

Important Dates in the Life of Saint Maximilian Kolbe

February 17, 1941

Niepokalanów, Poland

On Sunday, February 16, 1941, one day before his arrest and the beginning of his via crucis, Maksymilian presented a homily to his friars on the humility, love, and suffering. The homily was a summary of his thoughts on topics about which he frequently had written or spoken. His teaching on these topics was about to be tried by fire.

The next day, Monday, February 17, 1941, Maksymilian dictated his thoughts on the immaculate conception to Brother Arnold Wedrowski as the latter sat at the typewriter and recorded what his guardian said.

Had informants in Warsaw conveyed to Maksymilian the date and probable time of his arrest, or did he act on premonition? Contrary to custom, he dressed on February 17th in his best habit which he usually reserved for Sundays and feast days. He was very anxious to get his thoughts only paper as quickly as possible. In the midst of the dictation, he felt the need to pray.

According to Brother Arnold, after completing this first part of his dictation, Maksymilian knelt and recited three times Hail Mary. No sooner had Maksymilian completed the prayer than the telephone rang. It was 9:50am Maksymilian picked up the receiver and, as was his custom, greeted the caller with Maria. The caller was Brother Ivo in the friary reception room at the main gate of the cloister.

Brother Ivo said, “two automobiles marked POL (police) just entered the friary compound. There are five uniformed men and one man in civilian clothes.” Upon hearing this information, Maksymilian, with a tremor of anxiety in his voice, responded, “Oh?” There was a short pause, and then in a very calm voice Maksymilian said, “All right, all right my Child, Maria.”

For a brief moment Maksymilian paused and looked out his window at his window at the statue of the Virgin Mary standing on its pedestal just opposite the building in which his office was located. Each day, before beginning his chores, he had looked at this figure and gathered spiritual stamina for his work. Now he realized that he probably never again would see this figure of the Virgin Mary which occupied a central position in the friary. With a nostalgic gaze he bade farewell to the statue which Alfonso and he had erected in August 1927, and which daily had reminded him of his mission and vocation.

With one last look at the Virgin Mary statue, Maksymilian breathed the prayer, “O Immaculata protect thy friary and thy children.”

Steeled in the faith and confidence that the Immaculata would not abandon her city or her children, Maksymilian then went to meet the members of the Security Police.

The man in civilian clothes, who appeared to be in charge, was a Gestapo agent.

“We would like a tour of the friary,” he said.

Maksymilian was glad to oblige, certain that the visitors would be impressed by what they saw and by Niepokalanów obvious value to the entire surrounding community. Only two of the policemen, however, accompanied Maksymilian on a two hour tour. The others remained in Maksymilian's office, seeking to satisfy their curiosity by investigating the nerve center of the friary. After returning to his office, Maksymilian, ever the polite host, offered to have tea served to his guests.

"Priest," the man in the civilian dress said, "you don't seem to understand. We're here not to drink your tea but to place you and four of your priests under arrest."

With that remark, the Gestapo agent pulled a piece of paper from his coat pocket and said, "Send for Justin Nazim, Pius Bartosik, Urban Cieslak and Antonin Bajewski. Tell them to report to the main gate immediately."

Maksymilian called the worksite of each of his fellow priests on the Gestapo arrest list. Of course, during the tour of the cloister, the friars had seen Maksymilian in the company of the visitors.

The last telephone call Niepokalanów's guardian was to make in his friary and the last time he was able within his cloister to extend the greeting, Maria was to summon his confreres to arrest. Maksymilian picked up his briefcase as he and his jailers headed for the main gate. It was 11:50am.

The fact that five visitors were in police uniform alarmed the monastic community. When the brothers saw their guardian being escorted toward the police vehicles, they congregated near the main gate to observe what was taking place. While waiting for the four priests to report, the practical Brother Pelagiuz had run to the refectory and had made sandwiches. He then hurried to the main gate and placed the sandwiches in Maksymilian's briefcase. The brothers stood in stunned silence as they saw their beloved guardian and four of their confreres taken into the police custody. Maksymilian remembered the comfort he had given his Mugensai no Sono friars upon his departure for Europe in 1936. We should never take leave of one another with the premonition that we shall not meet again. He repeated this consolation to his Niepokalanów children, although he knew that the reunion he envisioned would take place first in heaven. Before entering the police car, Maksymilian made the sign of the cross over his precious children and over his beloved Niepokalanów, over his friars and over his City of the Immaculata that he never would see again. As the cars drove away, the friars could see the face of their guardian as he peered through the rear window of one of the police vehicles, desiring to hold in view as long as possible his children and his friary.¹

¹ Foster, Claude R. *Mary's Knight* (West Chester University Press, West Chester, Pennsylvania, 2001) pgs 653-654