



Saint Maximilian Kolbe

(1894-1941 Poland)

Feast August 14

Virtue of the Month,

Generosity:

Giving without counting the cost.

Saint Maximilian was born on January 17, 1894 in Zdunska-Wola, Poland, and given the name Raymond. When he was still a child he had a vision in which Our Lady held out to him two crowns, one white, the other red, asking him to choose between the two. The white symbolized purity and the red symbolized martyrdom. Raymond chose both of them.

When he was only 17, he joined the Conventual Franciscans and seven years later he was ordained Father Maximilian. Saint Maximilian Kolbe carried Christ's message from Poland all the way to Japan, setting up small towns and naming them after Our Lady.

When World War II broke out, Maximilian was in Poland. He was captured by the Germans and sent to the concentration camp of Auschwitz. At Auschwitz, one of the horrible rules was that any time a prisoner escaped, ten others would be condemned to death by starvation. One day, after an escape, the guards were choosing ten prisoners to die. One man cried out when he was chosen, saying that he had a wife and children. Risking the cruelty of the guards, Saint Maximilian intervened and offered his own life instead. The guards asked why he should die in the other man's place. Saint Maximilian Kolbe replied: "I am a Catholic priest."

Everyone at Auschwitz was surprised to hear prayers and songs coming from the starvation bunker, but those inside had been inspired by the holiness and leadership of Saint Maximilian. After a few weeks, Kolbe was still alive, so his guards murdered him with a fatal injection. He died on the vigil of the Solemnity of the Assumption, and so was able to celebrate with Our Lady in heaven, receiving there both of the crowns of purity and martyrdom that she had offered him as a child.