



## Father Kolbe and the World of Suffering

For this month's reflection we take an excerpt from the 22nd World Day of the Sick, "Faith and Charity: *"We Ought to Lay Down Our Lives for One Another"* (1 Jn 3:16):

When we draw near with tender love to those in need of care, we bring hope and God's smile to the contradictions of the world. When generous devotion to others becomes the hallmark of our actions, we give way to the Heart of Christ and bask in its warmth, and thus contribute to the coming of God's Kingdom.

To grow in tender love, and a respectful and sensitive charity, we have a sure Christian model to contemplate: Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, who is always attentive to the voice of God and the needs and troubles of her children. Mary, impelled by God's mercy which took flesh within her, selflessly hastened from Galilee to Judea to find and help her kinswoman Elizabeth. She interceded with her Son at the wedding feast of Cana when she saw that there was a shortage of wine. She bore in her heart, throughout the pilgrimage of her life, the words of the elderly Simeon who foretold that a sword would pierce her soul, and with persevering strength she stood at the foot of the cross of Jesus. She knows the way, and for this reason she is the Mother of all of the sick and suffering. To her we can turn with confidence and filial devotion, certain that she will help us, support us and not abandon us. She is the Mother of the crucified and risen Christ: she stands beside our crosses and she accompanies us on the journey towards the resurrection and the fullness of life... Those who stand with Mary beneath the cross learn to love as Jesus does.

Father Kolbe lived these words to the letter. At Niepokalanów, a center of work, communion, and prayer, where he lived with his confreres, his tenderness towards his brothers was striking. From the Vatican archives emerges: "Father Kolbe's temperament was passionate and carried away by anger. He was calm by virtue." At Niepokalanów Father Kolbe had a profound rapport with the 700 friars he lived with, for them, he was a father. "I believe that not only a father, but a mother would love her son as Father Kolbe loved us." One day he was urgently called because a friar had broken a machine. Everything was in smoke, work had stopped. Father Kolbe arrived at the accident, and asked the friar, "Did you get hurt?" Father Kolbe gave pride of place to the spirit: it suffices to see how insistently he begged the Provincial Minister to not release the simply professed friar Evaristo, even though he was gravely ill. "If he, until the end of his life, is not able to do more than to be sick, and if we have to spend a great deal of money for him, he would be such an extraordinary religious that it is worth having him, if for no other reason but to attract – by his merits – the blessing of God through the Immaculata."

When it was time for the move from Grodno to Niepokalanów, he noted: "I am a little afraid about moving during winter, because the brothers – making the move – may catch cold." (KW 148)

One day he was very sick and someone had stuck a small piece of paper outside his door: "Do not disturb Father!" When Father Kolbe found out, he immediately took the paper down, saying "Each one can come to me when they want; I am always here for you."

The tenderness that accompanied him in the family and at Niepokalanów, exploded in the concentration camp, where love of God was hidden by the smoke of Auschwitz. Father Kolbe shared his bread and soup many times, gestures that were the same as giving your very life. Then came the day in which he offered his place for that of a man he didn't even know, he died in his place.

Today, Father Kolbe asks us to continue his mission: to focus on the essentials, care for the wounded, and re-warm hearts, in a word: make our lives a gift for our brothers most in need.

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