

Homily 013116

WHAT DOES LOVE LOOK LIKE?

St. Maximilian Kolbe was born on January 8, 1894, in the Kingdom of Poland, part of the Russian Empire. He was a Polish Conventual Franciscan friar and a martyr in the German death Camp of Auschwitz during World War II. St. Maximilian Kolbe was very active in promoting the Immaculate Virgin Mary and is known as the Apostle of Consecration to Mary. Much of his life was strongly influenced by a vision he had of the Virgin Mary when he was 12. "That night I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. Then 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."

One year after his vision, Kolbe and his elder brother, Francis joined the Conventual Franciscans. In 1910, Kolbe was given the religious name Maximilian, after being allowed to enter the novitiate, and in 1911, he professed his first vows. He organized the Militia Immaculata (Army of the Immaculate One) after witnessing demonstrations against Pope St. Pius X and Benedict XV. His goal was to work for the conversion of sinners and enemies of the Church. In 1918, he was ordained a priest and continued his work of promoting Mary throughout Poland. Over the next several years, Kolbe took on publishing. He founded a monthly periodical titled, "Knights of the Immaculate)". He also operated a religious publishing press and founded a new Franciscan monastery which became a major religious publishing center. He also founded monasteries in both Japan and India.

In 1936, Kolbe's poor health forced him to return home to Poland, and once the WWII invasion by Germany began, he became one of the only brothers to remain in the monastery. He opened up a temporary hospital to aid those in need. When his town was captured, Kolbe was sent to prison but released three months later. Kolbe refused to sign a document that would recognize him as a German citizen with his German ancestry and continued to work in his monastery, providing shelter for refugees - including hiding 2,000 Jews from Nazi persecution. After receiving permission to continue his religious publishing, Kolbe's monastery acted as a publishing house again and issued many anti-Nazi German publications. On February 17, 1941, the monastery was shut down; Kolbe was arrested by the German Gestapo and three months later, he was transferred to Auschwitz.

Never abandoning his priesthood, Kolbe was the victim to severe violence and harassment. Toward the end of his second month in Auschwitz, men were chosen to face death by starvation to warn against escapes. Kolbe was not chosen but volunteered to take the place of a man with a family. It is said during the last days of his life Kolbe led prayers to Our Lady with the prisoners and remained calm. He was the last of the group to remain alive, after two weeks without food he was given a lethal injection. The man whose place he took survived life in the Concentration Camp, lived to tell the story and was present when Maximilian Kolbe was declared a saint. He was canonized by Pope John Paul II on October 10, 1982. Pope John Paul II declared Kolbe not a confessor, but a martyr.

Maximilian Kolbe believed in the power of love especially in the person of Jesus in whom he believed and for whom he gave his life. When Jesus on the cross looks out at those before him and prays, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” he not only speaks to them he also speaks to us. We so often think we know what we are doing but often enough we do not. Jesus offers a second chance, the possibility of a new beginning. It is right there in his crucifixion that we see the reality of what Paul expresses in his letter to the Corinthians because it is precisely the loving Jesus who endures all things, believes all things, hopes all things and bears all things. He responds to the impatience, the anger and vitriol with patience and kindness.

He does not meet their rudeness with his own rudeness. Nor their arrogance with arrogance of his own. It is he who is victimized by their jealousy and ours, by their temper and ours, by their resentment and ours. These things can destroy—and they do destroy. But only for a time. They destroy Jesus--but only for a time. And once He is risen from the grave, He can never be destroyed again. They can only threaten with death. They can only prey upon our fears and our desires. But when death is overcome and defeated then it has no sting.

On the other hand what Jesus offers truly lasts. Our fears will all disappear. Anxieties will end. But what is born in us of the Spirit of Christ will never die. But we really have to believe it—believe it enough that we will live it. We can choose the way of patience and kindness. We can learn how to rejoice and hope. We can live without needing to gossip or without always keeping score. We can live without harboring and brooding over the hurts done to us. We can live treating each person with respect even when they are driving a car or pushing a grocery basket, or when they wait on us at table or at the cash register. There are a lot of things we can do—a lot of ways that we can act. But only the good stuff lasts. Faith will last. Encouragement and support will last. Our hope will last. And yes, love will last because as Paul say “the greatest of these is love” really lasts because love is the best. Love always call for sacrifice but in this life many things call for sacrifice. But the sacrifices are worth. Yes. They are.