

WITNESS TO FREEDOM

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

"No one in the world can change Truth. What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it."

The 20th century has been called the Century of Martyrs. Some historians estimate that more people died for their faith in the 20th century than the previous nineteen centuries combined. The 20th century saw a massive amount of bloodshed from people who died because of their faith. One of the most dramatic examples of these martyrs is Saint Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest who offered his life in the Auschwitz death camp in exchange for the life of another man, a husband and father.

Maximilian Kolbe saw the evil of both the Nazi fascism invading Poland from the west and communism invading Poland from the east. The squeezing of the Polish people was partly a military effort, but perhaps more profoundly, it was an attempt to drain Poland of its culture, which was decidedly Catholic. Totalitarian regimes cannot tolerate an authoritative voice other than the state.

In response to the attack on the very life of the Polish faithful, Maximilian Kolbe invested his time and energy into creating a counter voice through print media and the formation of priests. The saint knew that what faced Poland and the western world was first and foremost a spiritual battle and thus needed a spiritual response. In establishing various newspapers and houses of formation, Maximilian Kolbe heroically and courageously stood up to the secular powers of his time. His work showed that the political powers may gain control of civil institutions, but they would never and could never gain control of the human spirit.

This great priest must have known he risked his life, but it was a risk he was willing to take in order to witness to the true dignity of the human person. In the end, he did give up his life when he offered to take the place of a father and husband who was to be executed at Auschwitz. In his life and death, Fr. Kolbe achieved victory over the lies of the totalitarian movements that tried to redefine God's created order. Totalitarian ideologies may appear strong temporarily, but the martyr reveals that the human spirit, strengthened by God's grace, is stronger.

St. Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!



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