



**St. Maximilian
Kolbe**
August 14

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1894–1941 • Poland

When Maximilian was twelve years old, the most beautiful woman appeared to him in a vision. It was the Blessed Virgin Mary, and she held in her hands two crowns, one red and the other white. She explained that the red crown was the crown of martyrdom and that the white crown was the crown of purity. Then she gazed into his eyes and asked him if he would accept one of the crowns. Even though Maximilian was young, he knew that both of the crowns were treasures and that both would lead him to Jesus. He told the Blessed Virgin Mary that he would accept both crowns.

Maximilian grew up to become a priest especially dedicated to Our Lady. Through his life of priestly purity, he received the white crown that Our Lady had offered him. He started a radio program and a magazine called the *Knight of the Immaculata* to win the world to Christ with the help of Our Lady. He traveled to Japan and India, where he published his magazine in different languages, so that he could spread Jesus' message throughout the world. But then he had to return to his home country of Poland because of ill health.

Suffering and tragedy struck when the Nazis took over Poland. The Nazis specifically persecuted the Jewish people, but they also killed Catholics and outlawed priests. They arrested Maximilian and sent him to Auschwitz, a terrible concentration camp where few survived.

One day, a prisoner escaped Auschwitz, and to punish the rest of the prisoners, the guards chose ten other men to die in the escapee's place. One of the doomed prisoners was a man named Franciszek Gajowniczek. Franciszek begged for mercy because he had a wife and children and wanted to live.

Maximilian's heart leapt with pity for Franciszek. He bravely stepped forward and offered to die in his place. In this he imitated Jesus, who died for you and me. The guards accepted his sacrifice, and Maximilian and the nine other men were locked in a cell to starve to death. There in the cell, Maximilian led the other men in songs and prayer, and gave them peace and courage for their deaths. After two weeks of starvation, Maximilian was still alive, so the Nazis put him to death. He received the red crown offered to him by Our Lady and became a glorious martyr for the Faith.

Franciszek Gajowniczek survived the concentration camp because of Maximilian Kolbe's sacrifice. He was present at Maximilian's canonization, when the pope declared Maximilian Kolbe a saint, and he lived to be ninety-three.

St. Maximilian Kolbe, help me to offer sacrifices out of love for others!