

### **Father Kolbe: Mother**

*“And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself.” (Jn 12:32)*

*“From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace.” (Jn 1:16)*

So it happens with every life becomes a gift. **Father Kolbe** was **human in the inhuman concentration camp** of Auschwitz. He gave himself to the “fullness of grace,” she who had been transformed by God’s tenderness, to the point of offering his life for another’s.

Many have received from Father Kolbe’s death, crucified for love. “I believe,” one of his first companions of Niepokalanow said, “that never a father or mother loved their children with such love and tenderness as Father Maximilian loved us.”

Deported to Auschwitz, where he arrived May 28, 1941, his only regret was having lost an occasion for charity. He extended a hand full of love to everyone, prayed for everyone, suffered for everyone, and wished everyone well. He desired happiness for everyone, just as God desires it.<sup>1</sup>

He is assigned hard labor, falls exhausted to the ground. Furious with a thirst for blood, Krott (the leader) comes to “his aid.” Father Maximilian says softly: “Don’t do it! Hate is not a creative force. It’s only powerless. Powerless to love!”

We saw him push wheelbarrows full of stones: a squadron found him one day under a mound of leaves, where his guardians had cast him after beating him to blood. Transported to the infirmary, an ill young person roughly stole a glass of milk that the doctor offered Father Kolbe, who was still and feverish. The young “thief” looks at Maximilian and tells the surprised doctor: “I don’t believe in God, but in him I do.”

In the infirmary, he was given the last free place, in the center of air flow from the front door. He is very appreciative. The new location allowed him to receive the ill with a gentle word and to pray for those whose bodies were carried out.

He was assigned to the transport of bodies together with a fellow prisoner. The poor man would tremble when lifting those remains in front of the crematorium and number 16670 prayed and would bless in the midst of the smoke of the furnace.

During the night, with the help of the dark, some prisoners went to him to be comforted. A witness relates:

*When I had finished my work shift, tired and depressed, I went to him. He would rest my head on his breast, like a mother with her child. He would comfort saying, 'Take Christ's hand in one of yours and Our Lady's hand in the other. Now, even if you walk in the darkness, you can go ahead with the same certainty of a child holding the hands of his parents.' I owe much to his maternal heart.*

“I was often bludgeoned by the guards and beaten by the Kapo.' I began to think of throwing myself into the electric barbed wire and be done with it...Father Kolbe came to find out. He spoke to me and was able to give me serenity. He knew how to instill courage in me and many others (...) I call him the apostle of Auschwitz.”

When a group of prisoners could gather around him, without risking suspicion from the guards, he spoke to them about God, the faith, the sublime value of Christian life, and those men, so tried and with death in the heart, seemed to revive.

“At age 13, I found myself in the hell of Auschwitz. Alone, parents killed. Father Kolbe found me and spoke to me while delirious, trying to find someone to share my suffering. He was like an angel for me, like a mother hen, he took me in his arms. He always dried my tears and my life blossomed once again.”

Father Kolbe, like a mother, didn't ask, but gave. After giving his small piece of bread, he gave himself. He gave himself to transform the men of Auschwitz from beasts into brothers. It's this tenderness of love that changes lives forever. Father Kolbe is a light for who draws near to him, because he believed that good is possible even in situations that deny it. “His death was salvation for thousands of human lives. As long as we live, we who were at Auschwitz will bow our heads in memory of what has happened. His action became for us a powerful explosion of light capable of illuminating the dark night of the camp.”<sup>3</sup>

We can well apply the words of one of the greatest Italian poets, Alda Merini, to Saint Maximilian: “His eyes born for charity, free from any fatigue, never closed, day or night, because they didn't want to lose the vision of their God.”

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<sup>1</sup>Ref. KW 1075

<sup>2</sup>Ref. *Maximilian Kolbe, the Saint of Auschwitz*, Patricia Treece, p. 179

<sup>3</sup>Giorgio Bielecki.