



February 2016

## The second corporal work of mercy: "Give drink to the thirsty" **Father Kolbe**

"I was thirsty and you gave me drink" (Mt 25:35).

Every minute four children worldwide die from lack of water. More than one billion people lack access to safe drinking water and more than twice that number do not have running water. The forecast of the World Bank Vice President Ismail Serageldin, who in 1995 stated that "the wars of the next century will be fought because of the water," is already a reality when you consider that, in several ongoing conflicts, access to water resources and their control is at issue. Water has become *blue gold*.

"This world has a serious social debt to the poor who have no access to clean water, because that is to deny them the right to life rooted in their inalienable dignity "(Laudato Si, # 30).

One day Jesus said to the Apostles: "Give them something to eat." It is a command that repeats today: "Who shall give even one glass of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward" (Mt 10, 42).

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul thirsts for God "(Ps 42). Water is not something that can be ignored; it is not a luxury. Water is a vital necessity. God is much more so, my water, my life.

Like Jesus, /0} **father Kolbe** sits next to every man and woman. He is the traveling companion of each one in order to quench the deepest thirst.

All his life he never tired of communicating the truth that is the Lord Jesus, sowing in every heart the words of life. The printed word became, day by day, the soul of his apostolate. On June 7, 1972, John Paul II, then Cardinal of Krakow, said of him: "Through the apostolic activities with the press ... he wanted the 'cantic of culture' to be inserted into the 'cantic of nature.'"

Father Maximilian gave drink to the thirsty. He satisfied the thirst to make sense of our lives. He gave a helping hand in times of sadness, darkness, despair. He helped others to accept suffering and setbacks and, little by little, to understand their meaning.

Just arrested, he infused his brothers with the calm and peace needed to confront the time of Nazi persecution.

In Auschwitz, a fellow prisoner told him to hate Germans. Father Maximilian replied: "Do not allow our executioners to make us become like them, hate is not a creative force, only love creates." His words fall like balm, like dew: heal the broken hearts from hatred and break down the walls of division.

When groups of inmates could gather around him without arousing the suspicion of the guards, he spoke to them of God, of faith, of the sublime value of Christian life, and these men, well proven and with a heavy heart, seemed to revive. "Permeated with Franciscan optimism, Father Kolbe set the task to give self confidence back and regain the original goodness of life, by pointing to the model of the Immaculate, who embodies pristine beauty and the candor and passion for life."

Then, at the end of July, a prisoner of his own block managed to escape. For one escaped prisoner, ten took his place in the starvation bunker. Everyone hoped not to be chosen. Father Maximilian was not chosen, he offered his life for a stranger and in order to give drink to the nine other condemned thirsting for truth, devotion, and peace.

A group of ten, with Father Kolbe "at the center," entered the basement of block 11. Prisoners were not given anything to eat or drink. Sadly, they mainly died of thirst. The hellish inhumanity of Auschwitz could not miss the torture of thirst, leading to a terrible death: The first signs of dehydration are dizziness, skin that is dry, onset of fever, disorientation - came the swelling of the tongue, inability to walk or even crawl due to weakness, cracked skin, always higher body temperature. Then, the kidneys and liver do not work anymore, and the ability to control the rhythm of breathing and heartbeat is lost. Coma and death occur. Terrible hunger, even more terrible thirst.

*Father Kolbe, the martyr of charity, became a victim to give drink to the other. He filled the empty jars of life. He quenched the thirst for meaning. The art of loving is knowing how to respond to this profound thirst.*

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