHAPTER SIX



The Carmelite Scapular

St. Maximilian wrote:

“Scapular, Rosary, Miraculous Medal: here are three things that the Immaculata herself has deigned to offer for the salvation of mankind.”

“On the 16th of July is the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Doubts are often voiced as to the purpose of the scapular, so it will not be out of place to a few words on the subject.

First, where does the word "scapular" come from?

It is derived from the Latin word *scapula*, that is, shoulder, and refers to a type of religious garment that the Benedictines, Carmelites and Dominicans wear over their habits. It covers just the shoulders and hangs, more or less amply, down the chest and back.

What is the origin of the scapular?

The ideals that inspired the various religious Orders did not remain confined within convent walls, but often reached also the faithful who lived in the midst of the world. These, too, as far as was possible, wanted to realize such ideals. Accordingly, there arose various congregations and confraternities, whose members could not wear proper religious habits but were at least allowed to wear something distinctive that would remind them of a habit. These robes were similar to the garment we mentioned, hanging from the shoulders, and could be quite different, especially in terms of colour.

How is a scapular made?

It consists of two pieces of woolen cloth joined by strings or ribbons.

Does the scapular have to be made of wool?

Yes, it does. It cannot be cotton, linen, silk or other material. Nor can it be knitted or embroidered. Otherwise, indulgences will not be gained.

Scapulars, may, however, be adorned with images: woven, embroidered, or sewn on a cloth. "These images may also be of some other material or of a different colour, but can never be too large, because the scapular should remain the most relevant part.

What is needed to gain indulgences and to qualify for the privileges of the scapular?

It is essential are:

1. That each scapular be blessed by a priest entitled to do so and that a priest, also properly entitled, be in charge of laying it on;

2. That he who has received the scapular wear it so that a part hangs down his chest, while the other, joined to the first with cords or straps passing over the shoulders, hang between his shoulder blades.

What do you do when your scapular is lost or worn out?

You have to have another made right away. No second imposition or even blessing by a priest is needed.

What is the origin of the Carmelite scapular?

On the 16th of July 1251, Blessed Simon Stock, the sixth General of the Carmelites, was pleading to the Most Blessed Mother for protection of the Order, which at the time was facing difficulties. In a vision, he saw the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, who gave him a scapular, saying: 'Accept, my son, this scapular for your Order as a mark of my confraternity. It will be a great privilege for you and all the children of Carmel, and those who die wearing this scapular will never suffer eternal fire. It is a mark of salvation, a shield in danger, and a token of the eternal covenant.'

Subsequently, the Most Blessed Mother also appeared to Pope John XXII and promised she would release from purgatory on the first Saturday immediately following their death those souls who during their lifetime had worn this scapular with devotion.

Although such appearances are not an article of faith, the number of conversions achieved through the scapular is telling proof of their authenticity.

About these apparitions, Pope Paul V says: 'Christians may devoutly believe in what is said about the aid experienced by the souls of the members of the Confraternity of the Scapular, that is to say, that the Most Blessed Virgin would help the souls of the religious and of the members of the confraternity who died in the love of God, and who during their lifetime wore this holy garment; that she would come to their aid with continual intercession in their favor, with pious prayers, with her merits and with her special protection after death, especially on Saturdays, dedicated by the Church to the Mother of God herself.'

Oddly enough, those who have adopted the Carmelite scapular, if they actually wear it to the day of their death, die happy and serene; but if they do not intend to repent, they die without their scapulars."





CHAPTER SEVEN

The Motherly Heart of the Immaculata Among Her Children

The Immaculata, during her apparition on the 13th of June 1917 in Fatima, said:

“I will never forsake you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the way that will lead you to God.”

She shows us her Motherly Heart, full of love, full of care for our salvation. She shows us her Heart, a Heart overflowing with the most sensitive motherly affection. 20 years after the apparitions of Our Lady in Fatima, Saint Maximilian wrote:

“The Immaculata descends on earth as a good Mother among her children, to help them save their souls. Thus, she desires the conversion and sanctification of all souls, without

exception. In order to carry out that work, though, she uses the tools taken from among men.

She urges the children who love her to cooperate with her in situations of normal everyday life.

These same souls consecrated to her, live by her, often think of her, love her wholeheartedly, and endeavor to discern her desires — either voiced from her own lips, or offered to them in silent inner inspirations.

They propagate thus her will, attracting an ever larger number of souls to ever more perfect knowledge and ever more ardent love toward her, and in her and through her, to ever deeper love toward the Divine Heart of Jesus.

At all times, the Immaculata inspires thousands of such souls devoted to herself. Many of them also come together more or less closely with one another to serve their Lady even better, in concerted effort. For this reason, the associations that work exclusively for her are many and varied.

However, we can still regret with Blessed* Grignon de Montfort: 'until today, Mary has not been known sufficiently and that is one of the reasons why Jesus Christ is not known as He should be.'

On earth there still exist souls who do not even know who Jesus and Mary are. The harvest indeed continues to be great, but the labourers are still too few. Consequently, the scope for every new effort is still very wide.

All those who have loved the Immaculata have desired to belong to her and expressed it with various formulas. Being a servant of her, being the son of her, being her slave, and so

* *Grignon de Montfort* was canonized in 1947

on, are the ideals which enlightened their lives. All, therefore, wished to belong to her in the most perfect way possible and no doubt would have liked to use all of the titles that any person had devised or that anyone's love could possibly devise in the future.

In a word, to be hers, hers without limits: that is the sun that brightens the lives of many, many hearts.

When the fire of love is ablaze, it cannot be constrained within the heart, but blazes forth and burns, consumes and absorbs other hearts. It conquers more and more souls winning them over to its ideal, to the Immaculata. The Militia Immaculatæ focuses on such love, which goes so far as to win the hearts of all those who are living now and who will live in the future, and that as soon as possible..., as soon as possible..., as soon as possible...

The knight of the Immaculata knows that, in the Immaculata and through the Immaculata, he shall soon and more easily become the property of Jesus, the property of God, knowing that SHE within him and through him will love Jesus in a way incomparably more perfect than he himself might strive to do with any other means.

He knows that, just as any grace from God the Father through Jesus and the Immaculata descends into his soul, so by no other way is any response to such grace, any exchange of love for love, able to and allowed to rise up to the Father, except through her and Jesus.

If all the souls who have already walked their earthly pilgrimage or who are currently living in this world could voice their views, we would be able to publish a countless

number of large volumes testifying to the activity of the Immaculata, tender Mother of souls redeemed by the Most Sacred Blood of her divine Son.

Even these volumes, however, would contain only what such may have recognized as special graces of the Immaculata, while every grace comes to the soul from the hands of the Mediatrix of all graces, and there is no moment in which ever-new graces fail to flow into each soul: graces of light to the intelligence, of strengthening of the will, of incitement to good; ordinary and extraordinary graces, graces directly related to temporal life and to the sanctification of the soul.

Only at the time of God's judgment in Heaven shall we become aware of the solicitude that our tender Heavenly Mother has had for each of us, ever since the beginning, of the solicitude that she has toward every soul, her child, to shape it according to the pattern of Jesus, her firstborn Son, the prototype of holiness, God and man."





CHAPTER EIGHT

Through the Immaculata to the Sacred Heart of Jesus

**“Through the Immaculata to the Sacred Heart of
Jesus: that is our watchword” —**

so wrote Saint Maximilian in 1938.

The very first chapel founded by Saint Maximilian and the brothers in Niepokalanów was very modest. The altarpiece was set up on the wall. Above the Tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament hung a framed printed picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and beneath it was placed a gypseous statue of the Immaculata. This arrangement of the main altar perfectly reflected the hierarchy of the faith and piety of our Saint.

His plans for the future church in Niepokalanów contained a similar set up:

"On the main altar, I envision a beautiful statue of the Immaculata with her arms outstretched, serving as a backdrop to the monstrance for the perpetual exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. (...) Above the statue, in a window (in the wall), a beautiful depiction of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

Saint Maximilian writes and talks about the Immaculata, about love towards her and about the necessity of prayer directed towards her. His words are filled with very special feelings. For the Saint, love for Our Lady meant striving to obtain the greatest possible love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to giving the greatest honour to God.

The way to the Sacred Heart of Jesus led through an intimate love for the Immaculata. This is reflected in the following words of the Act of Consecration to the Immaculata, repeated after Saint Maximilian by her Knights:

"In your immaculate and merciful hands to serve thee, so as to increase as much as possible thy honour in so many tepid souls that have fallen away from the faith and thus to extend the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus."

Saint Maximilian gives us the following commentary on the second part of the prayer:

"The Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is the love of God for mankind. His Kingdom is the domain of this love in the hearts of men, the love that Jesus manifested in the manger, throughout His life, on the Cross, in the Eucharist, and in giving us His Own Mother as our Mother; and He wants to enkindle this love in the hearts of men. To infuse and to

enhance the glory of the Immaculata, to conquer souls for her, means to win souls over to the Mother of Jesus, who introduces the Kingdom of Jesus to them."

Saint Maximilian stressed that the only motive for the existence and works of the Militia Immaculata was "to teach and to help souls, to win them over to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculata."

"The reason for our action is the love of the Heart of Jesus, namely the love of God, which is the essence of perfection and sanctification, to which we want to draw all of those who are and who will be, through the Immaculata, in her loving heart (as on the Miraculous Medal); because the name of Mary is closely linked to the cross of Jesus (as on the Miraculous Medal)."

Thus, the true goal of the life of the Knight of the Immaculata is to spread the blessed Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, that is to 'engraft' the reign of Jesus in human hearts and to enlarge the community of those united with Our Lord:

"The only reason for the existence and the activity of the Militia Immaculata is love, a love without limits for the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in order to offer up to Him as many souls as possible and to unite them to Him as closely as possible."

Saint Maximilian wrote in 1935:

"Many wonderful things could be said about devotion to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus — such as about aspiring to love

the Immaculata with the Heart of Jesus, and so on. I would just like to mention that we cannot possibly settle for any ordinary type of love for the Heart of Jesus, but — in keeping with what is written on the M.I. enrolment card — we must aspire to the most perfect love, that is, to loving with the Heart of the Immaculata, and only with a love of that kind."

For Saint Maximilian, love and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and love and devotion to the Immaculata, were not two different loves or devotions. The bond between Mary and Jesus was for him the ideal of love. His desire for himself and for others, was to get as close to that ideal as it was possible. Most of all, he wanted to love Jesus in the same way as He was loved by His Heavenly Mother, to love Him with her Heart, and to love the Mother of God, as Jesus loved her — that is to love her with His Heart.





CHAPTER NINE

The Work for the Conversion of Sinners

The Immaculata, during her apparition on the 13th of July 1917 in Fatima, said to the three children:

“Sacrifice yourself for sinners (...) You have seen Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go.”

At almost the same time Polish Franciscan, Father Maximilian Kolbe founded the movement called the *Militia Immaculatæ*, its goal being the conversion of sinners.

During the third Apparition in Fatima (13th of July 1917) Our Lady showed the three children a vision of Hell and she said:

“You have seen Hell, where the souls of poor sinners go. To save them, God wishes to establish in the world devotion to my Immaculate Heart. If what I say to you is done, many souls

will be saved and there will be peace. (...) When you say the Rosary, say after each mystery: O my Jesus, forgive us, save us from the fires of Hell. Lead all souls to Heaven, especially those who are most in need."

The three children of Fatima, especially Jacinta, prayed and made sacrifices for the conversion of sinners. Jacinta had an ardent thirst for their conversion, a genuine missionary zeal. She looked for sacrifices to offer for "my sinners."

Jacinta always made her sacrifices with this thought, a thought which was habitual for her: to suffer for sinners, to make acts of reparation in their place, to substitute herself for them, to obtain pardon for them and the grace of conversion.

Very often Jacinta said: "We must pray a lot to save souls from hell. So many go there! So many!"

In the same year, 1917, St. Maximilian Kolbe founded the *Militia Immaculatæ*. The goal of the *Militia Immaculatæ* is "to engage in the work of conversion of sinners, heretics, schismatics, Jews, and so on, but most of all of Freemasons, and in the work of sanctification of all, under the protection and through the mediation of the Immaculata." He wrote:

"Its purpose, therefore, is commitment to the conversion of sinners and of non-catholics, and for the sanctification of all. In other words, love towards all people, regardless of differences of faith and nationality, with a view to drawing them closer to the happiness that only closeness to God, the source of all happiness, and concrete love for God, that is, sanctification, can afford."

How can we convert sinners? St. Maximilian wrote:

"We all know well that the Virgin Immaculatae was established by God as the Mediatrix of all graces. In fact, no one converts or achieves sanctification without the help of the Immaculata, the Mother of divine grace. Indeed, the closer one comes to this Dispenser of divine graces, the more graces one obtains, the more easily one is made holy and contributes to the sanctification of others. It is logical, then, that we should be committed to the work of conversion and sanctification of souls under the protection and through the mediation of the Immaculata."

In Fatima and in Lourdes also, Our Lady asked about prayer for sinners. Saint Maximilian very often said and wrote: "The best way to convert (to sanctify) sinners is to arouse in them a devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary."

During the fourth apparition in Fatima, the Immaculata continued to ask for prayer for sinners: "Pray, pray very much, and make sacrifices for sinners: for many souls go to Hell because there are none to sacrifice themselves and pray for them."

In 1940 St. Maximilian wrote:

"The Immaculata urged everyone to pray for sinners. And the M.I. fulfills this invitation of the Immaculata, by having thousands of mouths and hearts repeat daily: 'O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee, and for all those who do not have recourse to thee, especially for the Freemasons and for those who are commended to thy care.' This invocation came out the mouth of the Immaculata and applies to every soul."

St. Maximilian wrote in 1938:

"We shall pray to her that she may deign to offer to Jesus just reparation for both our past infidelities and for the many wrongs that He suffers from sinners every day throughout the world. Each Knight offers self-commitment, through the Immaculata, as an instrument in her hands, in striving for the conversion of sinners and of all those in need of it, and for the sanctification of all.

And along with prayer, works. Works may be of different kinds, according to the condition and situation of each: they must be animated by fervour but guided by prudence. The common goal of these works: drawing souls, the greatest possible number of souls, to the Immaculata. She will cleanse them of their sins, enlighten them, strengthen them, inflame them with love for the Heart of Jesus and their brethren and make them happy. For the saints rightly assert that it is impossible for those who venerate Mary to perish, for 'love toward the Holy Mother is a sign of predestination."





CHAPTER TEN

The Conversion and Sanctification of Everyone Through the Immaculata

There is a need to flood the world with a cloudburst of Christian and Marian literature in every language.

This is the mission of the *Militia Immaculatæ*:

The conversion and sanctification of everyone through the Immaculata.

The utilization of mass media in apostolic work — this is one of St. Maximilian's modes of working. He himself utilized press and radio.

St. Maximilian's initiatives were often met with surprise. However, it was this forward-looking approach (making use of

all modern means, as long as they were decent — valid and legitimate) that proved to be fruitful and attractive to associates, who, in common with St. Maximilian, were anxious to work towards the salvation and sanctification of every soul.

At the point of setting up the *Militia Immaculatæ*, St. Maximilian desired that it should stand up to rampant evil, particularly to the enemy of the Church — Freemasonry. However, his main goal was higher: that the Immaculata be known and loved more and more.

Even Father Kolbe's religious name, Maximilian, was signalling his ways of working: 'to do everything, by all means, for the Immaculata', that is — for the salvation of souls through her.

This was the reason for setting up Niepokalanów (the City of the Immaculata) in Poland and in Japan, for his efforts to do the same in India as well as for initiating and developing publishing houses in Poland and in Japan, so the press would reach every household. In 1926 he wrote:

"A very important thing is the purpose of our publishing house, that is, that it is always concerned with winning the world for the Immaculata, every single soul that exists and will exist until the end of the world."

The goal of the *Militia Immaculatæ* is explained in its programme: "To use all other valid and legitimate means for the conversion and sanctification of men, according to one's means, in the different states and conditions of life, as the occasions present themselves; this is entrusted to the zeal and prudence of each one."

St. Maximilian explained the use of those means in 1928 in his letter to Brother Otto Caputo in Rome:

"The recommended means are: the prayer given by the Holy Immaculate Virgin herself and her medal, also given by her. Beyond this, all means as long as they are legitimate: for instance, the periodical and non-periodical press, radio, art, literature, theatre and cinema. Also, legislation, Chambers of Deputies, Senates, and various organizations, which should have as their purpose the fighting of evil organizations and the nurturing of the fullest development of the gifts of God to soul and body, given to every person in accordance with the laws of God, thus helping everyone, in all classes of human society, in all conditions and circumstances, from the cradle to the grave."

According to St. Maximilian the effective use of those efforts, evidenced by the conversion of souls, dependent on prayer, sacrifices and on the zeal of every Knight — the apostle in his own community — is also necessary. The Knight can and should make use of all means, because:

"The Immaculata shall operate with every means, including the most modern, because inventions should serve her foremost and subsequently commerce, industry, sport, etc. (therefore the printed word and now — why not? — even radio broadcasts, films, the Internet and generally everything that in time can still be invented to illuminate the minds and enflame the hearts)."

On the 8th of December 1938 a radio station was installed at Niepokalanów. St. Maximilian had plans for a movie studio and its own airport. This true apostle would neglect nothing and take advantage of everything when it came to spreading the kingdom of God.

Nowadays, imitating St. Maximilian in working towards the conversion of souls and promulgating devotion to the Immaculata, the *Militia Immaculatæ* makes good use of its modest resources and publishes books and leaflets in many languages. At the moment the leaflets are available in eighteen languages.

The books according to St. Maximilian's spirituality are offered in eight languages: English, French, German, Japan, Indonesian, Lithuanian, Polish and Russian. As did St. Maximilian, the *Militia Immaculatæ* publishes many books dedicated to the Mother of God.

Many of those items are available in M.I. Corners that are to be found in an increasing number of chapels and churches.



The M.I. Corner is a place where the faithful can access M.I. literature (books, flyers), Miraculous Medals, letters from Father Director, pictures and prayer cards.

It is a place where the Knight can equip himself with all necessary means. To the souls that have been led astray and need conversion the Knight can offer, in addition to prayer, Miraculous Medals, a good book or a flyer. Those means are also useful for the sanctification of our souls as Knights.



The literature (books, flyers, prayer cards) can be also ordered from Kolbe Publications, which has an ever widening offering:

www.kolbepublications.com

To those amongst the faithful who read books in pdf format or who use electronic books, the Knight can offer books and flyers in pdf format, available for free download from the *Militia Immaculatæ* Library:

www.mi-library.org

Conferences, lectures and sermons dedicated to the Immaculata and her Knighthood are also very useful in our apostolic work. These are available to watch and listen to on the M.I. Channel on Youtube:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRsF4L1CnB_YbHtIz-0kteYw

We invite you to visit the *Militia Immaculatæ* website, where you can order Miraculous Medals and find out more about the initiatives and the apostolate of Knights in the individual countries.





CHAPTER ELEVEN

I Live Only for Souls: That Is My Mission — St. Maximilian

In this statement Saint Maximilian has expressed the purpose of his life and of his whole apostolic activity. His great love of God made him eager to work for the glory of God, that is to work for the salvation of souls.

God is worthy of all our love. Man should seek God in order to find himself and his own happiness. The Catholic faith is the only truth and the only true way leading to God. From his earliest years Saint Maximilian Kolbe was led by those three truths. He became an eager apostle of souls, desiring to make God known to as many souls as it was possible.

Saint Maximilian loved souls, as he loved every creature that emerged from God's hands, because every creature reflects Divine

perfection. In the natural order of things human souls are supernatural children of God, redeemed by the Precious Blood of the Son of God.

Hence, he, who truly loves God, will also love people, his brothers.

"The love of God is the only source of genuine and sincere love toward our neighbours."

— wrote St. Maximilian.

Saint Maximilian never called anybody evil or bad. "Is it possible to look on souls indifferently?" — he couldn't.

"In order to reach out to so many unhappy souls, in order to strengthen innocent hearts in goodness, in order to help everyone draw nearer to the Immaculata, Mediatrix of all graces, in Rome, in 1917, at the Collegio Internazionale of Friars Minor Conventual (Franciscan Fathers), the *Militia Immaculatæ* was founded."

His next step was to found the Niepokalanów, the City of the Immaculata, and then after three years Saint Maximilian set off for the mission to the Far East.

A saint's heart can never be constrained to geographical boundaries. He is, by grace, always a missionary. This was especially true of St. Maximilian Kolbe. He loved the Immaculate with the Heart of Jesus, and he loved Jesus with the heart of Mary. It is manifested in a similar, universal desire to win all souls to Jesus and the Immaculate.

At Nagasaki, they established a new "City of the Immaculate" (Mugenzai no Sono — literally "Garden of the Immaculate"),

thereby introducing his ideal, the Immaculate, to the Orient. In spite of problems with local authorities, language, culture, and climate — one month after their arrival, St. Maximilian was, nevertheless, able to publish the first issue of *Seibo no Kishi*, the Japanese version of the magazine *Knight of the Immaculata*.

"In 1930 'Knight of the Immaculata', which in Japanese is called 'Seibo no Kishi', arrived in Japan. In spite of multiplying difficulties, the Immaculata permitted it in a short while to surpass by as much as six times the circulation of the most widespread Catholic magazines in Japan. This was because 'Kishi' did not address only Catholics, as other publications did, but pagans, protestants, and other non-Catholics. At first, they greeted it with curiosity, then with marked sympathy resulting in many of them receiving the grace of the Sacrament of Baptism."

This resulted in numerous conversions amongst the Japanese; most of them thanked him for his heroic and unconditional sacrifices to draw them to the true Faith. However St. Maximilian recognized that this apostolic success could only be attributed to pure and undivided love for the Immaculate. Where there is love and charity, there is God.

It is well-known that, during his lifetime, St. Maximilian founded two flourishing Cities of the Immaculate: Niepokalanów in Poland, and Mugenzai no Sono in Japan. Less known is the fact that, for many years, he laboured and prayed for the opening of a third one in India.

Following his infallible principle, "the will of my Superiors is the will of the Immaculate," St. Maximilian promptly submitted

his idea to the judgment of his Provincial Superior back in Poland. Permission finally came when the group of friars in Japan was sufficiently numerous (13 friars stayed behind in Japan as St. Maximilian sailed off to India) and when a new missionary priest, the above-mentioned Fr. Constantine, had arrived to substitute for St. Maximilian.

Without wasting a single moment, just two days after the new missionaries had arrived, St. Maximilian was already pursuing the acquisition of a ticket for India. He wrote in a letter to his Provincial:

"I am writing briefly, because I am setting out for Kobe to look into the matter of getting a ticket for India in accordance with your letter, stating that, after the arrival of Fr. Constantine, it will be possible to start looking around for a new City of the Immaculate, and in accordance with an earlier letter stating that I am the one who must think of India and the Muslims, and in accordance with your thinking that India suits us better than China..."



What was St. Maximilian expecting in India? As the train carried him away from Nagasaki and towards the port of departure, he wrote a letter to Niepokalanów and to the readers of the *Knight of the Immaculata*:

"I have told the brothers today to entrust to the Immaculate the matter of my discerning her will, and things have clarified. The prospects for China and its city of Haimen have dimmed, Vietnam and Saigon have had to wait, and the other ideas have receded to the back burner. India and Ernakulam have clearly presented themselves before our eyes. And I still have letters [of permission] from two years ago to go to these places, when we were heading out to the Far East for the first time. And so it is India.

But things are not without their worries. It is very hot there. And how will we be received? Here in Nagasaki we have already settled down in our little nest, things have calmed down, it is going well, work is going at a more routine pace. There you have to head out all over again into the unknown, facing uncertainty, unforeseen crosses... And perhaps we will have to come back empty-handed? Or maybe it will be necessary to lay down our lives extenuated by hardships...? But in the end, all this is for the Immaculate. She will lead us, and whatever she does will certainly be what is best.

And so, the first of the plan for conquering the world for the Immaculata, conceived two years ago, would be completed, namely Japan, India and China, which together make up half the population of the earth."

— wrote St. Maximilian in 1932.



When it came to souls, Saint Maximilian did not know rest or tiredness, neither did he see the national differences between people.

There were many occasions on missions when in the evening hours one of the pagans came in and Father Kolbe, after a full day of hard work, sat down with the poor soul until the late hours explaining the sense of life, the basic truths of faith and shining the light of Divine wisdom onto the dark pagan soul.

We must love absolutely everybody — he used to say often. Our love to our neighbour is proven in our desire and actions taken for salvation of their souls.

"Loving one's neighbour, not because he is 'nice', worthwhile, wealthy, influential, or just because he is grateful. For such would be very petty reasons, unworthy of the Knight of the Immaculata. Genuine love rises above the creature and plunges itself into God. In Him, for Him and through Him it loves everyone, be they good or bad, friends or foes."



CHAPTER TWELVE

St. Therese of the Child Jesus — the Patron of All Missions

On the 3rd of October we celebrate the feast of St. Therese of the Child Jesus. St. Maximilian had a special devotion to this saint. He prayed for her beatification and canonisation. Her Little Way was a model for St. Maximilian.

St. Therese of the Child Jesus has been appointed a patron of missions, although she herself had never been on a mission.

"By means of prayer, St. Therese of Lisieux, without leaving the walls of her convent, became the patron of all missions and not only the titular patron saint, as experiences show."
— wrote St. Maximilian in 1940.

For St. Maximilian her simple spirituality was his model and the way of spiritual progress. She took a special care of the saint, when he went on his mission to the Far East.

When difficulties were mounting up with starting the Immaculata mission in India, St. Therese was ever ready to lend St. Maximilian her helping hand in overcoming them. St. Maximilian wrote:

"In the Latin Archbishop's palace there was a statue of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, patron of all missions, and at her feet lay several flowers that looked like roses. At that time, the tangle of troubles was such that I had lost all hope. So, I started to pray, and even to complain a little to St. Therese, and concluded my prayers with these words: 'let's see if you remember.' I was thinking of the 'pact' we made even before



her beatification and canonization, when I had committed myself to offer a 'memento' in every Holy Mass for her beatification and canonization. She was supposed to oversee my mission in return. Suddenly, a small flower dropped onto the little table below the statue. The fact impressed me, but I exercised self-control and told myself, 'let us see if it means anything.' From then on, all troubles seemed to vanish one after the other, as if touched by a magic wand. In fact, two days later, no troubles at all remained, and for the Indian Niepokalanów I had already been promised the use of land, a building for starting activity right away, and a fairly large chapel. Glory be to the Immaculata for all things, since her 'little flower' (St. Therese loved calling herself the 'little flower' of the Immaculata) had deigned to solve the issue in such a wonderful manner!

And so, St. Therese, patroness of all the missions, has proven herself able 'to remember' even our mission.

As I reflect on what happened regarding the matter of Niepokalanów in India, I find it hard not see the hand of St. Therese of the Child Jesus with whom — as I wrote — I have made a 'pact'.

Before leaving Kobe I was taken to a church dedicated to her, in which the parish priest — apparently a relative of hers — had translated the biography of St. Therese into Japanese.

During my voyage, I came across images and statues of the saint everywhere. In fact, the Discalced Carmelites, in whose missionary district the Indian Niepokalanów is located, and of whom the Archbishop is a member, are her spiritual

brothers. In addition, there was the dropping of the rose in Colombo, which I have already mentioned."

The spiritual childhood of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, however, is not spiritual childishness. Its characteristics are humility, poverty, confidence, love, abandonment, simplicity and zeal. Let us talk about HUMILITY first. Children are naturally little, weak and powerless. Yet they acknowledge their nothingness and attribute nothing to themselves. The child depends on its parents for everything and at all times.

The second characteristic is spiritual POVERTY. The child owns nothing, even if it is the sole heir. Children have only what is given to them and not everything is given to them all at once. So, they constantly seek their parents' support and they are not ashamed of begging for all their needs and for all their wants.



Nevertheless, children have total CONFIDENCE. They know that their parents love them. And, they know that the parents would never abandon them. So, the child frequently has recourse to them and is not anxious about anything. The child's trust is fearless, boundless and unwavering.

No matter how small and poor a child may be, it possesses one thing in a very charming way — LOVE. The child's heart is matched to its size, but it is strong and vibrant; its love is ardent and tender. The child effusively shows it by hugs and kisses. Simply and securely, the child ABANDONS itself into its parent's arms. The Oblation to the Merciful Love of God is St. Therese's ultimate expression of such love, confidence and abandonment.

Still, all these are done in utmost SIMPLICITY. Everything in a child is simple — its thoughts, its words, as well as its actions. The child can only do little things, yet how happy and proud its parents are with what the child is able to do. Would God be less happy with our little efforts, provided, that we make them all with the greatest love?

Unlike the self-centredness of natural childhood, spiritual childhood does not think of itself only. It thinks of others as well — friends and foes alike. With burning love, it would do all that it can to charm its parents. That is how a child exercises its ZEAL.

Lastly, it is thoroughly MARIAN. To be a true child of God, one has to be formed in the maternal and Immaculate Heart of Mary, just like Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Although this was not written explicitly in her autobiography, yet it permeated all her writings. In fact, her very last poem was: "Why I love you, O Mary!"

Therefore, the Little Way of Spiritual Childhood is nothing else but the synthesis of faith, hope and charity all at once, pushed to their ultimate applications and retaining their evangelical freshness and candid simplicity.

In her autobiography, we can see the development of St. Therese's Marian devotion — from interestedness to disinterestedness; from constant reflex to self,



to total abandonment to the Merciful Love of God, yet always in the hands of Our Lady. We are not sure what formula for consecration to Our Lady she used after her First Communion. What is most important, is that she lived her consecration day by day.

So, in the *Militia Immaculatæ*, our Marian spirituality should also be like hers: filial, simple, confident, self-sacrificing and apostolic.



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