

MI Monthly Formation (1)

In Fr. Kolbe's Marian and Missionary Spirituality

JANUARY 2005 PRAYER INTENTION:

That all believers in the one God work to build peace and that religious faith never be used for economic or political goals.

“At the beginning of the New Year, I once again address the leaders of nations and all men and women of good will, who recognize the need to build peace in the world. For the theme of the 2005 World Day of Peace I have chosen Saint Paul's words in the Letter to the Romans: *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (12:21). Evil is never defeated by evil; once that road is taken, *rather than defeating evil, one will instead be defeated by evil.*

The great Apostle brings out a fundamental truth: **peace is the outcome of a long and demanding battle which is only won when evil is defeated by good.** If we consider the tragic scenario of violent fratricidal conflicts in different parts of the world, and the untold sufferings and injustices to which they have given rise, the only truly constructive choice is, as Saint Paul proposes, to *flee what is evil and hold fast to what is good* (cf. Rom 12:9).

Peace is a good to be promoted with good: it is a good for individuals, for families, for nations and for all humanity; yet it is one which needs to be maintained and fostered by decisions and actions inspired by good.”¹

Dear Friends,

I'd like to begin our 2005 MI Monthly Formation with these inspired words of John Paul II, which urge us to overcome every kind of evil with good. Looking around us at our world, our families and even ourselves, we may easily recognize the urgency of putting on this attitude of defeating evil by thinking, speaking and doing good. This is also the “battle” that every MIer is asked to do through his total consecration to the

Immaculata, the Biblical Woman full of grace and without sin, whose Son is Christ, the Redeemer of the world. It is so important that the New Year begins under the protection and sign of Mary, Mother of God! When we stare at the image of Our Lady holding her Son, we can feel how powerful is their unity in defeating evil by bringing God's grace into this world.

As the Pope writes in the above quoted message, “At its deepest level, *evil is a tragic rejection of the demands of love.* Moral good, on the other hand, is born of love, shows itself as love and is directed towards love. All this is particularly evident to Christians, who know that their membership in the one mystical Body of Christ sets them in a particular relationship not only with the Lord but also with their brothers and sisters. The inner logic of Christian love, which in the Gospel is the living source of moral goodness, leads even to the love of one's enemies: *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink”* (Rom 12:20).”

My dear friends, this should be the constant attitude of our hearts. Let me share something personal with you.

I just came back from San Bernardo do Campo, near San Paulo, Brazil, where I spent a few weeks with two large communities of Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata (20 young women and 28 young men) and with the laity who work in the spirit of the M.I.

On three different occasions, I gave talks about the life of St. Maximilian Kolbe and the prophecy of his charisma and spirituality for our time.

I went there above all to learn about and to share for a short time their mission, to which hundreds of people are committed to evangelization in the name of Mary, the Immaculata.

¹ Message of John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2005, n. 1.

There, Fr. Kolbe's dream of *leading the whole world to God through the Immaculata* is becoming a visible reality. In fact, through the mass media (TV, radio stations and magazine), many works of charity and human promotion and the preaching of the Good News to the poor of the *favelas* (slums), thousands of people are led to God through St. Maximilian's spirituality.

It is a multiform and well-articulated reality, a true network in which a great and unique ideal connects the different areas and unites the people who work in various fields.

I witnessed the work of *Santa Clara House* in which daily 80 Volunteers of the *Blessed Virgin* Parish offer school and moral assistance to 750 *meninos de rua*, children of the *favelas* who otherwise would live on the streets all day. I also participated in the Sunday Celebration of the Word in the small chapels of Riacho Grande, a huge rural district separated from San Bernardo by the Rio Grande River and surrounded by a tropical forest. Since it rains a lot, the dirt roads are full of holes and mud. With the assistance of a jeep, the missionaries and I could cross rough terrain, bottomlands, unexpected ditches and pools, and open a way through the trees, thick foliage and bushes. I liked these celebrations of the Word with the poor whose faith and devotion really struck me. A priest can reach them only a few times a year, therefore the Missionaries and some volunteers from the Parish take care of catechesis, human promotion programs and children in need. Every Sunday, they go to the chapels spread throughout the forest for the Celebration of the Word and the distribution of Holy Communion. With the assistance of many volunteers, they periodically visit the families of the poorest and coordinate the distribution of food, medicines and clothes.

I also went to Mato Grosso de Sul where I lived a few days in Campo Grande, the capital. There, the Association of the MI has a TV that recently has begun live broadcasts. Right now, it sends daily the direct broadcast of the Holy Mass celebrated by the local Bishop or by priests of nearby Parishes; and of the Holy Rosary, animated by lay and religious persons in turn. Some Missionaries, men and women, who are television technicians, cameramen and experts of TV

programming, coordinate the work with the aid of some laity.

Once St. Maximilian said that while a priest from the pulpit speaks for about 20/30 minutes once a week, other messages enter into people's homes and consciences 24 hours a day through the mass media. That's true indeed! Keeping this in mind, the "Radio Imaculada Conceição" network (311 radios in Brazil, 116 in Europe, 92 in Latin America and other 95 local radio stations which utilize some of its programs) brings the Christian message and St. Maximilian's spirituality into millions of houses and hearts. Realize that in the State of San Paulo alone (more than 37 million people) this radio has 27 thousands listeners each minute! There, in fact, even the poorest who dwell in wooden and paperboard shacks have a radio and often also a TV. Some MI couples are in charge of these radio stations since they partake in the same ideal as the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries: to bring the Good News of Christ and take care of the Christian formation of people through the radio broadcast.

I think that each one of us, who share in the same Kolbean spirituality, might find new ways to spread the love for the Immaculata also in the USA. "*Thus entering these hearts and taking full possession of them – St. Maximilian would say – the Immaculata may give birth to sweet Jesus, who is God, that He might grow in them in age and perfection. What a magnificent mission! Isn't it true?... Divinizing man to the God-Man through the Mother of the God-Man. ... When will all this become actual?*"²

Let us pray about this and entrust everything to the Immaculata so that She may keep it in Her Heart and point the way we should choose to begin this project, if it's God's will.

Mary, Mother of God, lead us to find, welcome and adore Baby Jesus in our lives.

God bless you!

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² Kolbe writings, n. 508, in *The Kolbe Reader*; cf. also n. 1159.

Dates to Remember

- 1 **The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God.** Solemnity. 38th World Day for Peace.
- 2 **THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD.**
- 3 **The Most Holy Name of Jesus** (Franciscan Calendar).
- 8 St. Maximilian Kolbe's birthday (1894).
- 9 **THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD.** National Vocation Awareness Week (9th – 14th).
- 18-25 **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.**
- 22 USA: Day of penance for violations committed against the dignity of the human person through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right of life.
- 30 Catholic Schools Week (30th – Feb 5th).

Suggested Readings for the Month

* **From the Bible: Rom 12**

* **From the Pope:**

JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia De Eucharistia*, Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist, nn. 56, 57, 58.

56. Mary, throughout her life at Christ's side and not only on Calvary, made her own *the sacrificial dimension of the Eucharist*. When she brought the child Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem “to present him to the Lord” (*Lk 2:22*), she heard the aged Simeon announce that the child would be a “sign of contradiction” and that a sword would also pierce her own heart (cf. *Lk 2:34-35*). The tragedy of her Son's crucifixion was thus foretold, and in some sense Mary's *Stabat Mater* at the foot of the Cross was foreshadowed. In her daily preparation for Calvary, Mary experienced a kind of “anticipated Eucharist” – one might say a “spiritual communion” – of desire and of oblation, which would culminate in her union with her Son in his passion, and then find expression after Easter by her partaking in the Eucharist which the Apostles celebrated as the memorial of that passion.

What must Mary have felt as she heard from the mouth of Peter, John, James and the other Apostles the words spoken at the Last Supper: “This is my body which is given for you” (*Lk*

22:19)? The body given up for us and made present under sacramental signs was the same body which she had conceived in her womb! For Mary, receiving the Eucharist must have somehow meant welcoming once more into her womb that heart which had beat in unison with hers and reliving what she had experienced at the foot of the Cross.

57. “Do this in remembrance of me” (*Lk 22:19*). In the “memorial” of Calvary all that Christ accomplished by his passion and his death is present. Consequently *all that Christ did with regard to his Mother* for our sake is also present. To her he gave the beloved disciple and, in him, each of us: “Behold, your Son!”. To each of us he also says: “Behold your mother!” (cf. *Jn 19: 26-27*).

Experiencing the memorial of Christ's death in the Eucharist also means continually receiving this gift. It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on a commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of his Mother and allowing her to accompany us. Mary is present, with the Church and as the Mother of the Church, at each of our celebrations of the Eucharist. If the Church and the Eucharist are inseparably united, the same ought to be said of Mary and the Eucharist. This is one reason why, since ancient times, the commemoration of Mary has always been part of the Eucharistic celebrations of the Churches of East and West.

58. In the Eucharist the Church is completely united to Christ and his sacrifice, and makes her own the spirit of Mary. This truth can be understood more deeply by *re-reading the Magnificat* in a Eucharistic key. The Eucharist, like the Canticle of Mary, is first and foremost praise and thanksgiving. When Mary exclaims: “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour”, she already bears Jesus in her womb. She praises God “through” Jesus, but she also praises him “in” Jesus and “with” Jesus. This is itself the true “Eucharistic attitude”.

At the same time Mary recalls the wonders worked by God in salvation history in fulfilment of the promise once made to the fathers (cf. *Lk 1:55*), and proclaims the wonder that surpasses them all, the redemptive incarnation. Lastly, the *Magnificat*

reflects the eschatological tension of the Eucharist. Every time the Son of God comes again to us in the “poverty” of the sacramental signs of bread and wine, the seeds of that new history wherein the mighty are “put down from their thrones” and “those of low degree are exalted” (cf. *Lk* 1:52), take root in the world. Mary sings of the “new heavens” and the “new earth” which find in the Eucharist their anticipation and in some sense their programme and plan. The *Magnificat* expresses Mary's spirituality, and there is nothing greater than this spirituality for helping us to experience the mystery of the Eucharist. The Eucharist has been given to us so that our life, like that of Mary, may become completely a *Magnificat!*”

Kolbean Spirituality: **The MI: A Modern Way to Live the Gospel**

In this new part of the monthly formation you will find some 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 MIer.

3. The Consecration to the Immaculata

“Those who love the Immaculata have at various times, both in public and in private, used various formulas to express their consecration to our Lady.”³ Fr. Kolbe wrote this in 1937 in the *Sketch for a Book*. Among those people to whom he refers, we can surely count St. Louis Grignon de Montfort, who wrote the *Treatise of the True Devotion to Mary*. St. Maximilian recognizes a certain wavelength between MI spirituality and the perfect devotion to Mary according to St. Louis Grignon de Montfort. He writes, in fact, that this devotion “is most certainly and entirely in the spirit of the MI.”⁴ At the same time, he also emphasizes that it differs from the way we understand and live the consecration to Our Lady

in the MI. Fr. Kolbe notes that “we consecrate ourselves to the Immaculata sicut res et proprietas [as (her) property and possession]. A slave can still say that he has certain human rights, something that res or proprietas does not have.”⁵

Even the expression “son of the Immaculata” does not satisfy him, because it reminds us of the legal obligations that mothers have toward their children. He dislikes also the expression “slave of the Immaculata” because a slave does not give his services willingly and wholeheartedly but forcibly.

In the *Original Program* of the MI, handwritten in Latin and presented by St. Maximilian the evening of October 16, 1917, the first condition to be enrolled in the MI consists in “placing oneself freely as a docile instrument” in the hands of the Immaculata. In the *Act of Consecration* he specifies even better his intentions as he writes: “I beseech you to accept my whole and entire self as your property and possession;” and then, “Dispose of me, of all my faculties of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity, as it pleases you.”⁶ He thinks that “such expressions as servant, son, slave, thing or property are beautiful, but we desire something more. We desire to be Hers without any reservation.”⁷

In 1940, almost at the end of his life and spiritual journey, in the *Sketch for a Book* he summarizes his thoughts: “The association is called Militia “of the Immaculata” because its members consecrate themselves to the Immaculata without any reservation, in any aspect and with no exception. They wish to be out of love Her servants, children and slaves; they desire to be Her property and possession, Her docile instruments and so on, accordingly to what devotion to Her may suggest to the heart of each one who loves Her. In one word, they desire to be hers in every aspect, according to the full meaning of this expression (...).

The association is called “Militia” because those who consecrate themselves to the Immaculata in such a complete way wish to emphasize the will of eliminating any limitation in

³ SK 1329 in *The Kolbe Reader*, p. 159

⁴ SK 508 in *The Kolbe Reader* pag. 92.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

their donation to the Immaculata, and this both in extent and in intensity. In this way, they wish to underline the will of loving Her passionately in order to irradiate more and more [Her presence] in their milieu, to illuminate with their splendor and to warm up with their enthusiasm the greatest number of people. As “Knights” they wish to conquer as soon as possible the whole world and every single person to the Immaculata, and this without exceptions.”⁸

Grignon de Montfort also spoke about a prophecy regarding the apostles of the last times. He wrote that they will be very holy persons who “will reach sanctity through their special devotion to the most Blessed Virgin, whom they revere in their minds and hearts as the most perfect model of holiness and as the rich source of divine grace. Such saints, especially towards the end of the world, will be raised up by God by means of Mary, his Mother, so that these souls, filled with grace and zeal, may oppose the enemies of God who will come forth on all sides with incredible audacity. These holy persons will have a very special devotion to the most Blessed Virgin. She will enlighten them with Her light, will nourish them with Her milk, will guide them by Her spirit, will sustain them with Her hand and will protect them by Her vigilance. In this combat these souls will, as it were, scatter the heretics and their heresies with one hand, along with the idolaters and their idols, the sinners and their impieties, while with the other hand they will build up the temple of the true God, which is the city of God. Furthermore, they will encourage all by word and example to practice true devotion towards Our Lady. Although they will have many enemies, they will win many victories and will give much glory to God. For as it was through Mary that salvation began, so through Her salvation will reach its accomplishment.”

Undoubtedly, St. Maximilian Kolbe is one of these holy persons, but he is not the only one. Considering these thoughts of Grignon de Montfort, Fr. Kolbe comments: “*Especially in these last days, God will raise up persons who through their special devotion towards the most Blessed Virgin will sanctify themselves and will*

not only oppose God’s sworn enemies, but will sweep away from the face of the earth heresy, idolatry, impiety; they will build up the temple of the true God and will inspire all with genuine devotion towards Our Lady. Is this not precisely the aim of all the Knights of the Immaculata?

But let us read further on: “They will have many enemies.” So for this, too, we must be prepared. Yet “they will also win many victories and give great glory to God.” In fact, “even as through Mary salvation began, so, too, through Her salvation will reach its accomplishment.” Let us reflect seriously on all these points.”⁹

(3. To be continued).

Resources

John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, that you can download from the Vatican web site:

www.Vatican.va/Holy_Father/John_Paul_II/messages/; or www.Vatican.va/latest/.

USCCB Prayers for Peace on

www.usccb.org/liturgy/prayersforpeace.shtml

For the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, see:

www.vatican.va

Then, on “search on site” type “Christian Unity;” go to the Pontifical Council For Promoting Christian Unity and click on “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.” You will find abundant material on this year’s theme: *Christ, the one foundation of the Church (1 Cor 3: 1-23)*.

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.

⁸ SK 1327, Niepokalanow, 1940. See also SK 1329 in *The Kolbe Reader* pag. 160.

⁹ SK 1129 in *The Kolbe Reader* pag. 39.