

St. Maximilian Kolbe



1894-1941

Feast Day:
August 14

Raymund Kolbe was born in Poland. He entered a Franciscan monastery when he was 16. There he received the name Maximilian. He was ordained a priest in 1919. He taught men who were preparing to be priests, and opened a religious community in Poland. He traveled to Japan and to India and opened communities there too.

When he returned to Poland, the Nazis had invaded the country. The Nazis were rounding up Jews and putting them in death camps. Fr. Kolbe organized a shelter for thousands of Polish people who had nowhere to go. In 1941, the Nazis raided the shelter. They took Fr. Kolbe and his companions to a death camp. Fr. Kolbe wrote a letter to his mother, telling her not to worry about him.

Life in the prison was very hard for Fr. Kolbe, but he always put the other prisoner's needs ahead of his own. The guards beat and tortured him. But he wouldn't ask for medical help until all his fellow prisoners had been treated. Though he was suffering, Fr. Kolbe helped the other prisoners. He would ask each one, "I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?" He heard their confessions. He told them about God's love.

One day a prisoner escaped. The guards said that 10 prisoners would be starved to death as a punishment. The guards choose 10 men. One of the men cried out in grief for his wife and children. Fr. Kolbe stepped forward and volunteered to take the man's place. Fr. Kolbe was put in a cell with the other 9 men. He prayed and read the Psalms with them. After two weeks of hunger and thirst, Fr. Kolbe was still alive. The Nazis injected poison into Fr. Kolbe's arm and he died.

The man Fr. Kolbe saved survived the war.