



Director's Letter No. 16

by Fr. Karl Stehlin, Director of the Militia Immaculatae

20 years MILITIA IMMACULATÆ OF TRADITIONAL OBSERVANCE

Dear Knights of the Immaculata,

Our little jubilee of 20 years of the Militia of the Immaculata of Traditional Observance is coming to an end. As we look back on these years, we must first thank God for having allowed this small army of Our Lady to spread to 62 countries on the 5 continents. However, not wanting us to build on sand, especially in this year, the Immaculate has sent us her blessings by means of crosses and trials: world restrictions have made the external apostolate (distribution of leaflets or medals etc.) very difficult, if not impossible; all of us have been confronted and absorbed by so many problems, that the specific aspect of the Militia, namely to be an instrument of the Immaculata to convert souls, may have been somewhat obscured.

In fact, many of us go through the painful ordeal of terrible isolation, the lack of Holy Mass and the sacraments. Who at the beginning of this year would have thought of such a change, such calamities? Moreover, all over the world hatred against the Church and against Christian morality is taking ever more brutal forms. And from Rome we receive only stones to eat and abominations to deplore... In the midst of so much sadness, is it still appropriate to celebrate a jubilee, which should be an occasion for joy? Where is this joy today?

So let us simply ask the founder of the M.I. what he would do today in our place. The answer is not difficult, if we remember that Father Maximilian Kolbe also went through very difficult moments in his life, much harder than what we are going through today. It is a fact that his whole life was a long ordeal: the consequences of tuberculosis made him a perpetual dying man who was given only 3 months to live by the doctors. The first 5 years of the M.I. were full of the mockery of his colleagues, provoking this spiritual isolation of not being understood or accepted by anyone. It was the same for the 6 years spent in Japan: abandonment and betrayal by some of his own brothers, mistrust and hostility of certain members of the clergy, lack of resources, and sometimes even of the necessities of life, *etc.*

In spite of this, the Militia was only growing. What a great success, in June 1939, to be able to count in Niepokalanów 13 priests, 762 brothers and more than 100 minor seminarians, having in hand an apostolate of good press like nowhere else in the world. Then suddenly there was war, the confiscation of the City of the Immaculata by German troops, the mobilisation of almost all the brothers, and the imprisonment of the last 42, deported to concentration camps. What an ordeal - one could say that from one day to the next the whole work of Father Kolbe was coming to an end.

What were the reactions and actions of these brothers who, together with Father Maximilian, found themselves in an atmosphere of forced prison, surrounded by desperate prisoners, lawless criminals and guards, most of them full of contempt and brutal hatred. Within the turmoil of today's crisis, we can now imagine a little bit the fear, the sadness, the suffering of these brothers. And of what does our holy founder remind them, and us too?

Our gift to Mary and the fruits of this total gift: *We gave ourselves to her, we want to win all souls for her, so she uses us as her property; and we should be grateful to her for using us. We are probably needed here now, not in Niepokalanów. How great is her kindness! They brought us here for free, and the barrack is there, with some food. For many people this may be the only opportunity to put their affairs with God in order, or to awaken in them a greater interest in religion in order to find the strength to endure these sufferings in peace. Others who were angry and spent their time cursing their brothers, are now changing and becoming better.*

In order to overcome trials, it is necessary to understand that they are **the expression of the Immaculata's will:** *There is no reason to be discouraged. There will always be difficulties and suffering. If, for love of the Immaculata, we even bear sorrows such as the lack of Mass and Holy Communion, many souls can be saved by her: whether they are pagans who do not even know the name of their Father and Creator, or our heavenly Mother, Mediatrix of all grace, or whether they are heretics or indifferent. If the Immaculata wishes, we will return (to Niepokalanów), we will work as we did before the war and we will also go to other countries. But we don't want to thwart her wishes: if it is the Immaculata's will, we even want to die here, even though others would be liberated.*

Faced with the fear of the darkest future, we must **put our absolute trust in Divine Providence:** *It is not for us to worry about the future, what it will or will not be, how we will work, where we will be, because all this is guided by Divine Providence down to the smallest details. The Immaculata certainly knows all this. And the thought that nothing happens without God's permission is capable of completely calming us. The Immaculata will*

achieve her ends and nothing and no one can prevent the realisation of her intentions. The whole world and all demons cannot do anything without divine permission. Let us allow ourselves to be led by the Immaculata! If she chooses this path for us, it is only for our greater good. Then, like scattered sparks, the hearts of all the brothers will light new flames around them, and thus the goal of the Militia of the Immaculata will be achieved: to sanctify souls by bringing them ever closer to Mary Immaculate.

Father Kolbe also shows us **the supernatural benefits we can derive from suffering and humiliation**: *In order to facilitate our efforts for the conversion of souls, God allows different crosses, whether or not they are dependent on the will of others, whether or not they come from good will. It is a vast field of graces to be used. Among these most useful resources are the hassles suffered by others because it is then that our virtue of hope increases. And then we can recite with greater joy this phrase from the "Our Father": "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." (Mt 6:12). After all, it is a prayer given to us by the Lord Jesus himself. Therefore, it is enough to forgive them with all your heart to receive God's forgiveness. What misfortune if we have nothing to forgive, and what happiness if we have many insults to forgive during the day. Of course, nature trembles in the face of suffering and humiliation, but, looked at in the light of faith, how necessary they are for the purification of our souls, how sweet they are, how much they contribute to a greater intimacy with God, and therefore to more effective prayer and action.*

This is certainly what our Founder would tell us today.

It was obvious for Maximilian Kolbe that the greatest trials are also moments of greatest graces. Saint Therese of the Child Jesus expressed the desire to live in the last days, because she wanted to show Jesus her love in the midst of the greatest trials and also because she knew how many souls she could save through her fidelity. And, in fact, we can already see the beneficent work of the Immaculata who from an evil brings out a greater good: conversions multiply, many Catholics wake up, there is a return to Tradition as never before, *etc.*

We are given the opportunity to live extraordinary moments in history. So we must not "miss the boat"! Let us therefore take hold of the Rosary more than ever and pray it fervently. "No one can take the Rosary away from us", let us therefore commit ourselves ardently to the Crusade for the liberation of the Mass and for vocations, and above all, let us remember the insignia of blessings and promises of Our Lady in Fatima who asks us to devote ourselves to her Immaculate Heart, through the devotion of the First Five Saturdays of the month. Then not only will we never lose heart, but with our heads held high, as faithful Knights, we will face whatever may happen to us in the future.

Let's take a last look at Saint Maximilian dying in Auschwitz in the concentration camp: with joy he gives his life in the place of a co-prisoner, he prepares the others condemned to death by converting them all. When someone comes to give him an injection of ethanol, he welcomes the executioner with a smile that is not of this earth. This is how the Immaculata rewards a life consecrated to her.

I conclude with Fr. Kolbe's luminous advice which should be for us the great watchword in these difficult times: *Do well what depends on me, and bear well what does not depend on me - this is all perfection and the source of true happiness in the world.*

Fr. Karl Stehlin

Warsaw, on the 8th of December 2020,
on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception