

Life

Born in Poland in 1894, Saint Maximilian Kolbe's father was German, and his mother was Polish. He was naughty in his youth. When he was 12 years old, his mother was extremely frustrated and asked him what would become of him in the future. Kolbe was startled and regretted of his behaviour. When he prayed, he asked the Virgin about his future and received from a vision of the promise of the red and white crowns, representing martyrdom and purity respectively. At the age of 16, he joined the Conventual Franciscans. He was ordained a priest in Rome in 1918. Kolbe always venerated the Virgin Mary. When studying in Rome, he co-founded the Knight of the Immaculate with six other seminarians, hoping that through the intercession of Our Lady to work for the conversion of sinners and enemies of the Catholic Church. After returning to Poland, he used publications and radio stations to preach and was very successful. He also established Niepokalanów (City of the Immaculate Mother of God), the largest Franciscan Monastery, and encouraged the seminarians to be God's brave soldiers under the leadership of the Virgin to pursue God's Holy will and resist the devil. In 1930, Father Kolbe and his companions went to Nagasaki to release the Japanese version of "Knight of the Immaculate monthly publication". The publication has continued its evangelization work to this day.

In 1939, Fr. Kolbe was called back to Poland and was appointed Dean of the Niepokalanów. In the same year, the Second World War broke out, and Germany occupied Poland. Fr. Kolbe was arrested but released a few months later. He refused to sign a document admitting that he had ethnic German heritage, that is, he gave up some of the rights of German citizenship. He continued to work in the friary and sheltered refugees, including 2,000 Jews who were hunted by the Nazis. In February 1941, Father Kolbe was arrested by the Germans and was sent to the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. In July of the same year, a prisoner escaped from the camp and the Germans were about to starve ten prisoners to death as punishment. One of them cried out that he had a wife and son, and Father Kolbe volunteered to die in his place. While these ten people were in the cell, Father Kolbe led them to pray and sing. About three weeks later, the priest and three others were on the verge of dying and were given lethal injections. He died at the age of 47. In 1971, Father Kolbe was beautified as a "Confessor of the Faith" by Pope Paul VI, who wore a white robe; he was canonized by Pope John Paul II who wore a red robe, and declared him "martyr", echoing Kolbe's vision when he was young.

Reflection

St. Maximilian Kolbe's last selfless dedication was not an impulsive act. Before this, he had been following this direction. He was not someone who seeks self-perfection. Whether in Rome, Japan, or Poland, he was eager for the world to repent and convert. During troubled times, when innocent people suffered, Fr. Kolbe gave up the rights due to him and refused to be an onlooker. Instead he tried all he could to help others, subjecting himself to danger. Finally using his own life to die for someone else showed his faith for the righteous God and his love to free others from pain. When he was beautified, Pope John Paul II called him a Martyr of Charity.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe lived in the era of the second world war with ethnic persecution. Unfortunately, decades later, racial persecution around the world are still reported in the news. Let us learn from St. Kolbe that when we are in a safe environment, not to ignore the needs of the suffering, and do our best to help them as much as possible.

Prayer

St. Maximilian Kolbe taught seminarians that it is not difficult to become holy; we only need to combine our will with the will of God, and the one who followed the will of God most is the Virgin Mary. Let us ask her to intercede for us, so that like her, we will follow God's will on the road to holiness.

May we learn from St. Maximilian Kolbe's the spirit of sacrifice and
try our best to help those in need.

We pray especially for the brothers and sisters who are suffering ethnic persecution.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us.