

THE LIFE OF SAINT MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

January 8, 1894

Zundska Wola, Poland (Russian occupied)

Seventeen months later, on Monday, January 8, 1894, two days after Epiphany according to the Gregorian calendar, Maryanna bore her second child, also a son.

As soon as she had given birth, Maryanna insisted that the infant be carried to the church for baptism.

“But it’s bitter cold,” her brother Franciszek protested.

“Nonetheless,” Maryanna insisted, “the child must be baptized immediately. What if he should die while we wait for a more convenient time? Please contact Father Kapalczynski and request baptism for this afternoon. It’s only a ten-minute walk to the church. You can keep the infant protected from the cold for that short period.”

“Juliusz,” Maryanna reiterated, “I want our son baptized today at the marble font in our beautiful church.”

Thus it occurred that at 4:00pm on January 8, 1894, as the short winter day already had surrendered to the long, dark night, the infant Rajmund Kolbe was baptized at the baptismal font situated in the narthex of the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the very church in which his parents twenty six months earlier had been united in holy wedlock.

No one attending Rajmund Kolbe’s baptism could have predicted that this infant, baptized in a church dedicated to the feast of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, would one day become one of the great advocates of reverence for Mary as mediatrix. Non one on that late January afternoon in the remote little town of Zdunska Wola, on the first day in the life of Rajmund Kolbe, could have foretold that his life, completely committed to the Virgin Mary, would come full circle forty seven later at Auschwitz on the vigil of the feast of her assumption.

After the ceremony the godparents with the infant in their arms, witnesses, Juliusz Kolbe and Father Kapalczynski walked to the sacristy where Father Kapalczynski wrote the baptismal certificate.

Why did you and Maryanna decide on the name Rajmund, Juliusz?” Father Kapalczynski asked.

Juliusz answered, “Maryanna told me that the baby already was knocking for admission into the world on January 7th. She also said that January 7th is the feast of Saint Rajmund Penafort (1180-1275), the great missionary saint of Aragon.”

Only later in the life of Rajmund (called by family and friends MundeK) would the parallels between his life and the life of Saint Rajmund Penafort become evident.

Both were zealous missionaries eager to convert to Catholicism Moslems, Jews, schismatics, and all who were outside the embrace of the Roman Church. In addition, Saint Rajmund Penafort was the co-founder with Petrus Nolaskus of the sodality “Our Lady of Ransom for the Redemption of Captives.”¹

¹Foster, Claude R, *Mary’s Knight* (West Chester University Press, West Chester, Pennsylvania, 2001) pgs. 3-5