

## Saint Maximilian Kolbe Feast Day - August 14, 2018 continued...

Father Kolbe was the last man in the starvation cell to remain alive. The Nazis then executed him by injection with carbolic acid on Aug. 14, 1941. He was beatified on Oct. 17, 1971 by Pope Paul VI and canonized by Pope John Paul II on Oct. 10, 1982. Franciszek Gajowniczek was present for the canonization.

How did this friar have such heroic virtue, mercy, and forgiveness in the face of such injustice and suffering? Practice. Indeed, Fr. Kolbe strove to live a life of mercy beginning years before his arrest.

Born on Jan. 8, 1894, "Raymond" Kolbe developed a strong religious yearning from an early age. He had a vision of the Blessed Mother in early childhood. He recalled, "She came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked me if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity, and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both."

At 13 years old, he entered the Franciscan seminary. He was given the religious name of Maximilian. He took his final vows in 1914, the same year that his German father was captured by the Russians and hanged for his part in fighting for an independent Poland.

After being ordained, he was moved to the monastery of Niepokalanow and contracted tuberculosis. He never complained of his illnesses, rather he offered them as a suffering to Mary. He knew the value of suffering.

In his book *For the Life of the World: Saint Maximilian and the Eucharist*, Jerzy Domanski wrote:

Toward the end of his days at Niepokalanow, Fr. Kolbe celebrated more often in the chapel of the sick friars. In his homilies, he touched on the value of sacrifice. "Jesus Christ," he said, "without a doubt, chose for the work of redemption the means most important and rich in merit, namely suffering... Apart from the Cross there is no salvation for the soul nor hope for everlasting life." Blessed the soul that grasps the value of suffering.

When he gave tours of the famous printing press at their friary, he always brought people to the infirmary, for he said that it was there that the most important work was done — suffering for souls.

We, too, can follow the example of St. Maximilian Kolbe. Each of us suffers in one way or another, and we have many loved ones who do as well — from poverty, illness, addictions, persecution, and more. Like St. Maximilian Kolbe, we should strive to bear our suffering with trust and love. Let us forgive those who trespass against us and live lives of mercy.

If you aren't strong in the face of suffering, do not be discouraged. Saint Maximilian wrote in his book of spiritual and Marian reflections entitled *Aim Higher*, "My dearest ones, let every fall,

even the worst and most habitual, serve as a rung [of a ladder] always toward higher perfection. The Immaculata permits the fall only to cure us of our self-love, our pride, to bring us to humility and so make us more receptive to God's graces."

Let us trust in the mercy of God, which brings us through every trial and forgives us of all of our sins. Jesus, I trust in You. Saint Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!