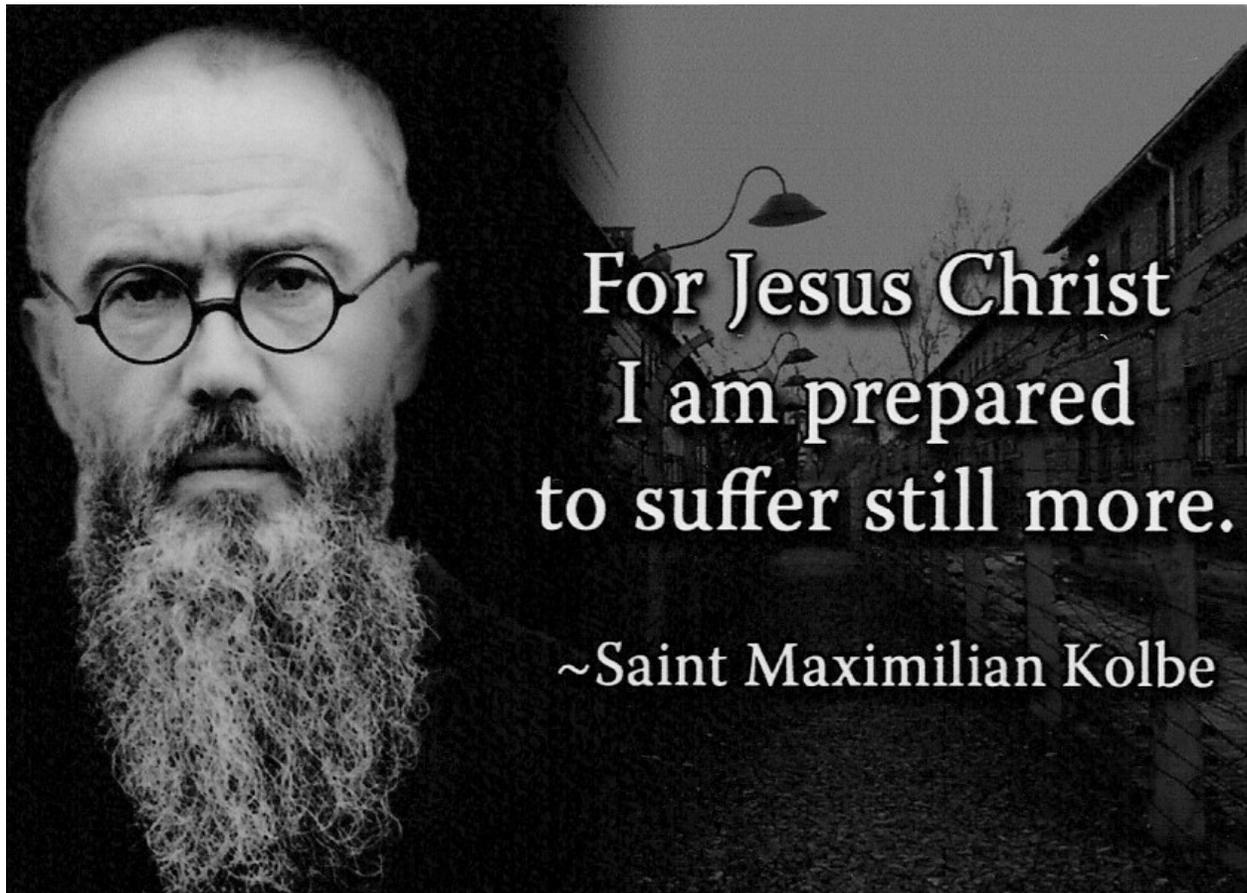


75th anniversary of the Martyrdom of St Maximilian Kolbe

Week 7 September 25 - October 2

Martyrdom of Health



For anyone who has ever been ill, temporary, chronic or terminal, the martyrdom of one's health is perhaps the most difficult to endure. It not only steals one's physical capabilities but also one's hopes and dreams.

Throughout his life, St. Maximilian experienced difficulties and suffering in terms of his health.

In 1914 as a seminarian studying to be a priest in Rome, Maximilian's thumb became seriously infected. So much so that there was no alternative but to amputate it. This meant that he could not become a priest because the priest had to be able to hold the Consecrated Host between his forefinger and his thumb only. Facing the loss of his thumb and his priesthood, he prostrated himself before the statue of the Virgin Mary and prayed,

"O Heavenly Mamusia, Immaculate Virgin, come to the aid of your servant. You summoned me in Pabianice when I was but a youth. You offered me the white crown, and you offered me the

red crown. Before your altar in Lwow, you blessed me with an awareness of yourself. Now I prepare for the priesthood to serve you in the highest spiritual vocation. My entire ardor, energy and purpose are now and will be, if you permit my ordination to that most holy office, consecrated to you. O Blessed, Holy Mamusia, heal my thumb. Permit not this infection to destroy all the hopes of being ordained your priest—hopes which are based on your grace, O Immaculate Virgin

Then having received some water from Lourdes, he bathed his thumb in the miraculous water, and his thumb was healed to the amazement of the doctor.

This however was only the beginning of more serious health concerns.

He contracted tuberculosis which caused him to cough up blood and to leave all of his work and plans and dreams behind and go to Zakopane in the mountains to recover or die.

In a letter from Zakopane, February 13, 1927, Maximilian writes "the doctor told me that this tuberculosis will always give me problems, so I have to take care of myself. Sleep 10 hours a day!!!! Four of them in the fresh air. A dry and sunny place to live and lots of food and I should not carry weight in my right hand."

Almost all this advice from his doctor he ignored when he traveled to Japan!

In another letter of March 28, 1927 written from the sanatorium in Zakopane, Kolbe writes, "I am good for nothing."

While living in Nagasaki he writes,

"I am overloaded with work. Our task here is very simple: working hard all day; working ourselves to death. Being considered a little less than a fool by our own people and exhausted, dying for the Immaculata."

The issues of his health followed Kolbe everywhere he went, causing him physical and emotional hardship as he strove with all of his might to bring the world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through consecration to the Immaculata. Because of his health issues, he died a little at a time everyday. All for the Immaculata!

Prayer ;

O Lady of Lourdes and Health of the Sick, cast your loving and comforting mantle around me in my times of sickness, that I may unite my sufferings with those of your suffering and sorrowful heart so that the world may come to know your Son, Who suffered and died for the life of the world. Amen

Meditations and Questions :

1. When have I experienced sickness or illness in my life?
2. How did it affect me physically and spiritually?
3. Who do I know that is ill?
4. How have I reached out them?
5. How does my suffering help others draw closer to Christ?
6. How unite my sufferings with those of Jesus and Mary?

In the Immaculata,  
Fr. Patrick Greenough OFM Conv  
MI International Vice President