

PART 4

**Consecration to the Immaculata: a Way to Holiness,
in the Footsteps of Mary, the Attentive Virgin in Prayer**
Readings from the Writings of St. Maximilian Kolbe

The great dream of St. Maximilian was: "To conquer the whole world for Christ through the Immaculata."

This ideal starts from the "total and limitless" belonging to the Immaculata and widens toward the passionate search for the heart of man, of all men, of all the billions of hearts beating on earth beyond Poland and Japan (cf. *KW* 647). We see how this ideal made him a missionary, caused him to implement pioneering apostolic projects for those days through the mass media, made him the spiritual father of a movement of spirituality and mission in the Church, the Militia of the Immaculata, and led him to give his life for a brother.

What does it mean to live in the footsteps of Mary?

It means to live a Gospel life, as Kolbe did, a life for God and for others, in obedience to God and in service to others.

We can find the concrete tracks of this "walking with Mary" in the attitudes of the Virgin suggested by Pope Paul VI's document *Marialis Cultus* (MC), from chapter 16 forward:

- the Attentive Virgin
- the Virgin in prayer
- the Virgin Mother
- the Virgin presenting offerings

Fr. Maximilian obviously did not know this document, but from his experience we can see a perfect harmony between his way of living his total consecration to the Immaculata and those attitudes of the Virgin indicated by MC. They appear to be a concrete expression of his desire "to become her" (cf. *KW* 556, 991 Q).

Mary is the Attentive Virgin, who received the Word in her heart, kept it and let the Word transform her in the image of her Son.

Mary accepted the Word of the angel. She let obedience to the Father's will, which was revealed to her daily in her relationship with Jesus, be the nourishment of her life, as Jesus says of Himself: "My food is to do the will of the Father" (Jn 4:34).

Mary walked the stages of her pilgrimage of faith in the light of the Word, the Word that was gradually revealed to her. It is no coincidence that St. Luke writes twice that "Mary treasured all these things in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 51). While the angel had announced to Mary that she would be the Mother of the Son of God, Simeon revealed to her how this motherhood would be realized: not in the mode of triumph or glory, according to the mentality of the world. That child would be "a sign of contradiction" and she also would experience a piercing sword (cf. Lk 2:34-35). Along the way, Mary found the connections, put the pieces together, received the Word that manifested itself even when she did not understand it, as in the incident of the child Jesus found in the Temple of Jerusalem (Lk 2:50).

Mary accepted that God would manifest Himself to her in a way which differed from her expectations.

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She accepted to walk in His inscrutable ways, with trust and abandonment. And on this path she found herself at the foot of the Cross, totally dedicated to the Gospel announced by her Son. She could only be there because she believed in the Word, and even when all abandoned Him, she kept in her heart the words: "On the third day He shall rise again" (Lk 18:33 and parallel passages).

The Word was really the lamp that enlightened her steps (cf. Ps 119). And she obeyed God with joy, surrendered to His will, which she recognized as a will of love. She knew that she was in the hands of the One who "cares for His humble servant" (Lk 1:48), that is, the One who takes care of His children and of humanity, who helps the poor, overthrows the mighty and extends His mercy from generation to generation.

From an early age, St. Maximilian chose as a foundation for his life and spirituality the prayerful listening to the Word of the Lord (cf. KW 964; 965; 987), so as to discern the path of his life in the manifestations of God's will. Fr. Maximilian had no doubts that what really matters is not to perform miracles, but to do the will of God through holy obedience (cf. KW 380). We have "to be led" by the Immaculata, he often repeated to himself and to the others (cf. KW 1334; 987), because her will coincides with the will of God (cf. KW 56). But to let ourselves be led is possible only if we have confidence, if we trust that we are in good hands. The will of God that Mary made her own is a good will; it is a will of love. Fr. Maximilian was sure of this. He was really like a weaned child in the arms of his mother, and that is why we find him ready to descend to the starvation bunker in the place of another prisoner.

Living with Mary we also are challenged to make the Word our daily food. "Do whatever He tells you" (Jn 2: 5), says Mary. And the psalmist: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps 119); "Show me the way to follow ...". Otherwise we will wander like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Ps 119:176).

In our consecration to Mary the first place is occupied by the Word received, meditated and kept in the heart, so it can inform our daily and concrete choices. We are to learn from Mary to compare the divine Word and our daily life and to recognize the Father's plan, the closeness of Jesus, the Spirit living in us and to walk in His ways.

Even for us, as for St. Maximilian, obedience to the Father's will is what really counts.

His will is manifested in His Word, in the Church's magisterial teaching and in the events of life that become meaningful in the light of the Word.

Mary is the Virgin in prayer because she lived in intimacy with God, proclaimed Him as her Lord as she sang her Magnificat, invoked Him for the need of the spouses at Cana and finally prayed with the Church in the Cenacle of Jerusalem.

Mary's prayer is praise, thanksgiving, intercession, but above all daily communion with her Son, ability to stay in contact with the mystery of the Son and to contemplate it, letting it to transform our life.

Prayer is not simply formulas, but it is growing in intimacy with God, care of that "inner room" where God lives. Prayer is entering into ourselves again and finding God who loves us tenderly beyond all sins. But if we do not enter into that room, how can we hear the Voice that calls us? Life makes sense if allow ourselves to hear Him says, "I love you," "Come," "You are precious to me," "Follow me".

St. Maximilian made prayer the cornerstone of all his activities. So he stated:

"Prayer is a means that people do not know about, and yet it is the most effective way to restore peace in the soul, to give them happiness, because it serves to bring them closer to God's love. Prayer revives the world. Prayer is the indispensable condition for the regeneration and the life of every soul..." (KW 903).

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Biographers recall an episode:

“Niepokalanow is at its best. Maximilian is asking the young friars what, according to them, is the next step to take. After several replies focused on the need to increase the productivity, finally a young friar whispers: ‘We must first increase inwardly, and then the productivity will be a consequence.’ Maximilian was so happy with this answer and added, “The expansion of our work will not be a demonstration of progress. Nor vast new buildings... So what would it take to make progress? What is the real Niepokalanow’s progress? And above all, what is our Niepokalanow? Is it this visible activity? Is it the industrial productivity? Or the circulation of the magazine? No, there is something better! Our Niepokalanow is the inner world of our souls! As a result, even if it were necessary to suspend our work, even if we had to disperse like leaves swept by the autumn wind, if in our hearts the Niepokalanow’s ideal remains and continues to flourish, then and only then we can say that we are in full progress” (cf. L. Faccenda, OFM Conv., *Ho visto Padre Kolbe*, Edizioni Milizia Mariana, 1970, pp. 27-28).

St. Maximilian gave primacy to the care for the inner-supernatural life, the relationship with God that is the basis of everything, as Jesus said: “I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit” (Jn 15: 5).

Listening to the Word and prayer are closely related. Prayer is the sounding board of the Word, is the “room” in which we can converse with the Father who sees in secret. It is the intimate place of the encounter with Him who alone gives meaning to our existence, our being and our actions. We often have to come back to that room, to hear Him reminding us that He loves us and to tell Him that we love him in return and that we want to be always with Him, “remain faithful to our love for Him” (Jn 15:9).

Questions for discussion:

- How much space has the Lord in my life?
- What does it mean to pray?

Commitment in our life:

Listen to the Word of God and turn it into a life experience.