

MI Monthly Formation (8)

In Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

AUGUST 2005 PRAYER INTENTION:

That those hurt by family breakups, may with care from the Church community, experience God's fidelity and tenderness.

Dear Friends,

In this month we want to celebrate with special zeal and joy the feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe and the solemnity of the Assumption of the Bl. Virgin Mary. We may promote in our Parishes, homes or MI groups the novena in honor of St. Maximilian complementing it with a constant reference to the spiritual meaning of the dogma of the Assumption.

As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) teaches us, "*The Most Blessed Virgin Mary, when the course of her earthly life was completed, was taken up body and soul into the glory of heaven, where she already shares in the glory of her Son's Resurrection, anticipating the resurrection of all members of his Body*" (CCC 974). Or as the Byzantine Liturgy puts it, in a more poetic fashion, "*In giving birth you kept your virginity; in your Dormition you did not leave the world, O Mother of God, but were joined to the source of Life. You conceived the living God and, by your prayers, will deliver our souls from death.*"¹

In the spiritual atmosphere and liturgical meaning of the Assumption, we can better understand the deep sense of St. Maximilian's death. He gave up his life to God on the eve of the feast of the Assumption, when the Church was celebrating the First Vespers of this solemnity. It was as if Mary brought up to heaven with her Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, her faithful servant and son, letting him partake in her very destiny. Mary was taken up to heaven body and soul; whereas, Fr. Kolbe's body was burned in the crematory and his

ashes scattered in the wind. Nothing remained of him but his witness of life and spiritual legacy.

That's how Fr. Luigi Faccenda, OFM CONV,² described Fr. Kolbe: "*He is a powerful light who, with the sanctity of his life illumines and brightens the motive of our own life: the life of grace, and the way of sanctity. He fully took on the way to sanctity. ... He who trained his whole life to the point of giving it up in the concentration camp; he who, as a religious, a priest, and as a director of an editorial and missionary work, nurtured himself with infinite humiliations; he who gave up so many dreams, repeats to us that holiness is possible and it is a duty, because God has created us for this purpose: to know Him, love Him and serve Him and to be with Him forever in Paradise. Having done this, Fr. Kolbe has become a great Saint for our difficult times.*"³

Let us call upon our Saint to intercede for each one of us the grace of a greater desire for holiness and therefore make a difference in this world by our becoming worthy sons and daughters of so noble a Mother.

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Suggested Readings for the Month

1. From the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
CCC 2380-2391

2. From the Pope

² Fr. Faccenda is an Italian Conventual Franciscan Friar, author of many books and essays about St. Maximilian Kolbe and Founder of the male and female Institutes of the *Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata*.

³ Fr. Luigi Faccenda, *Letter to the FKVI*, September 8, 1998.

¹ *Troparion*, Feast of the Dormition, August 15th.

General Audience of Benedict XVI, June 22, 05
Psalm 124[123]

"If the Lord had not been on our side"

Evening Prayer - Monday of Week Three

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. We have before us Psalm 124[123], a song of thanksgiving intoned by the whole community in prayer, raising praise to God for the gift of liberation. The Psalmist opens by proclaiming the invitation: "This is Israel's song" (v. 1), thus encouraging all the people to raise lively and sincere thanks to God the Savior. If the Lord had not taken the victims' side, with their limited strength they would have been powerless to free themselves; their adversaries, like monsters, would have torn and shattered them.

Although this Psalm has been thought to refer to some specific historical event, such as the end of the Babylonian exile, it is more likely that it was intended as a heartfelt hymn to thank the Lord for being saved from peril and a plea for liberation from all evil. In this regard it is a Psalm that is ever timely.

2. After the initial reference to certain "men" who rose up against the faithful and would have "swallowed them alive" (cf. vv. 2-3), the song has two passages. In the first, the raging waters, a biblical symbol of devastating chaos, evil and death, predominate: "Then would the waters have engulfed us, the torrent gone over us; over our head would have swept the raging waters" (vv. 4-5). The person of prayer now has the feeling that he lies on a beach, miraculously saved from the pounding fury of the waves.

Human life is surrounded by the snares of evil lying in wait that not only attack the person's life but also aim at destroying all human values. We see how these dangers exist even now. However, the Lord rises - and we can be sure of this also today - to preserve the just and save him, as the Psalmist sings in Psalm 18[17]: "From on high he reached down and seized me; he drew me forth from the mighty waters. He snatched me from my powerful foe, from my enemies... the Lord was my support. He brought me forth into freedom, he saved me because he loved me" (vv. 17-20).

3. The second part of our thanksgiving hymn shifts from the marine image to a hunting scene, typical of many Psalms of supplication (cf. Ps 124[123]:

6-8). Here, in fact, the Psalm evokes a wild beast clenching its prey between its teeth or the snare of fowlers that captures a bird. But the blessing this Psalm expresses enables us to understand that the destiny of the faithful, that was a destiny of death, has been radically changed by a saving intervention: "Blessed be the Lord who did not give us a prey to their teeth! Our life, like a bird, has escaped from the snare of the fowler. Indeed the snare has been broken and we have escaped" (vv. 6-7).

Here, prayer becomes a sigh of relief that wells up from the depths of the soul: even when all human hopes are destroyed, the divine liberating power can appear. The Psalmist can thus conclude with a profession of faith, which has been part of the Christian liturgy for centuries, as an ideal premise for all our prayers: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (v. 8). In particular, the Almighty takes the side of the victims and the persecuted "who call out to him day and night" and he "will give them swift justice" (cf. Lk 18: 7-8).

4. St Augustine comments clearly on this Psalm. He first observes that it is fittingly sung by the "members of Christ who have reached blessedness." In particular, "it has been sung by the holy martyrs who, upon leaving this world are with Christ in joy, ready to take up incorrupt again those same bodies that were previously corruptible. In life they suffered torments in the body, but in eternity these torments will be transformed into ornaments of justice."

However, in a second instance the Bishop of Hippo tells us that we too, not only the blessed in Heaven, can sing this Psalm with hope. He declares: "We too are enlivened by unfailing hope and will sing in exaltation. Indeed, the singers of this Psalm are not strangers to us... Therefore, let us all sing with one heart: both the saints who already possess the crown as well as ourselves, who with affection and hope unite ourselves to their crown. Together we desire the life that we do not have here below, but that we will never obtain if we have not first desired it." St Augustine then returns to his former perspective and explains: "The saints think back to the sufferings they encountered, and from that place of bliss and peace where they are now, look at the path they trod to arrive there; and since it would have been

difficult to attain deliverance had the hand of the Liberator not intervened to rescue them, they joyfully exclaim: 'If the Lord had not been on our side.' This is how their song begins. So great is their joy that they never even speak of that from which they have escaped" (*Exposition on Psalm 123: 3: Nuova Biblioteca Agostiniana, XXVIII, Rome 1977, p. 65*).

Pope Benedict XVI

3. Kolbean Spirituality:

The MI: A Modern Way to Live the Gospel

Thoughts and reflections about the Militia of the Immaculata as it was intended and proposed by St. Maximilian and about Kolbean spirituality. This section may provide you with more insights and greater enthusiasm, giving you a better understanding of your true identity as MIs.

10. At the School of Mary

As you well know, our former Pope John Paul II lived his consecration to Mary with particular intensity and gave great impulse to this devotion. It is not by accident that October 16 is both the beginning of the MI and of John Paul II's papacy. The thoughts expressed in his Apostolic Letter *Rosarium Virginis Mariae* and in the Message addressed to the Youth on the occasion of the 18th World Youth Day (2003) are an extraordinary representation of the Kolbean Marian spirituality. To learn Christ from Mary is one of the most striking ideas of the Apostolic Letter in which we read: "*Christ is the supreme Teacher, the revealer and the one revealed. It is not just a question of learning what he taught but of 'learning him.'* In this regard could we have any better teacher than Mary? From the divine standpoint, the Spirit is the interior teacher who leads us to the full truth of Christ (cf. Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). But among creatures no one knows Christ better than Mary; no one can introduce us to a profound knowledge of his mystery better than his Mother."⁴

Using different words, Fr. Kolbe expressed the same concept when he wrote: "*Every member of*

the MI knows that with the Immaculata and through her he will become Jesus' property and God's property in the fastest and easiest way."⁵

At Nazareth, Mary committed herself to the human growth of Jesus, introducing him into the cultural and religious Traditions of his people. In the same way, we may say, the Immaculata now leads us to pursue the full stature of our human and Christian dignity. "*This enables her –the Pope continues- to train us and to mold us with the same care, until Christ is 'fully formed' in us (cf. Gal 4:19). This role of Mary, totally grounded in that of Christ and radically subordinated to it, 'in no way obscures or diminishes the unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows its power' (Lumen Gentium, 60).*"⁶

Fr. Maximilian Kolbe in one of his letters from Japan dated 1934 wrote to the Friars in Niepokalanow: "*The more one belongs to the Immaculata, the more freely and openly he can draw near to the wounds of our Savior, to the Holy Eucharist, to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to God our Father.*"⁷ In another letter he explained that in Niepokalanow, "*We have a voluntary and beloved 'fixation,' the love of the Immaculata. For her we live, work, suffer and desire to die. With our whole souls we desire to implant this 'fixation' into the hearts of all, by all possible means, ideals, etc.*"⁸ For this reason, every MIer wants to be a "most perfect instrument in her immaculate hands."⁹

John Paul II echoed St. Maximilian's desire when he urged the Youth saying: "*Entrust yourselves to her with complete confidence! You will be radiant with the beauty of Christ. Open up to the breath of the Spirit, and you will become courageous apostles, capable of spreading the fire of charity and the light of truth all around you. In Mary's school, you will discover the specific commitment that Christ expects of you, and you will learn to put Christ first in your lives, and to direct your thoughts and actions to him.*"¹⁰

⁵ SK 1325.

⁶ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 15.

⁷ SK 603.

⁸ SK 325.

⁹ SK 339.

¹⁰ John Paul II, *Message for the XVIII World Youth Day, 2003, #4*.

⁴ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, 14.

More than a teacher, Mary is a Mother. She has been given to us during the most dramatic event of Jesus' life: "At the foot of the Cross on which was dying the One whom she had conceived at the moment of her 'yes' at the Annunciation, Mary received, as it were, a 'second annunciation': 'Woman, behold, your son!' (Jn 19,26)... Know that in difficult times, which everyone experiences, you are not alone: like John at the foot of the Cross, Jesus also gives his Mother to you so that she will comfort you with her tenderness.

It says in the Gospel that 'from that hour the disciple took her to his own home' (Jn 19,27). This statement, the subject of many commentaries since early Christian times, does not simply point out the place where John lived. Beyond the material aspect, it evokes the spiritual dimension of this welcome and of the new bond established between Mary and John. My dear young people, you are more or less the same age as John and you have the same desire to be with Jesus. Today, it is you whom Jesus expressly asks to receive Mary 'into your home' and to welcome her 'as one of yours;' to learn from her the one who 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart' (Lk 2,19) that inner disposition to listen and the attitude of humility and generosity that singled her out as God's first collaborator in the work of salvation."¹¹

Christ's wish that we take Mary as our Mother was the leading idea of St. Maximilian's life: "We wish to be her children, servants, lovers, property, docile instruments and everything else love will suggest to the heart of one who loves."¹² Why? Because "Christianity is not an opinion nor does it consist of empty words. Christianity is Christ! It is a Person, a Living Person! To meet Jesus, to love him and make him loved: this is the Christian vocation. Mary was given to you to help you enter into a more authentic and more personal relationship with Jesus. Through her example, Mary teaches you to gaze on him with love, for He has loved us first. Through her intercession, she forms in you a disciple's heart able to listen to her

*Son, who reveals the face of his Father and the true dignity of the human person."*¹³

These words are an echo of St. Maximilian's: "One consecrated to the Immaculata knows that, in the Immaculata and through the Immaculata, he will sooner and easier become property of Jesus, property of God. He knows that she, in him and through him, will love Jesus much more perfectly than he himself could try to do using any other means."¹⁴

Therefore, Mary's presence in our faith journey cannot be optional and occasional but rather has to be needful and constant. Mary's school is full time, without vacations and free of charge.

Through our consecration we allow the Blessed Virgin to mold us into Christ's likeness in order to fulfill our human and Christian vocation.

(10. To be continued)

For Personal Reflection

- Is my consecration to the Immaculata molding me into Christ's likeness?
- Is it building within me a true Christ-like mentality?
- At the School of Mary am I becoming a better person, able to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth?
- August 14th is the feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe. How can I share with others his spiritual legacy?

Resources

On St. Maximilian Kolbe:

Patricia Treece, *A Man for Others*, Marytown Press, Libertyville, IL, 1982

Andre Frossard, *Forget Not Love*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991

On the Eucharist:

This special Year of the Eucharist began with the World Eucharistic Congress, **October 10-17, 2004**, in Guadalajara, Mexico. It ends with the

¹¹ Ibid., #2-3.

¹² SK 1327.

¹³ John Paul II, *Message for the XVIII World Youth Day, 2003*, #4.

¹⁴ SK 1325.

ordinary assembly of Synod Bishops held in the Vatican October 2-29, 2005. The theme of the Synod is: "**The Eucharist: Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church.**"

On this topic you may find interesting references in: www.vatican.va
www.therealpresence.org
www.catholiccompany.com

John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine (Remain with us, Lord)*, Apostolic Letter for the Year of the Eucharist, 10/7/04

USCCB latest at:
<http://www.usccb.org>

Marian Feasts and Devotion for the month of August at:

<http://www.udayton.edu/mary/massumplit.html>

SK, *Scritti Kolbe (Fr. Kolbe's writings)*, in *Stronger than Hatred*, New City Press, New York, 1991.

Or in : *The Kolbe Reader*, Marytown Press, Libertyville, IL, 1987.

Or in: *Maria Was His Middle Name*, The Benziger Sisters Publishers, Altadena, CA, 1977.

Or in: *Immaculate Conception and the Holy Spirit*, Manteau-Bonamy, Marytown Press, Libertyville, IL, 2001.

Dates to Remember

- 2** *Our Lady of the Angels of Portiuncola* in Assisi. Feast
- 5** *Dedication of the Basilica of St. Mary Major* in Rome. Feast.
- 6** THE TRANSFIGURATION OF THE LORD. Solemnity. First Saturday.
- 14** **St. Maximilian Kolbe, martyr.** Feast. (Solemnity for Kolbean Institutes and Congregations).
- 15** THE ASSUMPTION OF THE VIRGIN MARY. Solemnity. **Plenary Indulgence** for Mlrs.
- 16** World Youth Day Celebrations in Cologne, Germany (August 16-21)
- 22** *The Queenship of the Blessed Virgin Mary*

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On August 13

the *Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata* in California invite you to participate in the **Annual Kolbe Mass and Consecration to the Immaculata** that will be held at St. Christopher Church in West Covina, CA, at **1:00 PM.**

For information call: (626) 917-0040 or write to FKMINCAL@Aol.com