

St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe

Who is this Hero of Auschwitz who founded the Militia of the Immaculata? And what does he teach us today?

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No less are there heroes in the sphere of faith and religion. God always raises up heroes, men and women who are models of supernatural strength and virtue. In a society blackened by a constant pursuit of leisure God raises up lovers of the Cross. To a society of blackened by disbelief and lack of prayer, God sends forth souls overflowing with faith and love. For a society blackened by frequent infidelities to God and neighbor, God inspires self-sacrificing champions of charity. The world, according to its standards, may not recognize them as heroes. Nevertheless they are living testimonials of the power of love - love of God and love of men.

One such hero was Fr. Maximilian Maria Kolbe, a Conventual Franciscan priest and founder of the great Marian movement, the Knights of the Immaculata. Father Maximilian will be remembered as God's "hero of Auschwitz," the infamous Nazi concentration camp where three million persons perished by were murder. His heroic charity was revealed' when he offered his life for that of a fellow prisoner who was condemned to die by starvation. Father Maximilian's acceptance of this cruel death with all its horrors so amazed his Nazi executioners that they remarked, "The like of this one we have never seen." Father Maximilian became the hero of Auschwitz through a life totally dedicated to God through the Immaculate Virgin. To understand and appreciate him, one must understand the role that Mary Immaculate played in his life.

Like St. Maximilian Kolbe, God calls us to be defenders of human life, a gift directly given to each of us and which comes from God. St. Maximilian's example of giving his life up to save the life of another should spurn us in our Catholic duty to defend life, especially the defenseless unborn in the womb. In other words, it is our duty and privilege to respect all human beings created in the sacred image of God and to treat all people with the charity and courtesy that befits people as children of God. Our Faith teaches us that human life begins at conception in the womb and only the Lord has the authority to end it. Life is sacred "from the womb to the tomb." When we pray the Hail Mary we are praying the great prayer of life when we address the Mother of God: "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb and, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death."

The Militia of the Immaculata has always supported and promoted the pro-life cause around the world, as a ministry that flows respectively from our consecration to the Immaculate Virgin, thus advancing the Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It should come as no surprise that our primary duty as Christians is to promote and uphold the reign of the Kingdom of God against the kingdom of darkness and death. St. Maximilian calls us in this crucial hour of the world's history, as does Pope John Paul II, to not be afraid of defending life. Therefore, to defend the unborn against abortion, to defend the elderly against euthanasia, to defend the poor, the sick, and refugees against unjust laws, persecution, and economic oppression is of utmost importance in our life as Christians. To work for the conversion of all prisoners and to decry the death penalty unless in extreme situations as taught in the Catechism of the Catholic Church are our responsibilities are Christians.

Trusting in the Holy Spirit and united with the will of our Heavenly Father, through Christ our Lord, St. Maximilian calls you and me, to be courageous instruments of the Gospel of life under the maternal care of our Blessed Mother, the Immaculata, who is the Mother of Life itself. We can begin to be a bit more engaging in our efforts against the culture of death by prayer, which must always be the beginning and the end of our activity. In bringing all our concerns to the Merciful Heart of Jesus by coming before Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist through Adoration, we can open ourselves to His life-giving grace. We then seek that Mercy for those in danger of death, especially the unborn and those about to be executed. Strengthened by his Divine Mercy and enriched by His sanctifying grace through the sacraments, we then seek to act in His Love. When we actively choose to defend the unborn, assist mothers-to-be in difficulty, aid the elderly,

help the poor, etc., we arduously remember the words of St. Maximilian, "Love alone creates; love alone conquers."

In imitation of Our Lady at the visitation of her cousin Elizabeth, we likewise assist our neighbor in difficulty. Whether that person be an unwed mother, perhaps an elderly homebound individual, or a young father struggling to put bread on the table for his family, or the homeless teenager, or a mistreated prisoner, it is our duty to act in accordance with our Lord's own divine mandate: "Whatever you do for the least of these, My brothers and sisters, that you do unto Me."

Thus, in imitation of Our Lady and St. Maximilian, let us pray, reflect, and then act to defend God's precious gift of life.