



Raymond's Two Crowns

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About one hundred years ago, in the faraway land of Poland, a little boy was born who was to become a very famous person.

His name was Raymond Kolbe. He lived in a little village along with his parents and his two brothers, Francis and Joseph.

The Kolbe family was rather poor but they always had what they needed. They loved one another very much and were said to be a very happy family.



Kolbe Family

Raymond was a rather curious boy who often got into trouble. He didn't mean to be disobedient or to do naughty things, but sometimes it just turned out that way.

Once, Raymond's Mother sent him to his room as a punishment. She was so upset about her little boy that she began to cry. Mrs. Kolbe looked at him and said, "O Raymond, whatever is going to become of you?"

He was very sorry for his bad behavior and promised never to be naughty again.

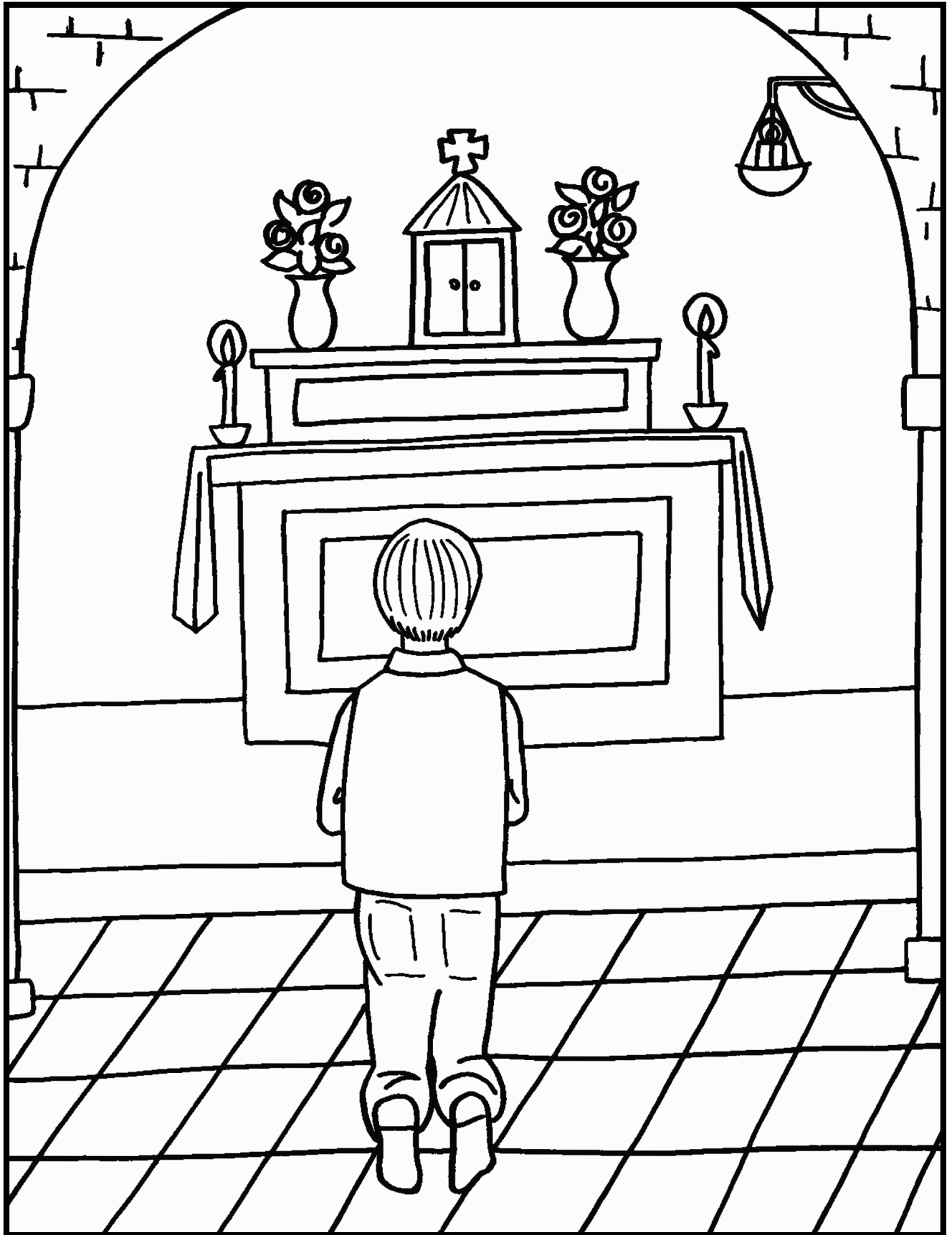


Raymond in trouble

Raymond secretly ran off to the village church to say some prayers. He asked God to help him become a better boy, so that he would never make his Mother cry again.

Just when he was about to leave, a bright light appeared out of nowhere. Standing in the middle of it was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. It was Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

She held in her hands two shining crowns. Then, holding them out for him to see, she said, "Which one do you want?"



Raymond prays for help

Wanting to make the best decision, Raymond stretched his neck to get a better look at the crowns.

One was white and it stood for a pure heart. This crown would bring him the wonderful blessings of love.

The other was red. It was a sign of giving up one's life for Jesus. If he chose the red crown, Raymond would one day become a martyr, just like the Apostles of Our Lord.

The little boy thought for a moment and then gave his reply, "I would like both, please." The Mother of Jesus smiled at him and then disappeared.



Vision of two crowns

From that day on, Raymond did his best to be good always. He tried to obey his parents the first time they asked him to do something. He did his homework without complaining. It was very hard at first. But after a while it became easier and easier.

Raymond did well at school. He especially liked math and science. He was so smart that he even invented a space rocket that really worked! He also studied the Latin language because he had decided to become a priest when he grew up.

Imagine that! The little boy whose curiosity often got him into trouble was going to become a priest.



Raymond obeys

When Raymond was a teenager, he left home to study for the priesthood. His brother Francis decided to go with him. They had to sneak out of the city because their country was run by enemy soldiers. Their father hid them underneath stacks of hay in a wagon, and they were secretly driven to the seminary.

Raymond was well liked by both the teachers and his classmates. He helped many students with their studies. During recreation he often joined them in sports and games, especially soccer.

Although Raymond liked the seminary, he sometimes thought that God wanted him to become a soldier. He wanted so much to help free the Polish people.

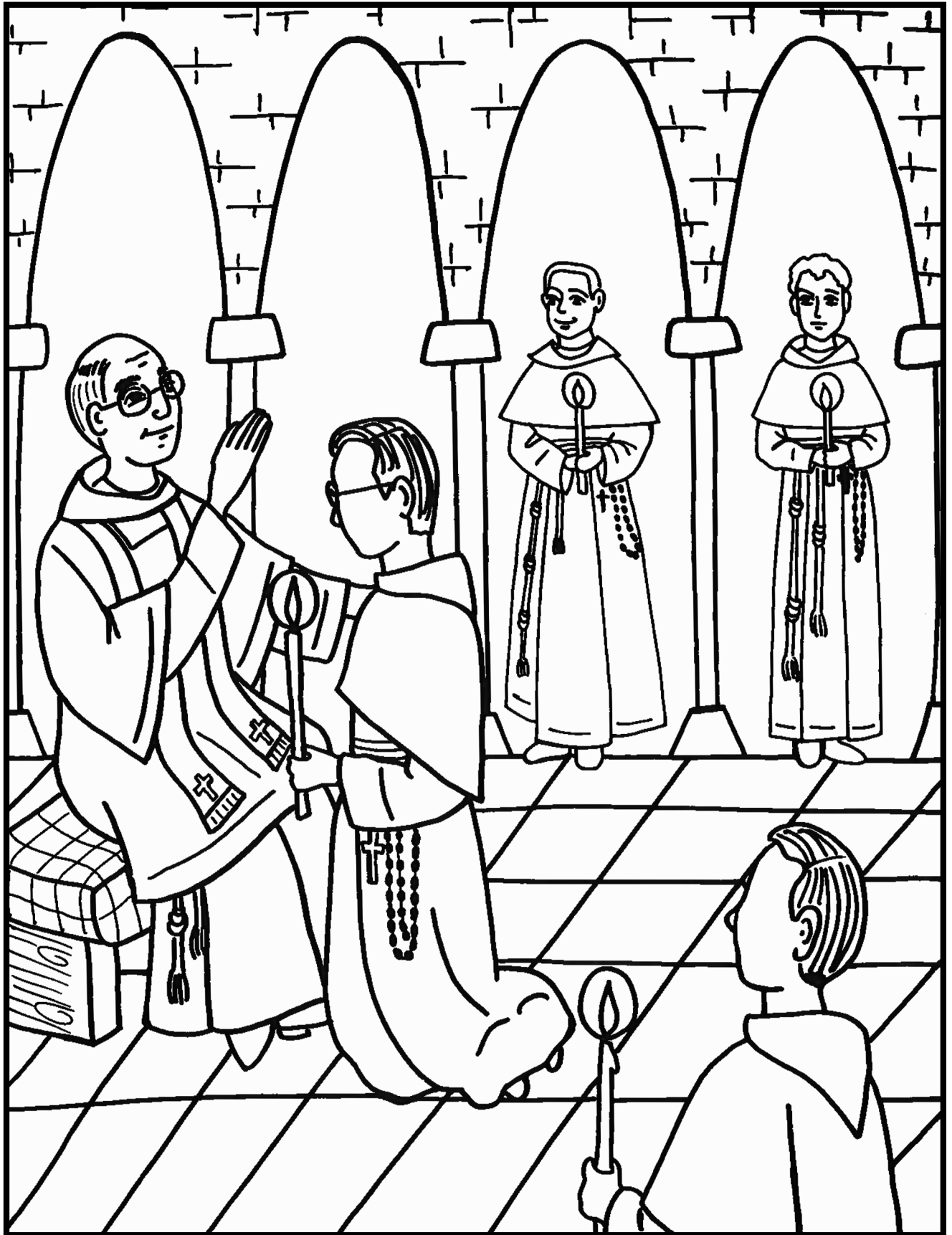


Raymond and his brother secretly go to seminary 15

Raymond prayed to Our Lady for help in making the right decision. Finally, he decided that as a priest he would be like a soldier of Jesus. He would fight against sin and evil in the world. That would be the best way for him to help people.

So after graduating from the high school seminary, Raymond joined the Franciscan Order. At a special Mass, he was given the black Franciscan robes and the religious name of Maximilian. But his friends just called him Max.

By his Franciscan promise to live a pure life, Max sought the white crown which Mary had held out to him as a boy. He was so very happy!

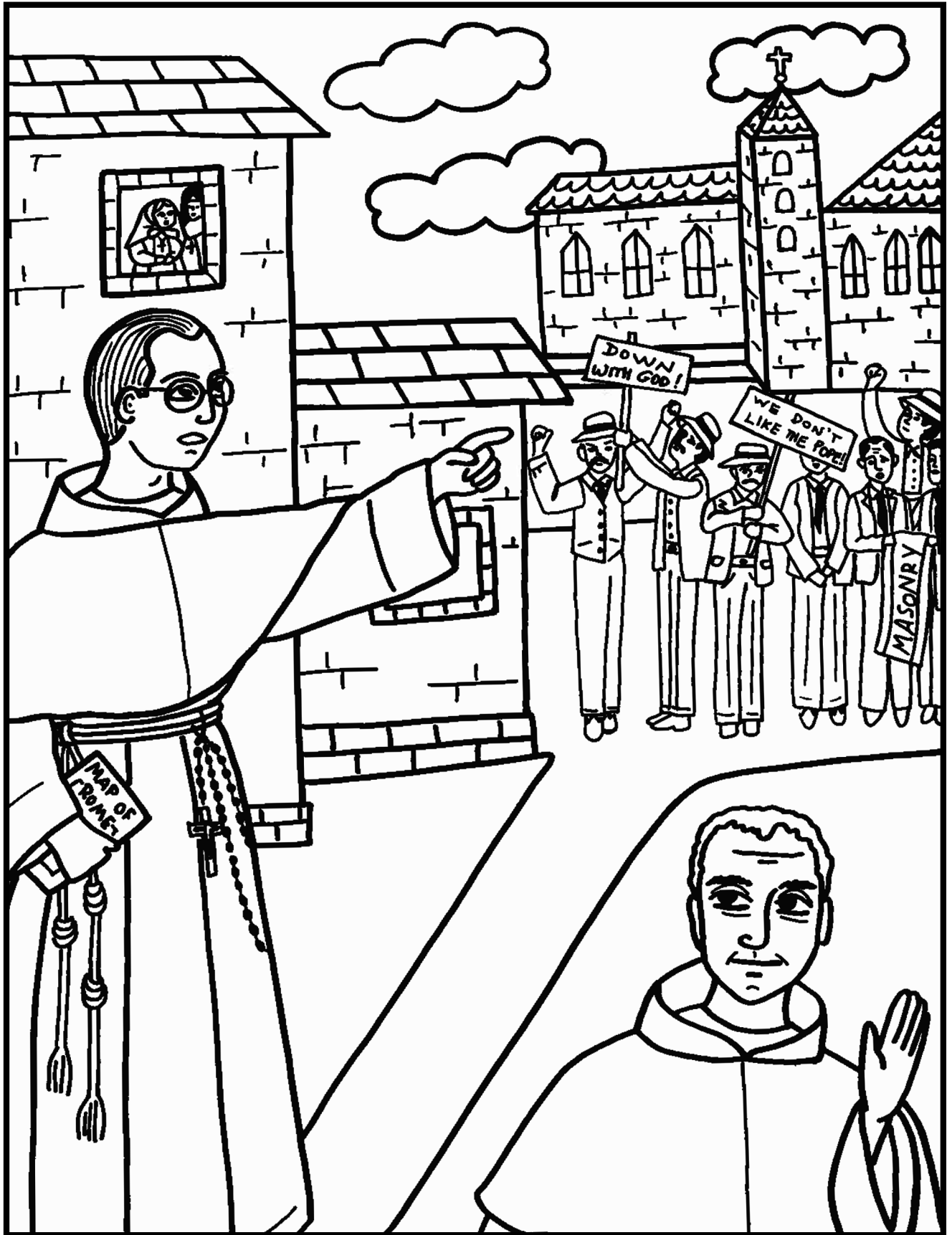


Becomes Maximilian, OFM Conv.

When it came time to go to college, Max was sent to study in Rome, Italy. He was so excited to go to this great city where the Pope lived!

Max spent many hours studying. But during his spare time he often went sight-seeing. There were so many wonderful things to see in Rome, like beautiful churches and wonderful museums!

One day, when Max and a friend were out for a walk, they saw a terrible sight. A crowd of angry people were gathered around the Holy Father's house. They were shouting horrible things and carrying signs that made fun of God and the Catholic religion!



Sees demonstration

Max became very sad. He decided to start a group of Catholics who would work and pray to help change these enemies of the Church into good Christians!

He chose Mary, the Mother of Jesus, to be the special helper of this group. He called it the MI, which are the initials for the Latin name of the Militia of the Immaculata.

Immaculata is another name for Mary. It means that she is full of God's love and never sinned. It reminds us that she is the holiest woman who ever lived.

The people who joined the MI were called Knights because they were to join Mary in the fight against evil and sin.

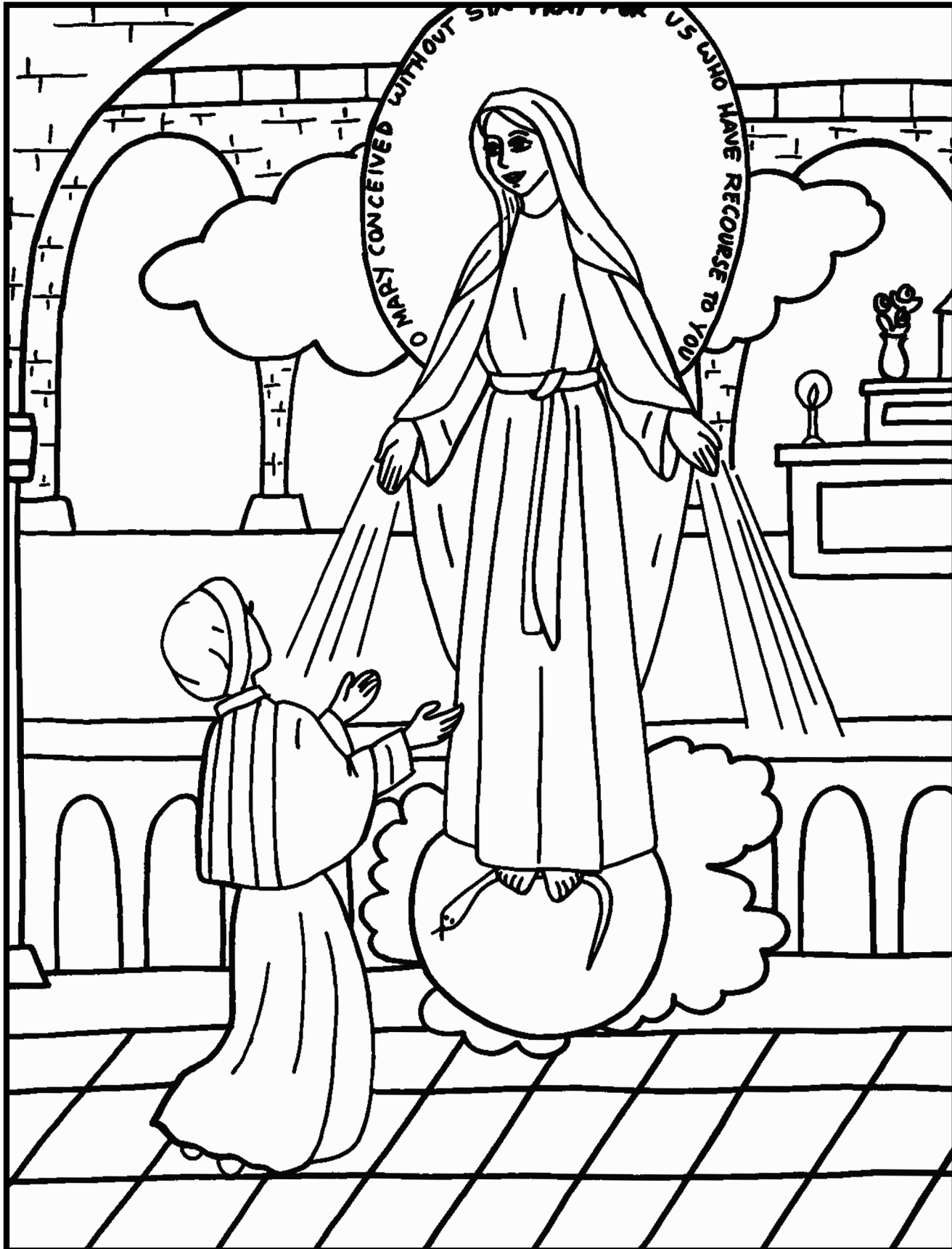


Looks to Mary

Max had heard two true stories that made him choose Mary to be the heavenly Queen of the MI.

One was the story of the Miraculous Medal. In the year 1830, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Catherine Laboure in Paris, France. Mary asked Sister Catherine to have a special medal made which would honor Our Lady's holiness and purity. She promised that God would work great wonders for those who wore this medal with faith in His mighty power.

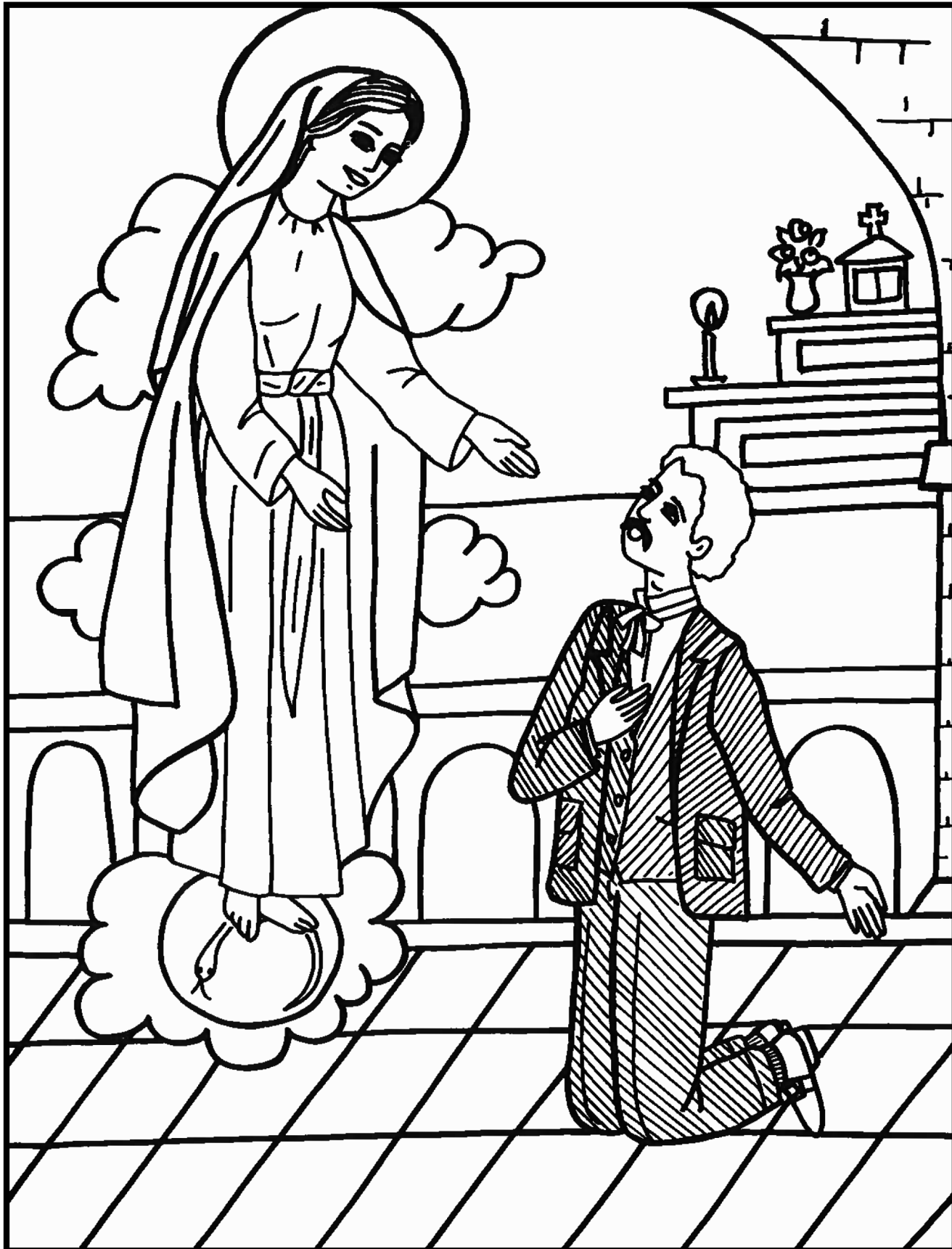
The medal was made and thousands of them were given to the people. So many conversions and miracles took place that it quickly became known as the Miraculous Medal.



Miraculous Medal

The second story was about the Miraculous Medal and a Jewish man named Alphonse Ratisbonne. He didn't like Catholics at all. He used to make fun of them all the time! But he accepted a Miraculous Medal as a gift from a friend who was praying very hard for his conversion.

One day, while looking at art work in a church, Alphonse saw a most beautiful woman surrounded by a dazzling light. As he looked closer he saw that it was Mary, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal! All at once his hatred for Christians was changed into a deep love for Jesus. Alphonse became a Catholic and went on to be ordained a priest!



Max thought a lot about these stories. They showed him how important Our Lady is and how powerful her prayers are. She always helps people to know and love Jesus, her Son.

The Knights of the Immaculata would help Mary bring others to Jesus. They would give the Miraculous Medal to people and ask Mary to pray for them.

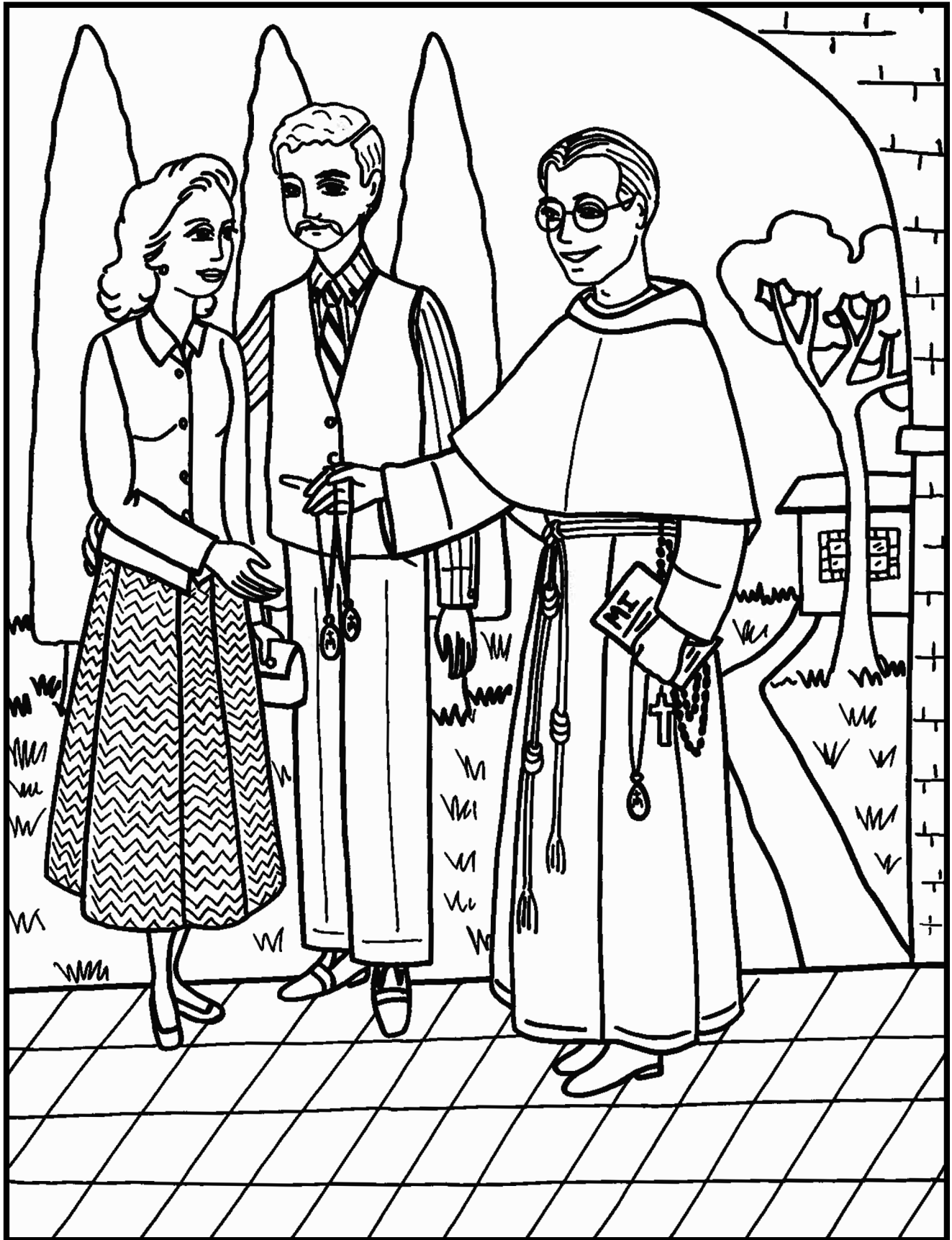
Max wrote a special prayer for the MI called the Act of Consecration to Mary. All the members would offer themselves to Our Lady by reciting this prayer. They wanted to live good Christian lives and spread the Good News about Jesus to everyone. They wanted to be like Mary and love Jesus with all their hearts.



On October 16, 1917, the first members of the MI met with Max in a little room. They wrote down a few simple rules for the Knights to follow.

Max continued with his studies and was ordained a priest. He was now called Father Kolbe. He returned to Poland, where he began to preach about the MI everywhere he went.

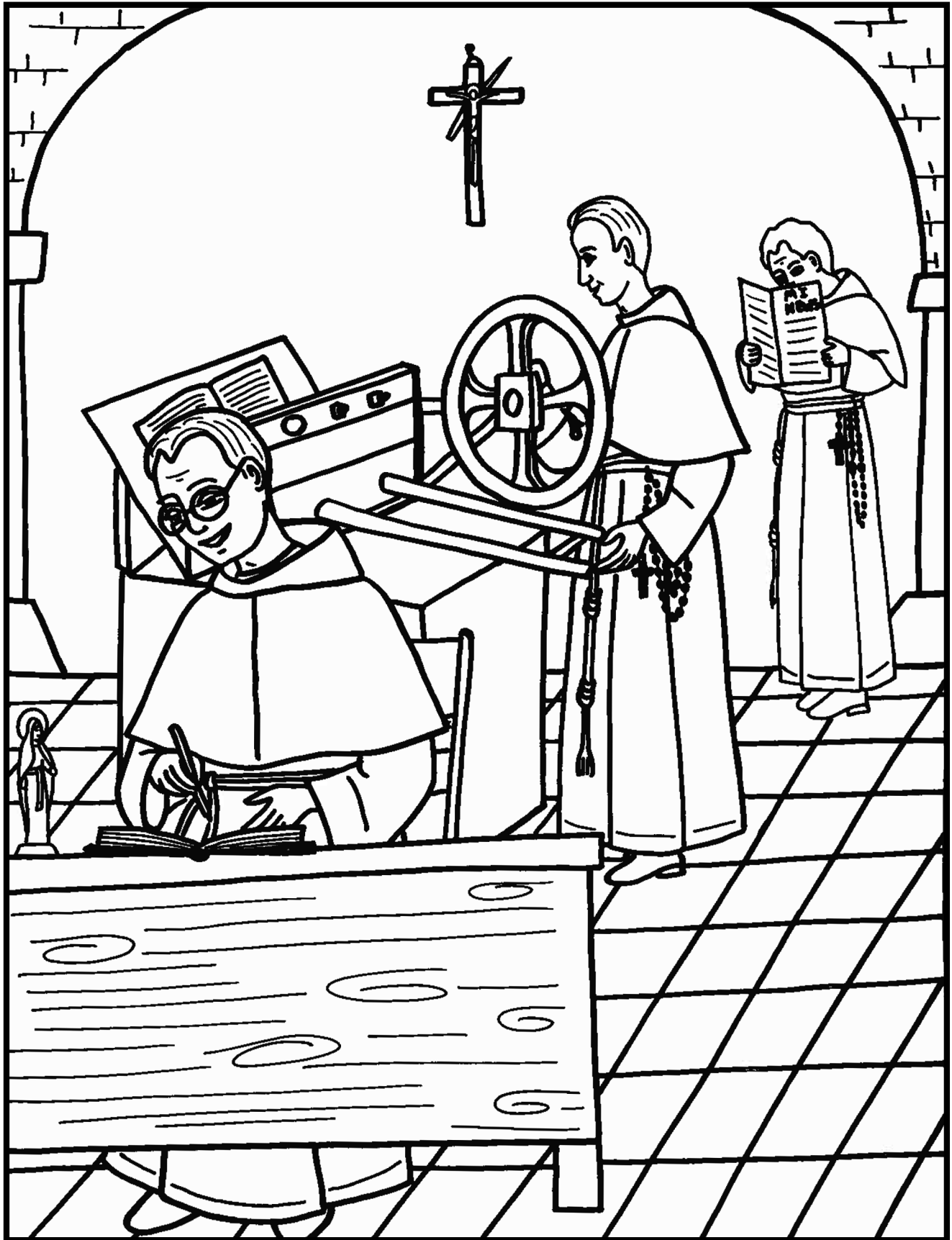
Father Kolbe gathered the Knights into little groups. Each had its own special work to do for Mary. Some spread the Good News in colleges. Others would speak about Jesus to the sick in hospitals. To help the members tell people about Mary, Max started a magazine called *The Knight of the Immaculata*.



Many Franciscans made their consecration to the Immaculata. Max decided to find a place where they could all live and work together to spread the MI.

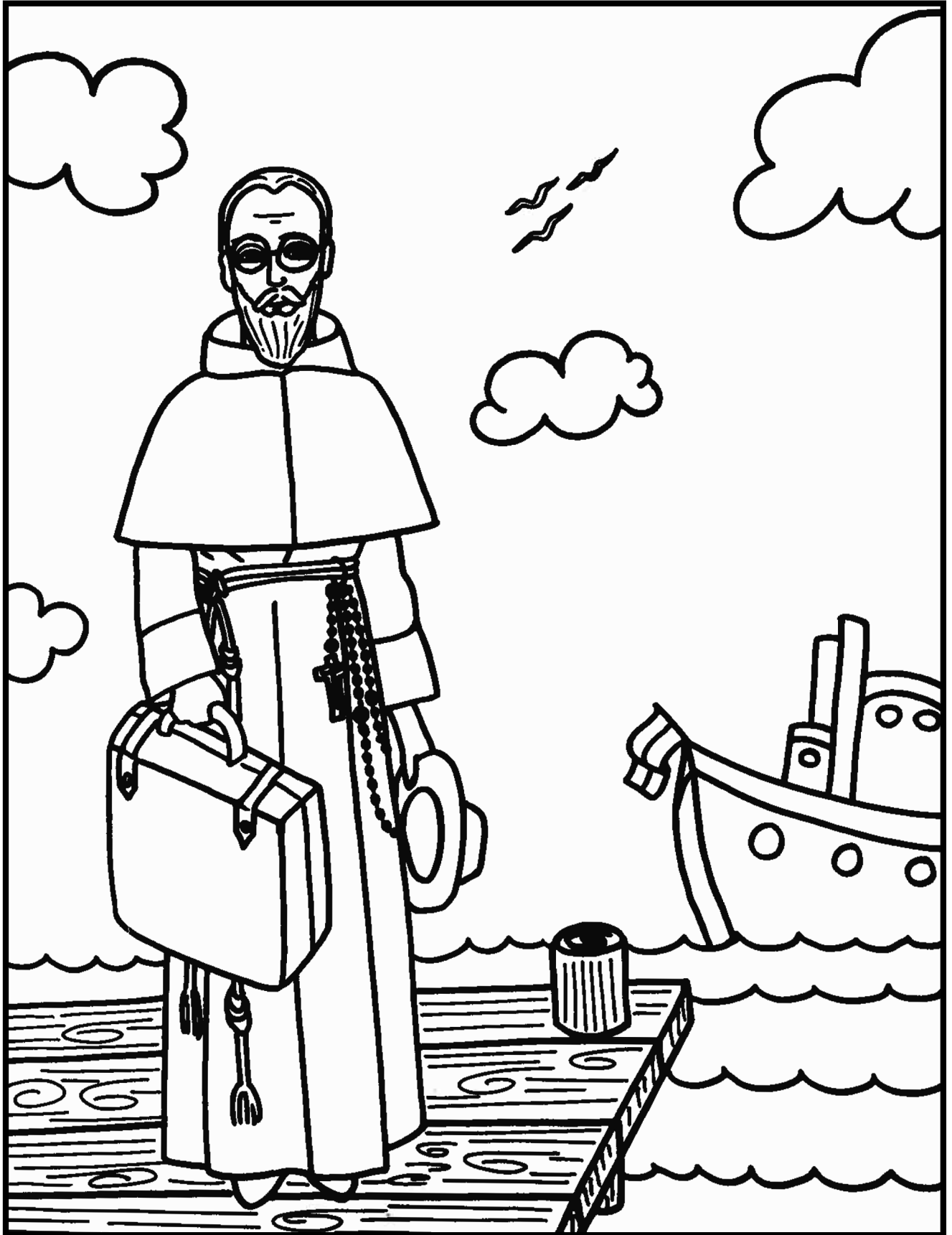
He searched all over and finally found a large piece of land. On it they built a chapel, some little houses, a large kitchen, and many workrooms where the MI magazine could be printed. Father Kolbe called this wonderful place the City of the Immaculata.

Besides printing the MI magazine, the Franciscans also published many religious booklets and newspapers. They even built a radio station so that the Good News could be preached to more people. They wanted everyone to know and love Jesus!



A few years later, Father Kolbe asked permission from his Superiors in order that he might go to foreign lands as a missionary. One day, along with some companions, he set sail for the land of Japan. Most of the people there had never even heard about God or the Blessed Virgin Mary. Max was so excited about becoming a missionary of the Immaculata. He wanted to spread the Good News about Jesus all over the world.

At first, the little group of Franciscan missionaries had nowhere to live and very little to eat. But they were very happy. Then Max found a job teaching at a Catholic seminary, and this brought in a little money. With some of this money they began publishing the MI magazine in Japanese and gave it away free to people.

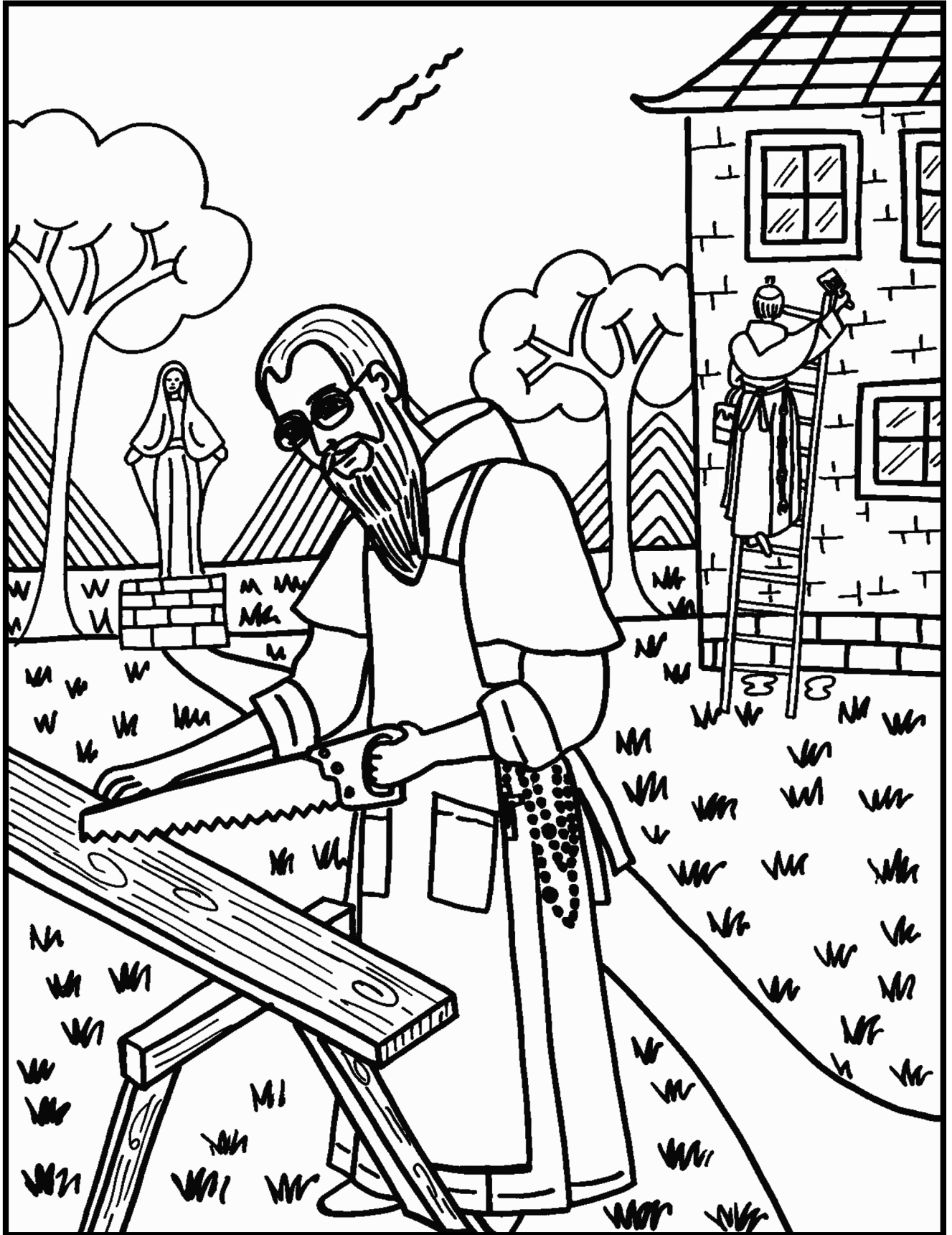


Missionary to Japan

Next, Father Kolbe decided to start a Japanese City of the Immaculata. First, he found some land in the mountains near the famous town of Nagasaki. Then he and his companions began building and painting.

They worked very hard and soon the new City, called the Garden of the Immaculata, was built. A statue of Mary was put up in a place of honor to show that she was its Queen. Many Japanese young men joined the missionaries and became Franciscans.

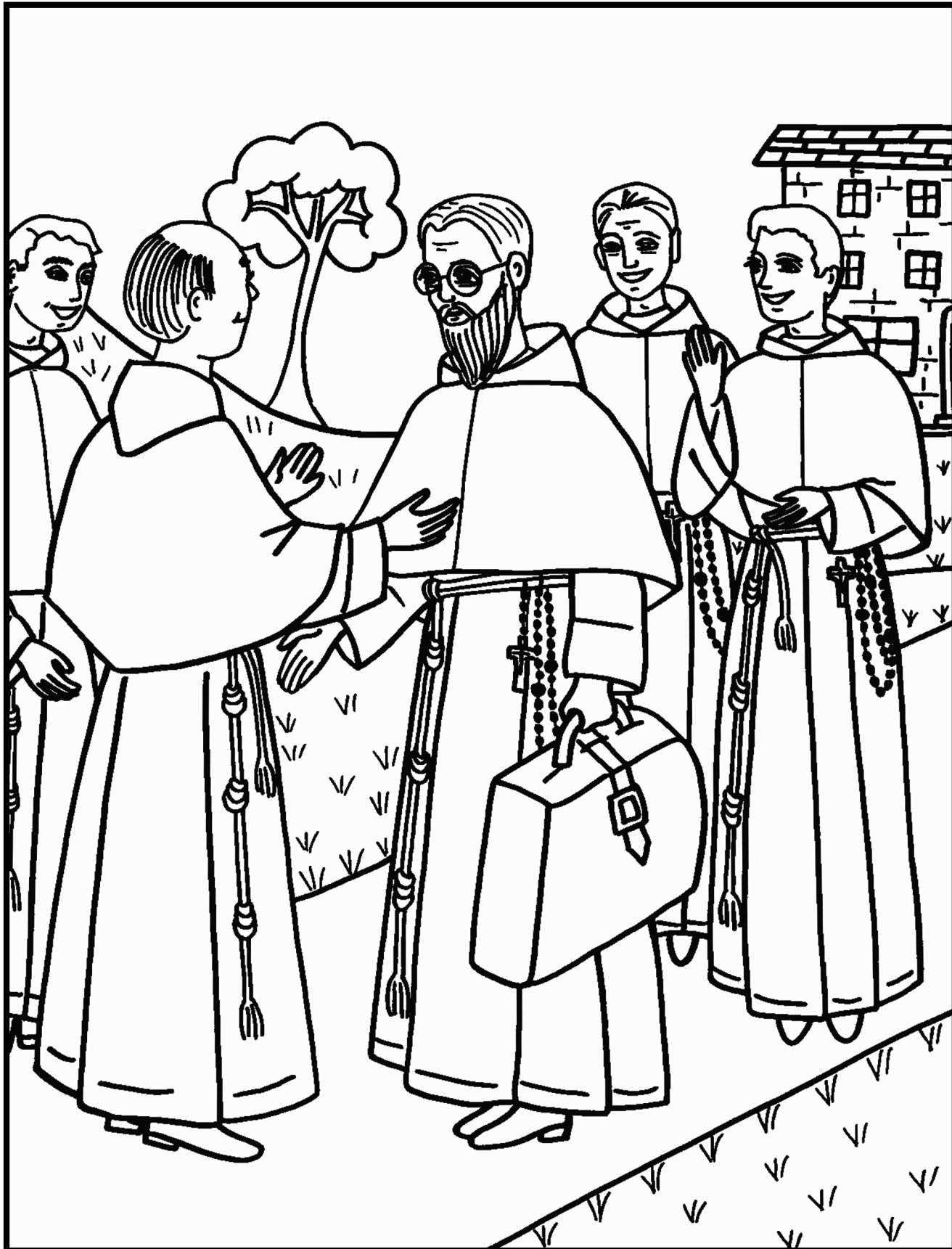
After several years in Japan, Father Kolbe was asked to return to Poland. The City of the Immaculata needed him to come back and take care of many things.



His brother Franciscans were so happy when Father Kolbe returned! They all loved him as much as they did their own fathers. As the years went by, Father Kolbe became very famous in Poland as a wise and holy priest.

With him as their leader, the Franciscans at the City of the Immaculata carried out many good works. Lots of young men joined them and soon it became the largest house of Franciscans in the world!

About this time, a horrible war broke out. It was called World War II. The enemy soldiers of this war were the German Nazis. They were very mean and hated lots of people, especially the Jewish people. They also hated everyone who opposed their evil plans.



Maximilian returns to Poland

Father Kolbe used to speak out against the evil ideas of the Nazis. He reminded people that God is the Father of every person, and that everyone belongs to one human family. Like Jesus, he wanted people to love their enemies.

This made the soldiers furious! They tried to destroy the City of the Immaculata. Father Kolbe was arrested and sent to one prison after another where he suffered much.

Finally, the Nazis sent him to the most horrible prison of all. It was called Auschwitz. People sent to this prison camp were treated worse than slaves. They were given very little food and forced to work all day long without any rest. Most of the prisoners died.



Maximilian is arrested

Even in this horrible death camp Father Kolbe spread the peace and love of Jesus. He secretly celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation and comforted the prisoners in their sufferings. Father told them to trust in God and in the prayers of the Immaculata. He wanted everyone to love the soldiers, even though they were very mean.

Father Kolbe shared his little bits of food with those who were hungrier than he. He did what he could to take care of the sick and dying. The prisoners were all amazed that he was so kind and loving in that place of hatred and death! Usually, even the nicest prisoners became very mean and selfish.



One day a prisoner escaped and the Nazis chose ten men to die by starvation as a punishment. When the last man was chosen he began to cry.

Suddenly, another prisoner stepped out of line. He went up to the soldier in charge and said, "I want to die in that poor man's place." No one could believe it. They wondered who this man was who loved others so much that he would give up his life for them. It was Father Kolbe!

Father and the other nine men were stripped of their clothes and locked up in a dark basement. None of them received any food or water at all! After two weeks, only Father Kolbe was still alive.

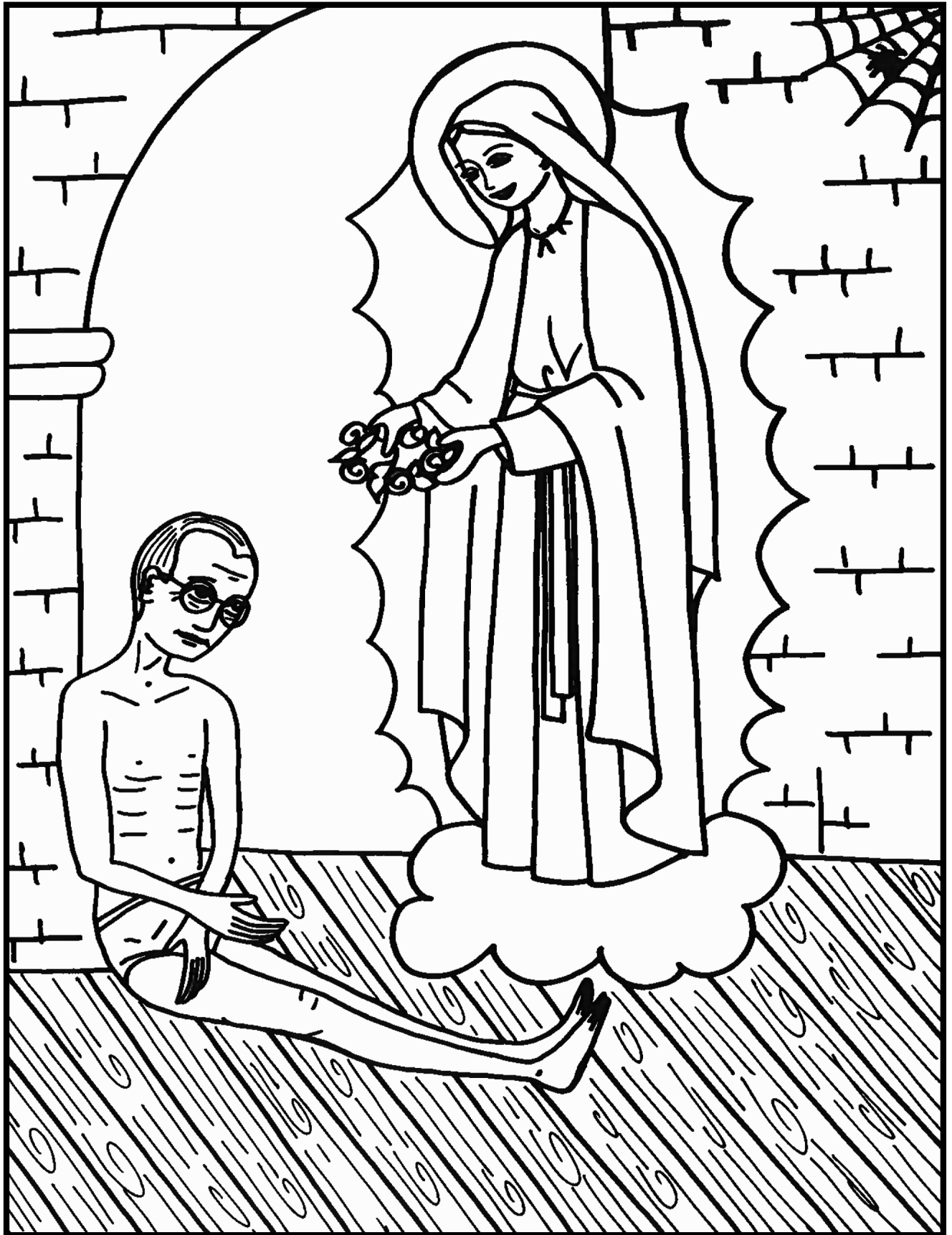


Maximilian offers his life

On August 14, 1941, the prison doctor went down into the dark basement. He gave Father Kolbe a shot of poison which killed him in an instant. He finally received that red martyr's crown, which the Immaculata had promised him so many years before.

After the war had ended, the story of Father Kolbe and his great love became known all over the world. People began praying to this brave Knight of the Immaculata. They were sure that he was in Heaven, for he had died as a martyr for Jesus.

As the years went on, other priests became leaders of the MI. It spread to many different lands and millions of people were taught about consecration to Mary.

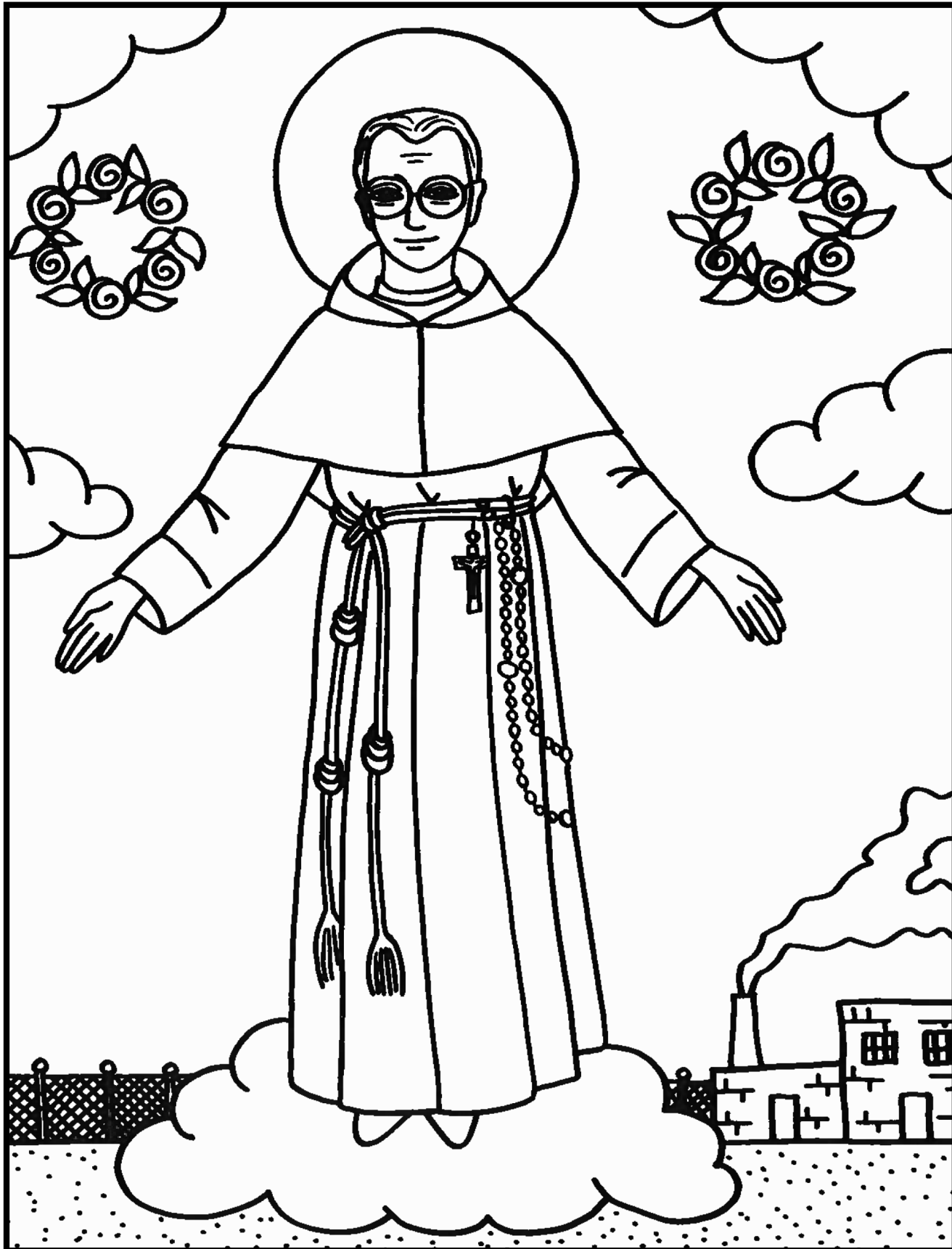


Martyrdom

On October 10, 1982, our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, declared Father Kolbe to be a saint and the church's first martyr of Christian love. He called him the special saint for our times.

Christians all over the world honor Saint Maximilian Kolbe and look up to him as a hero. They want to love Jesus as he did. They want to spread devotion to Mary among all people, too.

Saint Maximilian is in Heaven now with the Immaculata, whom he loved and served so well. He prays that everyone will love Mary and help her to spread the Good News among others. Will you?



St. Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!

The Militia of the Immaculata

St. Maximilian Kolbe in his desire for the highest sanctity and in his missionary spirit felt the immediacy of understanding the mystery of Mary and sharing this knowledge with mankind. He was convinced that a true knowledge of and total self-offering to her would in turn give birth to a dynamic Christian life, even to the highest level of sanctity.

This can be called the true Marian spirituality that gave birth to the Militia of the Immaculata movement (MI), which he founded in 1917. The Militia of the Immaculata is a universal movement with members from all walks of life. They strive to bring the presence of Mary into their daily life by living the spirit of total consecration to her. By offering up daily duties, prayers, sufferings, and good works, MI members collaborate with the Immaculata for the evangelization and sanctification of the whole world.

Catholics who would like to belong to this ecclesial association may ask to be enrolled in one of the MI centers. On the fixed date, after due preparation, one recites the prayer of consecration to the Immaculata, which should be renewed frequently.

The wearing of the Miraculous Medal, a sign of one's consecration, is a reminder that we are children and apostles of Mary.

The Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata

St. Maximilian's Marian-missionary legacy was also the primary inspiration for the establishment of the Institute of the Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata. It is a secular institute for consecrated women, founded in 1954 by Fr. Luigi Faccenda, O.F.M. Conv. The Missionaries received pontifical approval on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 1992.

The Missionaries profess the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience and strive to live the total offering of self to the Immaculata, following the example of St. Maximilian.

Five years after their first profession, they consecrate themselves to God with perpetual vows. They promise filial obedience to the Catholic Church and its Magisterium.

As secular, consecrated women they fulfill their consecration to God by living in the world, without belonging to it. They may live alone, with their own families, or in community, striving to be in the world a living presence of Mary, the model of the consecrated lay woman.

The Institute carries out its mission of evangelization and promotion of human values in every environment and social class, without distinction of land or nation. By promoting the knowledge and love of Mary, the Missionaries contribute to the Christian formation of people and foster the return to God of those far from Him.

Literature on Saint Maximilian Kolbe's life and spirituality can be obtained from any of the following centers:

UNITED STATES

Fr. Kolbe Missionaries of the Immaculata

Spes Nostra MI Center
531 East Merced Avenue
West Covina, California 91790
(626)917-0040

ITALY

Missionarie dell'Immacolata "P. Kolbe"

40044 Borgonuovo di Pontecchio Marconi Bologna
(051)84.50.02 I 84.56.07

ARGENTINA

Misioneras de la Inmaculada "P. Kolbe"

cc 311
7400 Olavarria Buenos Aires
(0284) 20.997

BOLIVIA

Misioneras de la Inmaculada "P. Kolbe"

CC3
Montero Santa Cruz
(092)21.331

LUXEMBOURG

Missionnaires de l'Immaculee, P. Kolbe

Presbitere Hollerich
130, Route d'Esch
L-1471 Luxembourg
(00352) 48.19.98

Raymond's Two Crowns tells you the exciting story of a hero of our time: St. Maximilian Kolbe. He was a Franciscan friar, a missionary, and a great lover of Our Lady. In a world of hatred, he chose to love and die out of love for others. Pope John Paul II calls him “the patron of our most difficult times.”

“The Immaculata is our Mother
because Jesus gave her to us.
My child,
love her as your Mother,
with all your heart.
She will make you pure
like herself.
She will nourish you
with the milk of grace...
and you will become holy!”

– *St. Maximilian Kolbe*



Immaculata Press