

Kolbe Is Martyr to Sanctity of Life

Following is excerpted from the text of Pope John Paul II's address on the occasion of the canonization of Father Maximilian Kolbe.

"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

From today, the church wishes to give the title of saint to a man who was enabled to carry out absolutely literally the above words of the Redeemer.



For, towards the end of July 1941, when the camp commandant ordered the prisoners to die of starvation to be lined up, this man, Maximilian Maria Kolbe, offered himself spontaneously, and said that he was ready to go to death in the place of one of them. This readiness was accepted, and after more than two weeks of torment caused by starvation, Father Maximilian's life was ended by a lethal injection, Aug. 14, 1941.

All this happened in the concentration camp at Auschwitz, where during the last war, some four million people were put to death, including also the servant of God, Edith Stein (the Carmelite Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), whose beatification cause is at present under examination at the competent congregation. Disobedience to God — the creator of life, who has said "Thou shalt not kill" — caused in that place the immense holocaust of so many innocent people. And so at the same time, our age was horribly marked by the murder of the innocent man.

Father Maximilian Kolbe, himself a prisoner of the concentration camp, defended, in that place of death, the right to life of an innocent man, one of the four million. This man (Franciszek Gajowniczek) is still living and is here among us. Father Kolbe defended his right to life, declaring that he was ready to go to death in his place, because he was the father of a family and his life was necessary to his dear ones. Father Maximilian Maria Kolbe thus reaffirmed the creator's exclusive right to the life of an innocent man, and bore witness to Christ and to love. For the apostle John writes: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

By laying down his life for a brother, Father Maximilian, whom the church has since 1971 venerated as "blessed," in a particular way made himself like Christ.

Through the death which Christ underwent on the cross, the redemption of the world was achieved, for this death has the value of supreme love. Through death undergone by Father Maximilian Kolbe, a shining sign of this love was renewed in our century, which is so seriously and in so many ways threatened by sin and death.

As though gathering together the sacrifice of his whole life, he, a priest, and a spiritual son of St. Francis, seems to say:

"What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?"

"I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord."

These are words of gratitude. Death undergone out of love, in the place of one's brother, is a heroic act of man through which, together with the blessed, we glorify God. For from God comes the grace of such heroism, of this martyrdom.

Maximilian prepared for this definitive sacrifice by following Christ from the first years of his life in Poland. From the years of his youth, in fact, he was filled with a great love of Christ and desire for martyrdom.

This love and this desire accompanied him on the path of his Franciscan and priestly vocation, for which he prepared himself both in Poland and in Rome. This love and this desire followed him through all the places of his priestly and Franciscan service in Poland and also of his missionary service in Japan.

The inspiration of his whole life was the Immaculate Virgin, to whom he entrusted his love for Christ and his desire for martyrdom. In the mystery of the Immaculate Conception, there revealed itself before the eyes of his soul that marvelous and supernatural world of God's grace offered to man. The faith and works of the whole life of Father Maximilian show that he thought of his cooperation with divine grace as a soldierly service under the banner of the Immaculate Conception. The Marian characteristic is particularly

expressive in the life and holiness of Father Kolbe. His whole apostolate, both in his homeland and on the missions, was similarly marked with this sign. Both in Poland and in Japan, the centers of this apostolate were the special cities of the Immaculate (Niepokalanow in Poland, and Mugenzai No Sono in Japan).

What happened in the starvation bunker Aug. 14, 1941?

There were fulfilled the words spoken by Christ to the apostles, in order that they "should go and bear fruit and that their fruit should abide."

In a marvelous way, the fruit of the heroic death of Maximilian Kolbe endures in the church and in the world.

Maximilian did not die, but "gave his life for his brother."

In that death, terrible from the human point of view, there was the whole definitive greatness of the human act and of the human choice: He spontaneously offered himself up to death out of love.

And in this human death of his there was the clear witness borne to Christ: The witness borne in Christ to the dignity of man, to the sanctity of his life and to the saving power of death, in which the power of love is made manifest.

Does not this death, faced spontaneously, for love of man, constitute a particular fulfillment of the words of Christ?

Does not this death make Maximilian particularly like to Christ, the model of all martyrs, who gives his own life on the cross for his brethren?

Does not such a death possess a particular and penetrating eloquence for our age?

Does not this death constitute a particularly authentic witness of the church in the modern world?

And so, in virtue of my apostolic authority I have decreed that Maximilian Maria Kolbe, who, after his was venerated as a confessor, shall henceforward be venerated also as a martyr.

Kolbe Named Martyr During Canonization

By Father Kenneth J. Doyle

Vatican City (NC News Service) — Pope John Paul II wore red vestments, the color for a martyr, as he canonized Father Maximilian Kolbe Oct. 10.

More than 150,000 pilgrims thronged St. Peter's Square for the ceremony honoring the Polish Franciscan priest who in 1941 sacrificed his life by volunteering to replace another prisoner in the death line at Auschwitz.

The other man, Franciszek Gajowniczek, now 81, attended the canonization Mass and was welcomed with sustained applause when mentioned by the pope.

Gajowniczek, who had a wife and two children when Nazi guards chose him at random for starvation, wept softly during the three-hour ceremony.

Also present was an Italian woman, Angeline Testoni from Sardinia, who church officials say was cured of pulmonary tuberculosis through Father Kolbe's intercession.

In 1971 Father Kolbe was beatified with the title of confessor, a holy man who professes the Catholic faith in an outstanding way. In the

canonization ceremony he was given the title of martyr.

The pope, in his homily discussed the new designation by calling the priest's death in the concentration camp at Auschwitz a victory over a system of contempt and hatred for man and a victory for what is divine in man.

A martyr, according to the church's tradition, is one who is killed out of hatred for the Christian faith and life.

In Father Kolbe's death, said the pope, "there was the clear witness borne to Christ, the witness borne in Christ to the dignity of man, to the sanctity of his life and to the saving power of death, in which the power of love is made manifest."

"Does not this death, the pope asked, "make Maximilian particularly likened to Christ, the model of all martyrs, who gives his own life on the cross for his brethren?"

The pontiff praised the priest for his zeal in promoting devotion to Mary. Father Kolbe was the founder of the Militia of the Immaculate Mother, now a worldwide Marian organization.

More than 10,000 Poles

attended the Mass, about half of them from Poland. Included was an eight-member delegation representing the Polish government. The pope sternly criticized the government, in remarks following the ceremony, because of the Polish parliament's passage Oct. 8 of a law which outlaws the independent trade union Solidarity.

Among those celebrating the Mass with the pope were Cardinal Franciszek Macharski of Cracow, Poland, and Cardinal Joseph Höffner of Cologne, West Germany.

Vatican sources said that the presence of the Polish and German prelates, representing opposing nations in World War II, was planned to show the reconciliation which Christianity is designed to bring.

Also concelebrating were Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia, who led a large Polish delegation from Philadelphia, and Father Konrad Sweda, a priest from Poland who was a prisoner at Auschwitz with Father Kolbe. During beatification proceedings, Father Sweda had been one of the principal witnesses for Father Kolbe's cause.

Fr. Albert Shamon



Word for Sunday

Tenderness, Toughness

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Mk. 10/46-52. (R1) Jer. 31/7-9. (R2) Heb. 5/1-6.

When we took first year French in high school, we learned this ditty: "Je vous aime, /Je vous adore; /Qu'est-ce que diable, /Voulez-vous encore?"

Freely translated, it says, "I love you, I adore you; what the devil more do you want?"

In Sunday's gospel, Jesus calls a blind beggar to Himself. That He called him to Himself when everyone else was trying to quash his clamor, proved Jesus cared for and loved him. So when the blind man was brought to Him, Jesus could have said: "I love you — what the devil more do you want?"

The blind man said, "I want to see, what else?" And surely enough, Jesus granted so great a favor, because of the man's faith.

The author of Hebrews says of Jesus, "He is able to deal patiently." He is the Son of God of whom

Jeremiah wrote, "I will console them . . . I am a father to Israel."

The virtues of patience, concern and care has a decidedly Godlike flavor. Was it not Cardinal Newman who said, "A Christian is a gentlemen."

This past century saw a shift from the "gentle" man to the "macho" man. The proper Bostonian gave way to the Marlboro Man. Tenderness and toughness were thought to be incompatible. You can't be both gentle and gutsy. Thank God, this faulty thinking is changing.

Toughness is not strength. Toughness is a kind of brittleness. It is hard — until it meets a stronger force and has to yield. Then it crumbles because it cannot yield.

"Tough" people think yielding is weakness.

On the other hand, gentleness is more than speaking softly or being a door-mat. That, too, is a caricature of gentleness.

Edwin Markham in his poem, "Lincoln, a Man of

the People," attributes Lincoln's greatness to a happy blend of tenderness and toughness.

"The color of the ground was in him, the red earth, /The smack and tang of elemental things; /The rectitude and patience of the cliff, /The goodwill of the rain that loves all leaves. /The courage of the bird that dares the sea, / . . . The pity of the snow that hides all scars, / . . . The tolerance and equity of light . . . /The strength of the virgin forests braced his mind, /The hush of the spacious prairies stilled his soul."

The gentleness of the strong! What is it? It is —

- a smile to an uncertain newcomer
- a gentle touch of reassurance
- a hug that says, "I care."
- a listening ear, a shared meal
- the words, "I'm sorry, will you forgive me?"
- the affirmation, "You did a good job."
- an unexpected expression of esteem.
- the silent sympathy of strangers when you are embarrassed (Faith Baldwin).

St. Francis DeSales, the gentleman saint, put it this way: "There is nothing so strong as gentleness. Nothing so gentle as real strength." Therein lies the human greatness of Jesus — He was the meekest of the strong and strongest of the meek.