



OPTIONAL 33-DAY PREPARATION FOR MARIAN CONSECRATION **with the booklet *BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER!***

If you wish to use a 33-day format in preparing for your consecration to the Immaculata, please follow the plan below:

Day 1

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful
and kindle in them the fire of your love.
Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created.
and You shall renew the face of the earth.
O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,
Grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise
and ever enjoy His consolations.
Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

Dear Knights of the Immaculata and Friends preparing for total consecration, Maria! The International office of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI) has provided a program of preparation for total consecration to the Immaculata, which MI-USA has published in a booklet format. This booklet shows the path that individuals, MI Villages and groups may follow for total consecration and ongoing formation. In preparing this booklet, quotes were taken from the two-volume set of letters and various writings of our founder, St. Maximilian Kolbe. Careful and sagacious thought went into preparing the principal text and the questions for reflection to help us along the correct path. As we follow the path of total consecration to our Blessed Mother, we are brought into the spiritual ideals that St. Maximilian envisioned for the Militia of the Immaculata. His goal was that all Mary's Knights become saints in her loving arms. This path leads us through Mary closer to the Sacred Heart of her Son Jesus Christ and to His Church, and encourages us to win the whole world for Him through her Immaculate Heart. As we begin our journey and preparation to become Knights of the Immaculata, let us recall the many Saints who consecrated themselves to Our Lady in their trials and quest for holiness. Above all, let us try to resemble Mary, the perfect disciple of her Son. I sincerely believe that this booklet is a precious gift that will guide you and keep you on the straight and narrow path to holiness. May Mother Mary rest in your hearts and enlighten you along the way.

Ronald L. Rodrigues
MI National President – USA

St. Maximilian Kolbe and the Militia of the Immaculata

St. Maximilian Kolbe was born in Poland in 1894 and at about the age of 10 had a vision of the Virgin Mary. She offered him a white crown and a red crown, representing purity and martyrdom. He chose both, a foreshadowing of his life of evangelical purity and sacrificial love. In 1910, he joined the Conventual Franciscan Order. He studied in Rome where, on October 16, 1917, with six other young friars he founded the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), which is now an International Public Association of the Faithful, erected by the Holy See. The MI is open to Catholics of all walks of life and promotes total consecration to Mary Immaculate as a most effective way to live one's Baptism and Confirmation. The MI encourages all people of goodwill to welcome Our Lady in their lives and develop a trusting relationship with her. The aim of the MI is "to win the whole world for Christ through the Immaculata," Mother of God and of the Church. Ordained a priest in 1918, Father Maximilian returned to Poland and began his untiring missionary activity, starting a monthly magazine and establishing two evangelization centers dedicated to the Immaculate Virgin: Niepokalanów, the "City of the Immaculata," in Poland, and Mugenzai no Sono in Japan. He envisioned missionary centers worldwide. To better "win the world for Christ through the Immaculata," he utilized the most modern techniques, including short-wave radio, and planned to build a motion picture studio. In 1939, during WWII, at Niepokalanów Father Maximilian welcomed thousands of refugees, especially Jews. In 1941, he was arrested by the Nazis and taken to the Auschwitz concentration camp. There he offered his life for another prisoner and was condemned to slow death in a starvation bunker. Father Kolbe died on August 14, 1941, from an injection of carbolic acid. Pope St. John Paul II canonized him as a Saint and Martyr of Charity on October 10, 1982. St. Maximilian Kolbe is considered a patron of journalists, families, prisoners, the pro-life movement, the chemically addicted and those with eating disorders. St. Maximilian's insights on the Immaculate Conception anticipated the Marian theology of the Second Vatican Council and further developed the Church's understanding of Mary's role in God's Plan of salvation. His Marian thought re-echoes in the Marian teaching of both St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Closing Prayer

Hail Mary...

O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you, and for all those who do not have recourse to you, especially the enemies of Holy Church and all those recommended to you.

Day 2

Opening Prayer

From the Gospel according to St. John

Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his

mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. After this, aware that everything was now finished, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I thirst." There was a vessel filled with common wine. So they put a sponge soaked in wine on a sprig of hyssop and put it up to his mouth. When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, "It is finished." And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit. Now since it was the preparation day, in order that the bodies might not remain on the cross on the sabbath, for the sabbath day of that week was a solemn one, the Jews asked Pilate that their legs be broken and they be taken down. So the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and then of the other one who was crucified with Jesus. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs, but one soldier thrust his lance into his side, and immediately blood and water flowed out. An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows that he is speaking the truth, so that you also may (come to) believe. (Jn 19:25-35)

At the School of the Word: Lectio Divina on Jn 19:25-27

We access the heart of Kolbean spirituality and consecration to the Immaculata by placing ourselves at the school of the word of God. The most emblematic text of Scripture for our purpose is certainly John 19:25-27. St. Maximilian also referred to this text, admiring the loving plan of God and dwelling on the exuberant gift of God's love, which is represented by the Mother. "Another gift yet..." he wrote, a gift that comes from the pure gratuity of the heart of God in Christ. This is what St. Maximilian said: "Who would dare to imagine?...What could You have given me more, O God, after having offered Yourself to me to become mine? ...Your heart, inflamed with love for me, suggested to You another gift; yes, yet one more gift! ...You asked us to become children, if we wish to enter the heavenly kingdom. You well know that a child needs a mother. You Yourself established this law of love. Your goodness, Your mercy, therefore, created for us a Mother, the personification of Your goodness and infinite love. From the cross, on Golgotha, You offered her to us and us to her..." (KW 1145). Let's read with St. Maximilian the source of this gift, there at Calvary, with Mary and John, to grasp the meaning of this event for us today... Lectio on Jn 19:25-27 The context is solemn. We are at the culmination of the life of Christ, when Jesus fully revealed His glory. He is on the Cross, the cross that raises Him to heaven and from which He draws all people to Himself (cf. Jn 12:32). It is the fulfillment of our salvation, the heart of the paschal mystery of Christ, the moment of the supreme gift of love: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (Jn 3:16). The Father manifested that love through the gift of His Son in the Incarnation, and that mystery now culminates in the gift of His life for us. In this solemn context occurs the gift of the Mother, the penultimate act, we might say, of His giving Himself for our salvation. At verse 30, the Evangelist tells us: "When Jesus had taken the wine, he said, 'It is finished.' And bowing his head, he handed over the spirit."

In this solemn context, the entrusting is of great value: the gift of the Mother is part of what Jesus was to accomplish. It seems that all is finished after the entrusting of the disciple to the Mother and the Mother to the disciple. v. 25: We find four women at Calvary, among whom the "Mother of Jesus" stands out, and John refers to her using that title. Also in Cana he calls her by that title. v. 26-27: In these verses we have what scholars call a "detection scheme": Jesus sees - He says - Look... We find this scheme again in John's Gospel, where John the Baptist sees Jesus coming and says: "Look, the Lamb of God" (cf. Jn 1:29-30; Jn 1:36). This literary scheme reveals the mission of the indicated

character. Therefore in the passage of the Cross, Jesus explains to the Mother what her mission is: to be the mother of the disciple.

Closing Prayer

Day 3

Opening Prayer

But who is the “beloved disciple”?

It is the one who receives the word and obeys the commandments of Jesus; that is, the one who loves as He loved. Here, then, the disciple represents all the disciples of the Lord. The “beloved disciple” can be you or me: each of us is loved by Jesus. Mary’s motherhood, which began at the Annunciation, assumes at Calvary a universal dimension. Since then, as the Second Vatican Council teaches, Mary takes care of the brethren of her Son (cf. LG 62), who became from that moment her own children. Yes, from “that hour,” as it is written in the Gospel of John. It is the hour of the Cross, the hour of the manifestation of the glory of Christ, the hour of salvation, the heart of the paschal mystery of Christ itself. What happens from that hour on? “The disciple took her into his home.” This is the consecration to Mary: Welcoming the gift of Christ! John takes Mary into his home, among his own things, into his inner life space, as St. John Paul II says (RM 45). This gift also concerns us today. Every disciple of the Lord, on the day of one’s Baptism, together with the gifts of Christ receives the gift of the Mother. To consecrate oneself to Mary does not mean, therefore, to “create” the gift, to make up something. The gift is a gift, is free and unmerited and remains so even if we are not conscious of it. Mary always exercises her motherhood, whether we are aware or not. What we can do is accept the gift of the Mother, like all gifts of Christ. To accept her, as John did; to take Mary into our life, to live this mother-child relationship with gratitude and awareness.

As St. John Paul II continues:

“It means accepting – like John – the one who is given to us anew as our Mother. It also means taking on the commitment to be conformed to Christ, putting ourselves at the school of His Mother and allowing her to accompany us” (Ecclesia de Eucharistia 57). There is another passage that encourages us to take Mary with us. It is a text from the Gospel of Matthew: “Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her” (Mt 1:20). It is the invitation of the angel to Joseph, while he had decided to divorce her quietly. This motherhood comes from the Spirit; it is a gift of the Spirit. This is true of Mary’s motherhood of Jesus and of her spiritual motherhood of us. “She will bear a son...,” said the angel to Joseph. That is what the spiritual motherhood of Mary is: to give birth to Jesus within us.

Closing Prayer

Day 4

Opening Prayer

This is the motherhood of Mary: to form Jesus in us.

St. John Paul II recalled it very well on several occasions, when, speaking to young people, he invited them to take Mary into their lives: “She will discharge her ministry as a mother and train you and mold you until Christ is fully formed in you” (Message, *Behold Your Mother*, for the XVIII World Youth Day, April 13, 2003, n. 3). St. Maximilian in turn invites us to live the consecration to Mary with this awareness: “In Mary’s womb our soul must be reborn after the form of Jesus Christ. She is bound to feed the soul with the milk of her grace, raise it as lovingly as she nourished, looked after, and raised Jesus. At her knee the soul must learn to know and love Jesus. From her Heart it must draw love toward Him, or even love Him with her heart and become like Him through love” (KW 1295).

St. Maximilian suggested a truly beautiful program. We should not worry about taking Mary into our lives, if it’s about experiencing this kind of motherhood that causes us to conform to Christ, to become similar to Him in love, the only commandment of the Lord! There is another very inspiring passage from St. Maximilian’s Writings that reveals a still deeper meaning of consecration to Mary: “That is the MI: to let her into all hearts, to bring her into being within all hearts, that by entering those hearts and taking most perfect possession of them, she may there give birth to the sweet Jesus, God, and there raise Him to perfect age. What a beautiful mission! ... Is that not true? ... The elevation of man to the God-Man, through the Mother of God-Man” (KW 508). This text adds something new. Welcoming Mary in our lives is to accept and experience her motherhood in us with full consciousness, but inside this awareness we find not only the acceptance of the spiritual motherhood of Mary, but also the willingness to become collaborators of her motherhood toward every man. This is the rich and original interpretation of Father Kolbe! The motherhood of Mary is not just given to us, it is also entrusted to us. Having experienced her motherhood, today we can become her collaborators. The evangelizing action of the Church is precisely the extension of the maternal mission of Mary. The MI is “to let her into all hearts” so that she can exercise her spiritual motherhood: “What a beautiful mission, is that not true?” says St. Maximilian!

Question for discussion:

- What is the role of Mary in the history of salvation and in my personal history?

Closing Prayer

Day 5

Opening Prayer

Consecration to the Immaculata: In the Heart of the Trinity, with Our Gaze Fixed on Christ

The gift of the Mother, entrusting and consecrating ourselves to Mary, our belonging to her, are in themselves a gift of the Most Holy Trinity.

The Father reveals all His love for us in the Son's sacrifice on the Cross. The Spirit makes the gift of the Crucified Christ alive and present. The love that the Father manifested in Christ is offered to us by the Holy Spirit, Who remains forever in the Church.

The motherhood of Mary, therefore, is also offered to us by the Holy Spirit. As her physical motherhood is a work of the Spirit ("What has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit"), so her spiritual motherhood is from the Holy Spirit.

Then it is a gift of the Trinity, but it also refers to the Trinity. Consecration to Mary has the Trinity as its goal and as its ultimate reference, because the whole Christian life is related to the Trinity. Mary herself is entirely related to the Trinity: "She is the Mother of the Son of God, beloved daughter of the Father, the Temple of the Holy Spirit" (LG 53).

St. Maximilian cared very much about the Trinitarian dimension of consecration to Mary, because everything that happened to Mary is a work of the Holy Trinity. Mary lived a unique experience of the action of the Most Holy Trinity in her life at the moment of the Annunciation:

"The One and Triune God looked upon the low estate of his handmaiden and 'He who is mighty' works in her 'great things'. God the Father entrusts to her, as a son, His own Son, God the Son enters into her womb, while the Holy Spirit molds the Body of Christ in the womb of the most pure Virgin. 'And the Word was made flesh' (Jn 1:14). The Immaculata becomes Mother of God. Christ, God-Man, is the fruit of the love of the One and Triune God and of Mary Immaculate" (KW 1295).

It is important to understand that, in the light of Father Kolbe's considerations, the profound relationship between Mary and the Trinity is the reason why our consecration to her implies to begin an itinerary that leads us to the encounter with the Most Holy Trinity.

Closing Prayer

Day 6

Opening Prayer

Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit and in her life she was always docile to the action of the Spirit.

Consecration/entrustment to Mary, therefore, becomes trusting in the divine Presence. In the Holy Spirit. Mary takes care of me, of us, the world. My life and that of the world are in good hands. In the hands of the Spirit, first of all, and of this Mother, who exercises her motherhood by the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit who associates Mary to Himself in the work of sanctification of men. The "motherhood in the order of grace" (LG 61) that Mary exercises in the Church is in the Holy Spirit. Even today, like that day at the foot of the Cross, we receive the gift of this motherhood thanks to the Holy Spirit, as we have already pointed out.

Mary, for her part, from the moment of the Annunciation, was always docile to the action of the Spirit. St. Luke emphasizes a usual attitude of Mary who “treasured all these things in her heart...” (Lk 2:19, 51). Mary accomplished it in the Holy Spirit, in Whom the Word is alive. The first attitude in living out our consecration to Mary is precisely to listen to the word in total availability, trust, and surrender to the Spirit.

“Let yourself be led... by the Holy Spirit. Let yourself be led by the Holy Spirit through the Immaculata” (KW 987 C), as St. Maximilian reminded himself, in a text that speaks of consecration to Mary as surrender into the hands of Mary and docility to the work that the Spirit accomplishes in us through her.

Mary is the beloved daughter of the Father, as it was written in the text of the Second Vatican Council. We see in her the fully realized plan of God for His creatures: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.... He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself,” as Paul writes in the Epistle to the Ephesians (1:3-5). In this sense, Mary is the beloved daughter of the Father, because He accomplished first of all in her the dream that He had for all of us, making her holy and immaculate in love. Contemplating this mystery, St. Maximilian wrote that: “The Immaculata is ... the ultimate limit between God and creation. She is a faithful image of God’s perfection, of His sanctity” (KW 1232). Mary’s life is under the sign of the gratuitous love of the Father from the beginning of her existence. Mary feels all its intensity when with grateful astonishment and singing to her God she exclaims: “He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant” (Lk 1:48). This ocean of love that inundates her from the first instant of her conception, becomes a river of love that grows in the following of her own Son, and which will reach its climax under the Cross. There, at the foot of the Cross and conformed to her Son in love (Phil 2:5), she received every man for whom He offered Himself and whom He was asking her to embrace as her child.

From this attitude of love and acceptance of Mary’s motherhood, arises another fundamental attitude in living our consecration to the Immaculata: love. It is love that conforms us, as it did her, to her Son.

Closing Prayer

Day 7

Opening Prayer

With Our Gaze Fixed on Christ

Mary is especially *the Mother of God*, and then in this entrustment/consecration to her the relationship with Christ is essential. We already saw it in the previous reflection, but now we come back to it, because it is very important.

The goal of consecration to Mary is growth in faith in Christ the Lord.

Mary is entirely relative to Christ. The words that Mary said to the servants at Cana are the words that she repeats to each of us: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:1-12).

Mary did first what Jesus said. In her life we find the accomplished model of the disciple of the Lord: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice” (Lk 8:21). Jesus points to the life of Mary as a life fully conformed to His word. Mary, for this intimate union with the entire life of the Son, in obedience to the will of the Father, invites us to turn our gaze to Him. She reminds us that He is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6). “Do whatever he tells you” is her own sharing of a life experience that takes place in the service of love for Christ; of a life that finds its sense in conformity to Him and that experiences existentially the union of branch to the vine (Jn 15:1 ff.).

Mary expresses her motherhood toward us by showing us the Son, wishing our conformity to Him. St. Maximilian reminds us that Mary aims at making us reach the stature of Christ. She wants us to shine with His beauty.

Consecration to Mary therefore is not just a devotion, an idea, but a path of conformity to Christ. It means to walk with Mary toward Christ, centering more and more our life in Him. From that arises a life commitment: the communion with Christ and the conformity to Him up to the total gift of ourselves, as St. Maximilian did. In him the most challenging words of the Gospel became reality: love for enemies and, above all, the greatest love: “to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (Jn 15:13), which is exactly what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

Closing Prayer

Day 8

Opening Prayer

Consecration to Mary as taught by St. Maximilian Kolbe is a Christ-centered experience.

It is not centered on Mary, but on Christ, as St. Paul VI emphasized in the homily for Fr. Kolbe’s beatification, on October 17, 1971: “Maximilian Kolbe was an apostle of the veneration of the Blessed Virgin, seen in her first, original privileged splendor, as she defined herself at Lourdes: the Immaculate Conception. It is impossible to separate the name, the activity and the mission of Blessed Kolbe from that of Mary Immaculate. It was he who instituted the Militia of the Immaculata here in Rome, even before he was ordained a priest, on October 16, 1917. We can commemorate its anniversary today.

“It is well known how the humble and meek Franciscan with incredible audacity and extraordinary organizational genius developed the initiative and spread devotion to the Mother of Christ, contemplated as ‘clothed with the sun’ (cf. Rev 12:1). This devotion was the focal point of his spirituality, his apostolate and his theology.

“Let no hesitation restrain our admiration and commitment to all that our new Blessed had left us as a heritage and an example, as if we too were distrustful of such an exaltation of Mary in view of

two other theological movements, the Christological and ecclesiological, which seem to compete today with the Mariological. On the contrary, there is no competition, for in Father Kolbe's Mariology, Christ holds not only the first place but the only necessary and sufficient place in the economy of salvation. His love of the Church and its salvific mission was never forgotten either in his doctrinal outlook or in his apostolic aim. On the contrary, it is precisely from Our Lady's complementary, subordinate role in regard to Christ's universal, saving design for man that she derives all of her prerogatives and greatness.

"How well we know it! And Kolbe, in accord with the whole of Catholic doctrine, the whole liturgy and the entire theology of the interior life, sees Mary included in God's plan of salvation as the 'term fixed by eternal counsel,' as the woman filled with grace, as the Seat of Wisdom, as the woman destined from eternity to be the Mother of Christ, as the Queen of the Messianic Kingdom, and at the same time as the Handmaid of the Lord, chosen to participate in the Redemptive Act as Mother of the God Man, our Savior. 'Mary is the one through whose intercession men reach Jesus and the one through whom Jesus reaches men' (L. Bouver: *Le trone de la Sagesse*, p. 69).

"Therefore our Blessed is not to be reprov'd, nor the Church with him, because of their enthusiasm for the formal religious veneration of the Mother of God. This veneration with its rites and practices will never fully achieve the level it merits, nor the benefits it can bring precisely because of the mystery that unites her to Christ, and which finds fascinating documentation in the New Testament. The result will never be a 'Mariolatry,' just as the sun will never be darkened by the moon; nor will the mission of salvation specifically entrusted to the ministry of the Church ever be distorted if the latter honors in Mary an exceptional Daughter and a Spiritual Mother. The characteristic aspect, if you like, and the original quality of Blessed Kolbe's devotion, of his 'hyperdulia' to Mary, is the importance he attributes to it with regard to the present needs of the Church, the efficacy of her prophecy about the glory of the Lord and the vindication of the humble, the power of her intercession, the splendor of her exemplariness, the presence of her maternal charity. The Council confirmed us in these certainties, and now from heaven Father Kolbe is teaching us and helping us to meditate upon them and live them. This Marian profile of our new Blessed places him among the great saints and seers who have understood, venerated and sung the mystery of Mary."

Closing Prayer

Day 9

Opening Prayer

Consecration to the Immaculata: With Mary in the Church

Let us continue our itinerary of preparation, or deepening, for our consecration to the Immaculata in the MI, turning to what we call the ecclesial dimension of the consecration to the Immaculata.

With Mary in the Cenacle

At the foot of the Cross, the scene described by John 19:25-27 presents Mary as she was entrusted to us as a mother by the dying Redeemer. At Cana the Mother says: "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5).

We will focus our attention on the nascent Church gathered with Mary, waiting for the Holy Spirit, after the Resurrection (Acts 1:14).

Mary appears intimately united to the Church that lives in history, then as at all times: in prayer, in communion and mission. We cannot separate Mary from the Church.

The mystery of the one merges with that of the other. The Fathers of the Church had already emphasized in their reflections the intimate bond that joins Mary to the Church. St. Ambrose, in particular, stated that everything that in Scripture is said about Mary can be said about the Church and all that is said about the Church can also be said about Mary. Mary is the model, the image, the anticipation of the Church. The Second Vatican Council gave a particular emphasis to the relationship between Mary and the Church, particularly in relation to her virginal motherhood.

As Mary is the Mother who virginally generates the Son of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, so also the Church is the mother who generates the children of God by the Spirit through preaching and Baptism. And Mary is not only the model of the Church, but in fact, she cooperates in the rebirth of the faithful in the Church and continues to play a maternal role within the Church.

Closing Prayer

Day 10

Opening Prayer

At the Annunciation

Mary, at the Annunciation, accepted the word of God and heard that: "*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...*" (Lk 1:35).

The Church shares the same experience at Pentecost. Mary and the disciples receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and from that moment the maternity of the Church begins. The Gospel will be announced to all nations. The motherhood of Mary continues in the maternity of the Church until the end of time through preaching and Baptism.

The mystery that joins Mary to the Church makes our consecration to Mary, ultimately, a consecration to Jesus in the Church. To belong to Mary means to belong to the Church. We cannot ignore this ecclesial dimension of the consecration to Mary.

If Mary was in the Cenacle of Jerusalem with the nascent Church, even today we meet Mary in the Church that proclaims the Gospel and celebrates the liturgy.

As we can deduce, then, to consecrate oneself to Mary is not simply a devotional act.

To consecrate oneself to Mary means to be committed to be an active member within the Church that recreates the Cenacle's atmosphere: prayer, communion and mission, in continuous docility

to the Holy Spirit. It means to be committed to live “with” the Church: “*Sentire cum ecclesia*,” as the Fathers of the Church put it, by embracing the great ideals of the Church.

Each of us should foster the desire and commitment for the unity of the Church, first of all, for which Jesus prayed before His passion (cf. Jn 17). To stay with Mary in the Cenacle means to wish that all of God’s children are gathered around the Eucharist. Today, those who believe in Christ are not yet fully united. We must feel the responsibility to pray for Christian unity and to participate in the work of the evangelization that is the extension of Mary’s maternal mission. As missionary disciples, we are aware that the word of the Lord is too far from being accomplished: “*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation*” (Mk 16:15); “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

Closing Prayer

Day 11

Opening Prayer

The MI Movement

In the Kolbean spirituality, this ecclesial dimension is not simply a corollary, albeit important. It is a fundamental point.

In St. Maximilian’s vision, authentic consecration to Mary does not exist if it is not referenced to the Church, especially in reference to the mission of the Church.

We could say that what is truly original in St. Maximilian, compared to other forms of consecration to Mary in the Church, is precisely its missionary and universal dimension.

He founded the MI Movement in 1917, when he was still a young man, with few resources, but with a great ideal in his heart. As time went on, that ideal would become ever more clear: “*To win the whole world for Christ through the Immaculata*”²; *To embrace the entire globe “...so that she may extend her dominion in the hearts of all those who live in any corner of the earth”* (KW 1210).

In the original charter of the MI, St. Maximilian delineated the characteristics of the MI movement; he indicated the goal of his Movement with these words:

“*To bring about the conversion of sinners, heretics, schismatics, etc., especially Freemasons, and the sanctification of all, under the patronage and through the mediation of the B.V.M. Immaculate*” (KW 1368). To attain this purpose St. Maximilian considered one’s total consecration to the Immaculata the essential condition (ibid.).

Closing Prayer

Day 12

Opening Prayer

St. Maximilian founded the MI with a clear objective: that everyone be converted and become a saint.

Whoever is consecrated to the Immaculata in the MI Movement embraces the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel to every person, to the ends of the earth, collaborating in Mary's maternal care for the brethren of her Son, which continues until they are led into the happiness of their true home (LG 62). In this context we also find St. Maximilian. The charismatic gift he received is the spiritual insight about Mary's maternal role in the Church and in the life of every person, and the intuition regarding the fact that this Mother urges us to collaborate in her maternal mission.

Jesus' gift from the Cross is the source of the charism of the MI movement: the gift of His Mother to John which took place at the climax of the mystery of redemption. This motherhood that we received calls us to ensure that Christ is born, through the Mother, in the hearts of all men.

Let us refer again to a text that defines beautifully the MI identity and mission:

"That is the MI: to let her into all hearts, to bring her into being within all hearts, that by entering those hearts and taking most perfect possession of them, she may there give birth to the sweet Jesus, God, and there raise Him to perfect age. What a beautiful mission! ... Is that not true? ... The elevation of man to God-Man, through the God-Man's mother" (KW 508).

This collaboration in the maternal mission of Mary can be implemented in different ways.

St. Maximilian indicated three levels of membership and participation in the MI: to the 1st level (MI-1) belong those who live their consecration individually. To MI-2 belong those who live the MI's spirituality communally, in order to implement its goals together, as well as individually, and thus fulfill the Marian mission that God has entrusted to the Movement.

Finally, to the 3rd level (MI-3) belong those who live a total dedication to the MI ideal and apostolate, as happens for example in the Cities of the Immaculata, in the Institutes of Kolbean inspiration, and also individual MI members who strive to be totally dedicated to the MI ideals and mission.

These different forms of participation in the Movement have been confirmed in the MI general Statutes, when the MI was recognized by the Holy See as a public association of the faithful, universal and international, that is, an association with which the Church identifies herself and which acts in the name and by mandate of the universal Church.

Therefore, the MI truly is a great ecclesial family in which everyone can find his or her place.

Welcoming the call to Marian consecration in the spirit of St. Maximilian means to accept the invitation to live a Church experience, in an ecclesial reality that is spread throughout the world with more than four million members worldwide.

Questions for discussion:

- Do you also want to welcome Mary into your life and participate in her maternal mission in the Church and the MI movement?

Commitment in our life:

To pray the Holy Rosary daily.

Closing Prayer

Day 13

Opening Prayer

Consecration to the Immaculata: a Way to Holiness, in the Footsteps of Mary, the Attentive Virgin in Prayer

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).

Closing Prayer

Day 14

Opening Prayer

Mary, the Attentive Virgin

Mary is the Attentive Virgin, who received the word of God 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. Rather, 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. 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 of God, 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.

Closing Prayer

Day 15

Opening Prayer

St. Maximilian's Attentiveness

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 of God our daily food. “Do whatever He tells you” (Jn 2:5), says Mary. The psalmist also proclaimed: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps 119:105). “Show me the way to follow...” (Ps 119:32-33,35); Otherwise we will wander like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Ps 119:67,176).

In our consecration to Mary the first place is occupied by the word received, meditated upon 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 God’s word.

Closing Prayer

Day 16

Opening Prayer

Mary, the Virgin in Prayer

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 transform her life.

Prayer is not simply formulas, but it is growing in intimacy with God, caring for 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 we allow ourselves to hear Him say, “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).

Biographers recall an episode: “Niepokalanów is at its best. Maximilian is asking the young friars what, according to them, is the next step to take. After several replies focused ‘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 Niepokalanów’s progress? And above all, what is our Niepokalanów? Is it this visible activity? Is it the industrial productivity? Or the circulation of the magazine? No, there is something better! Our Niepokalanów 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 Niepokalanów’s ideal remains and continues to flourish, then and only then can we 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” (cf. Jn 15:5).

Listening to the word and prayer are closely related. Prayer is the sounding board of the word, 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 and remain in His love (cf. 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.

Closing Prayer

Day 17

Opening Prayer

Consecration to the Immaculata: a Way to Holiness, in the Footsteps of Mary, the Virgin Presenting Offerings and the Virgin Mother

Mary is the Virgin Mother

This is the Virgin's feature that stands out immediately. She is, above all, the Mother of God. At the Annunciation, Mary gave her assent in faith and actually made available her body for the incarnation of the Son of God.

We recall, in this regard, a well-known passage from Luke's Gospel (11:27-28), in which there is a woman of the people who, admiring the extraordinary nature of the message that Jesus announced, raised her voice in the middle of the crowd, exclaiming, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you!" And yet, Jesus replied: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." Mary is the Mother of Jesus, as St. Augustine wrote, not only for bringing the Lord in her womb, but especially for having received Him in faith. She lived a very tender love for the Son and his brethren (cf. KW 991).

Mary went promptly to her cousin Elizabeth to lend an exquisite evangelical service (cf. Lk 1:39-46). She was a caring mother at Cana: her carefulness increased the celebration and caused the faith of the disciples of the Lord to grow (cf. Jn 2:1-12). This motherhood reached universal dimensions under the Cross where she became the Mother of every man on earth.

There are two dimensions of the motherhood of Mary toward Christ: the physical dimension that we cannot ignore, because it gives us the truth about the Incarnation, and the spiritual dimension that indicates a relationship with Jesus that goes beyond the physical bond. We also can live this second dimension. As Jesus says, we also are brothers, sisters and mothers of the Lord if we listen to His word and put it into practice! (cf. Lk 8:21).

This motherhood of Mary that we call "spiritual" toward Jesus, has been enlarged to reach the size of the world, to embrace each one of us, as is clear in the Gospel of John, where Jesus offered the Mother to the disciple. There, Mary became the one who generates children to faith, not in the physical sense, of course, but in the sense of caring for the brethren of her Son in faith, to show all people the Son as the only point of reference. "Do whatever he tells you" (Jn 2:5). Mary exercises her motherhood toward us, making sure that Christ is born, grows and strengthens within us, as St. Maximilian stated:

"In Mary's womb our soul must be reborn after the form of Jesus Christ. She is bound to feed the soul with the milk of her grace, raise it as lovingly as she nourished, looked after, and raised Jesus. At her knee the soul must learn to know and love Jesus. From her Heart it must draw love toward Him, or even love Him with her heart and become like Him through love" (KW 1295).

Closing Prayer

Day 18

Opening Prayer

Participating in Mary's Motherhood

In another text Maximilian wrote: *"Only at the time of God's judgment in Heaven shall we become aware of the solicitude that our tender Heavenly Mother has had for each of us, ever since the*

beginning, of the solicitude that she has toward every soul, her child, to shape it according to the pattern of Jesus, her firstborn Son, the prototype of holiness, God and man” (KW 1313).

The “form,” the “mold” in which every Christian must be shaped is Jesus Christ. Conformity to Christ, having His own sentiments, is what primarily is dear to Mary, as the Mother of Jesus.

This is also true of the motherhood of the Church: to announce Jesus Christ and make Him grow in the heart of each person so that his or her life is happy, and finds its direction, depth, hope and truth. It is really as Pope Benedict XVI said at the inaugural Mass of his pontificate, “Christ does not take anything and gives everything.” As already proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council: “[O]nly in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. [...Only Christ...] reveals man to man himself...” (GS 22). And this is the motherhood of the Militia of the Immaculata, according to the desire of St. Maximilian, proclaiming Jesus Christ!

“That is the MI: to let her into all hearts, to bring her into being within all hearts, that by entering those hearts and taking most perfect possession of them, she may there give birth to the sweet Jesus, God, and there raise Him to perfect age. What a beautiful mission! ... Is that not true? ... The elevation of man to God Man, through Man God’s Mother” (KW 508).

To announce Jesus Christ is a beautiful mission, because every person finds in Him the happiness and fullness of meaning for his or her life. We may share the spiritual motherhood of Mary, not only listening to the word of God, but also by becoming co-workers in her maternal mission. In fact Maximilian writes that Mary does not want to carry out her mission alone, but that she wants to engage us too. Motherhood means care, love, attention to others. Maximilian is an effective witness to it. The proclamation of the Gospel is the greatest act of love; it is the first charity. The Gospel message transforms the proud-hearted and gives the humble the awareness of their dignity, as already announced by the Virgin of Nazareth in her Magnificat. The proclamation of the Gospel is also the first form of charity for every member of the Militia of the Immaculata.

Maximilian Kolbe, facing the reality of his time (atheism in particular) said that:

“These poor people, therefore, need light, a great deal of supernatural light, of supernatural energy. They are unhappy, discontented, because they take as their ultimate goal what is only a means and therefore, after reaching the happiness to which they aspire, cannot find what they were looking for. And they continue to search with a dejected heart, with bitterness in their souls. How can we fail to reach out to them? How can we not to help them placate their hearts, lift their mind above all that passes toward the one ultimate purpose, God? Love for one’s neighbor pushes those souls who have already found the true ideal of life not to forget their brothers and sisters around them. One of the many associations that practice this love of one’s neighbor is the Militia of the Immaculata” (KW 1237).

Maximilian is also a witness of that love which is ready for martyrdom. Maximilian is the “man for man,” who lived with the conviction that “Only love creates” (cf. KW 1205). This is the lesson he learned in his deep and intimate daily experience of communion with Christ through his consecration to the Immaculata.

Being at the school of Mary led Maximilian, and can lead each of us, to be “for others” in everyday life, in the family, at work, in our social relationships. The Marian manner of life has love as its center, its heart, its fundamental dimension.

Closing Prayer

Day 19

Opening Prayer

Mary is the Virgin presenting offerings.

Mary, as stated in *Marialis Cultus*, is the example of that worship which consists in *making our own life an offering* pleasing to God.

For her the “rejoice” of the Annunciation soon became “a sword will pierce your soul,” because that Child would be a sign of contradiction (Lk 2:35). It is an allusion to the passion of the Son which will become her passion. Mary shared from moment to moment the experience of the Son, and transformed her fiat into a daily stabat, faithfully adhering to the mission that the Father entrusted to her.

St. Maximilian called this stage of life “suffering out of love.”

Jesus did not come down from the Cross, Mary did not move away from the Cross. So Jesus has loved us!

He entrusted His cause to the Father and, as the Letter to the Hebrews says, the Father heard the Son who spoke to Him with prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears (cf. Heb 5:7). Yes, Jesus was “heard because of His reverent submission,” as stated in Hebrews again. The Resurrection is the response to the confident surrender of the Son into his Father’s hands.

Mary was there because she also confidently entrusted her life to the Father. Mary knew that God does not fail in His promises. She had sung it in the Magnificat. Suffering is the result and consequence of love. St. Francis cried because “Love is not loved.”

This is true for us, too. St. Maximilian wrote that in human life there are three stages: preparation for work, work, and suffering out of love. Here his life is evidently described as in a fresco. The offer of life through the hands of Mary to Christ was the reason why St. Maximilian lived and died for love. In Auschwitz, his serenity was contagious because he had a certainty in his heart.

This is the last note he wrote to his mother before dying:

“My Beloved Mother, toward the end of May I came by a train to the Auschwitz camp. All is well with me. Beloved Mama, do not worry for me and for my health, because the good God is in every place and with great love He thinks about everyone and everything” (KW 961).

Closing Prayer

Day 20

Opening Prayer

St. Maximilian's certainty

Here is the certainty of St. Maximilian: *"God is in every place and with great love He thinks about everyone and everything."* Here is the answer to suffering. So it is no longer a stumbling block, because God is there and "comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor 1:3-4).

We can live out our mission when we are active and enjoy times of serenity, but also when we are in trouble, if we live in union with Christ the Redeemer through our total offering to the Immaculata. This becomes a way of salvation for us and for everyone.

Human life always involves suffering, which, lived with Mary at the foot of the Cross, may become a "Paschal suffering."

Faith, as well as consecration to the Immaculata, does not protect us from the dangers of life, but gives us the opportunity to offer everything to God through Mary, truly everything: joy, pain, happy events and moments of suffering, leading us to welcome the consolation of God so as to be in turn comforters for others. How else should we call St. Maximilian's experience in the starvation bunker but a consolation experience that enabled him to console and lead his companions to God?

Mary's four fundamental attitudes:

- The attentive Virgin,
- The Virgin in prayer,
- The Virgin Mother, and
- The Virgin presenting offerings,

show us how to live our consecration to her. Sometimes we ask how to live out our consecration to the Immaculata. Here we have the answer. It consists in re-living within us those same attitudes so that the Gospel message may be reflected in our lives.

Questions for discussion:

- Has St. Maximilian something to tell you with his ideal: Total consecration to the Immaculata and the passion for the mission "to conquer the world for Christ through the Immaculata"?
- Would you embrace his ideal in your life?

Commitment in our life:

To be near suffering people, giving them the gift of our presence, love and consolation.

Closing Prayer

Day 21

Opening Prayer

With Mary on a Mission: St. Maximilian Kolbe's Missionary Way

“Everywhere Is Love!”

“Scrutinizing with ecstatic admiration the divine plan of salvation, whose origin is the Father who freely willed to communicate to creatures the divine life of Jesus Christ revealed wondrously in Mary Immaculate, Father Kolbe, fascinated and enraptured, exclaims: ‘Everywhere is love’ (KW 1291). The gratuitous love of God is the answer to all doubts. ‘God is love,’ says St. John (1Jn 4:8).”

These words, pronounced by Pope St. John Paul II during his homily of December 8, 1982, at Santa Maria Maggiore, two months after the canonization of Father Kolbe, hold the key to understanding mission in the perspective embraced and lived by St. Maximilian.

Mission, in fact, it is all about love: the “excessive” love of God the Father who dreams of the happiness of every creature and gives His Son for us (cf. Jn 3:16). It is about the “excessive” love of Christ, who became man for us in Mary’s womb, let His Heart be pierced on the Cross to quench our dry and hard hearts with the living Water of His Spirit, with His Body broken and his Blood poured forth for us (Jn 19:17-37). It is about the humble love of the young woman of Nazareth, who offered her womb and heart to God in the abandonment of faith, so that in time and in history He could realize this plan of salvation and love (cf. Lk 1:26-38).

With the depth of the mystics and saints, Maximilian, follower of St. Francis, understood that the infinite love of the Triune God for humanity was fully revealed through Jesus Christ. In the mystery of the Incarnation and the Cross, God humbled Himself, became poverty, weakness, flesh. The Lord Jesus stripped/emptied Himself of everything and surrendered to our hands (cf. Phil 2:6-7): He is totally-given Love. “Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, my God” (cf. Heb 10:5-7).

St. Maximilian, however, did not forget that the mystery of this “emptying” took place in the womb of Mary, as St. Paul reminds us: “When the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal 4:4). For a special gift of grace, we could say for a unique “charism,” Maximilian was allowed to grasp and accept with great clarity the mystery and mission of Mary in God’s plan.

Closing Prayer

Day 22

Opening Prayer

The Immaculata, the New Eve

For Maximilian, Mary is not only the creature whom God chose as His Mother to enter into the world: she is the Immaculata, the new Woman, the redeemed humanity dreamed of by God.

She is, even today, the Mother of God who became man, called to continue to work with the Holy Spirit in generating the Son in the hearts of men.

“... And the Word was made flesh (Jn 1:14) as the result of the love of God and the Immaculata. So He became the firstborn, the Man-God, and souls are not reborn in Christ by any other way, other than through the love of God and toward the Immaculata and in the Immaculata.”

He realized that, *both in the mission of the Son*—that of revealing the face of the Father and making us share in His divine Sonship, as in that of the Spirit—that of forming in the image of Jesus all the children of God, God the Father has entrusted to Mary a very specific mission: to be the Mother of the Son of God made man and the Mother of all men called to be members of His Mystical Body, the Church.

Maximilian wrote: *“...it is the task of the Holy Spirit to form until the end of the world the new members of the Mystical Body of Christ, but... this work is accomplished with Mary, in Mary and through Mary”*⁵; *“In Mary’s womb the soul must be reborn according to Jesus Christ’s pattern.”*

From the prolonged and vital contemplation of the dynamics of this plan of love, first as a young student in Rome and then increasingly in the years of his Franciscan religious life and of his priestly ministry, Maximilian deepened that passion for the glory of God, the coming of the Kingdom of the Heart of Jesus, and the conversion and sanctification of every person – all of which would become the driving force of his whole existence.

In his desire to attract all men to God’s love, Maximilian Kolbe understood that the first fundamental priority of the Church’s mission is to imitate the Lord Jesus, the Missionary of the Father par excellence, to do as He did, that is, *emptying ourselves in the womb of the same mother, Mary.*

Therefore, Fr. Maximilian, going straight to the essence of things, realized that the *strength of the mission* consists in *belonging totally to Mary*, in striving to be like her, to become her (cf. KW 508 and 1210), to allow her divine Spouse, the Holy Spirit, the main Protagonist of mission, to continue to bring Christ into the world through us.

This Marian perspective was echoed in the recent ecclesial Magisterium, in the thought of Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI who wrote as follows: “The Church is not an apparatus; she is not simply an institution... She is a woman. She is a mother. She is alive. The Marian understanding of the Church is the most decisive antithesis to a merely organizational and bureaucratic concept of Church. We cannot make the Church; we have to be the Church.... It is only in being Marian that we become Church. In the beginning, the Church... was born when the ‘fiat’ emerged from the soul of Mary. This is the deepest desire of the Council: that the Church is awakened in our souls. Mary shows us the way.”

Closing Prayer

Day 23

Opening Prayer

A Winning Strategy

In the light of what was said above, before reflecting on Fr. Kolbe's missionary approach, it is important to emphasize the ingenious simplicity of his missionary strategy, the essence of which is primarily being animated by a passionate and exciting "obsession": the desire to get closer to Mary, to belong more and more to her, to become Mary, the Immaculata, the creature in whom the Plan of God is fully realized, to "let fly more and more the wings of love" for God and neighbor, letting her continue through us to give birth to Jesus in the heart of every person.

In other words, Maximilian understood (like all the saints!) that to collaborate in the universal plan of salvation first of all it is necessary to put ourselves out there! More than methods, means, initiatives... the mission needs people! Mission requires that each of us choose, freely and decisively, to welcome the love of God, to follow Jesus and to offer Him his or her life (cf. Rom 12:1-2), to be a witness of His love, an instrument in His hands, a servant of the Truth. Like Mary, we are to be ready to say, "I am the Lord's servant. May your word to me be fulfilled" (Lk 1:38).

For this purpose he founded the Militia of the Immaculata (MI): certainly not to set up another Catholic organization, but to give life to a missionary movement, an association of people who choose to "consecrate themselves completely to the Immaculate Virgin, placing themselves freely as a docile and generous instrument in her hands" (see the MI Original Program), in order to cooperate in the conversion and sanctification of themselves and of all men. The MI is an association of people who, together and unreservedly consecrated to Mary, live and love, suffer and rejoice, work in any environment and situation in communion of life with her, making her visible in the world.

That is why reaching out and inviting more and more people to belong to the MI was the goal relentlessly pursued by Fr. Maximilian. It was not so much to swell the ranks of adherents to his association, but to contribute as quickly as possible to pursuing "the happiness of all mankind in God through the Immaculata,"⁹ allowing her to continue her maternal and universal mission everywhere, as soon as possible, through the humble and generous presence of more and more MI "Knights."

MI members are people of every age, condition and state of life, present "everywhere, but particularly in the most important places, such as: 1) youth education (professors of scientific institutes, teachers, sports clubs); 2) the management of public opinion (magazines, newspapers, their drafting and dissemination, public libraries, circulating libraries, etc., conferences, movies, cinemas, etc.). 3) fine arts (sculpture, painting, music, theater); and finally 4) Knights of the Immaculata in every field should become the pioneers and leaders in science (natural sciences, history, literature, medicine, law, exact sciences, etc.)."

He continued this way: "With the assistance of the MI, industrial complexes, businesses, banks, etc., should arise and develop. In a word, the Militia should permeate everything, and in a healthy spirit heal, strengthen, and develop all to the greater glory of God through the Immaculata and for the good of humanity."

This was St. Maximilian's missionary dream! These were the new horizons that attracted his eyes! His missionary strategy could be summed up in a threefold program:

1. to be converted and to evangelize oneself at the school of Mary;
2. to evangelize others, through example, word and the generous gift of self;
3. to call and to form new evangelizers.

Closing Prayer

Day 24

Opening Prayer

In the Footsteps of Mary, the First Missionary

“At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill His promises to her!’ And Mary said: ‘My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed’” (Lk 1:39-48).

What transparency of the Holy Spirit had to fill the person of Mary, if her greeting made Elizabeth in turn be filled by the Spirit, so she recognized in her young relative the Mother of the Lord? What fullness of grace was to flood the heart of Mary if just her greeting could convey the presence of the Savior and make the Precursor leap for joy in the womb of His mother?

This Gospel passage, in which Luke describes the visit of Mary to Elizabeth, reveals the missionary soul of Mary, which held a strong attraction for Maximilian Kolbe, to the point of inspiring him “to become herself living, speaking, acting in this world,” to become a missionary of Jesus in the world.

St. Maximilian's missionary manner, in fact, was born here: from the daily contemplation of Mary, the Woman of the Gospel, this great and humble Woman, who walked the dusty roads of her land carrying God in the heart and singing her *Magnificat*; this Woman who, as we read in the great conciliar document on the lay apostolate, “While leading the life common to all here on earth, one filled with family concerns and labors, was always intimately united with her Son and in an entirely unique way cooperated in the work of the Savior”; this strong Woman who advanced in her pilgrimage of faith repeating her fiat to the Will of God in all the seasons of her life, under the Cross... and beyond! Kolbe's missionary approach everywhere (in Rome, in his country, in Japan) wanted to be a reflection of Mary's manner: a manner at the same time interior and practical, spiritual and active.

Closing Prayer

Day 25

Opening Prayer

St. Maximilian's example

Maximilian, living ever more intensely and radically his belonging to the Immaculata, his total consecration to her, learned and embraced Mary's dispositions in relation to God and neighbor, those attitudes which Pope Paul VI summarized and described in his unequalled apostolic exhortation *Marialis Cultus*, which presents Mary as the *Virgin in prayer, the attentive Virgin, the Virgin Mother and the Virgin presenting offerings*.

The first typical attitude of Mary that Father Maximilian contemplated and embraced by living in communion with her, is certainly that of prayer, the intimate union with the Triune God, Who made Kolbe a contemplative in action.

His words about prayer reflect his beliefs, but above all his experience: "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. By means of prayer, St. Thérèse de Lisieux, without leaving the walls of her convent, became the patron of all missions and not only the titular patron saint, as experience shows. Let us pray, let us pray well, pray much, both with our lips and in our thought, and we shall experience in ourselves how the Immaculata will take increasing possession of our souls, how our belonging to her will deepen more and more in every respect, how our sins will vanish, and our flaws will weaken, how gently and powerfully we will come ever closer to God.... To the extent in which we burn more and more with Divine Love, we will kindle a similar love even in others."

Regarding Maximilian we could say what Celano wrote about the Seraphic Father Francis, namely that he was "not so much praying as becoming himself a prayer."

The second inner attitude of Mary, the attentive Virgin, which characterized the whole missionary experience of Father Kolbe, was definitely obedient attention to God, who manifests His will through Scripture, the Church, interior inspirations and life circumstances.

Several letters highlight how obedience of faith was the secret, the compass, of each of his missionary initiatives, that he undertook always and only after being validated by the voice of obedience.

Here is what he wrote in 1931 from Mugenzai no Sono to the seminarians of Niepokalanów: "You yourself will experience in your lives, even on this earth, that all of the perfection of holiness, all the fervor of action, all the usefulness of the missionary ministry consists not in great wisdom, nor in great intelligence, nor in great skills or even in the amount of prayers and penitence, but solely in the perfection of Holy Obedience. Why is this? Because through Holy Obedience the certain will of God, the will of the Immaculata manifest themselves; through Holy Obedience we truly become an instrument in her hands...."

Closing Prayer

Day 26

Opening Prayer

Identified with Mary's charity

The third attitude of Mary, the Virgin Mother, that Maximilian was able to translate into his life is love-charity: love that becomes self-gift, that becomes hands, feet, arms, eyes placed at the service of others with the simplicity and genuineness of a mother. This evangelical love was first of all addressed to his confreres, in the reality of everyday life. It was a love that involved listening, acceptance, involvement, participation, appreciation of the other. An example: in a letter dated 193619 (written after his return to Poland from the Japanese mission) Maximilian, guardian of the city-friary of Niepokalanów, tells us that in his daily program he has reserved the morning for listening to the confreres who need to consult with him, and then the afternoon (and often the night) to go visit each person in his workplace. Even during the periods of increased activity, he found time to pay particular attention to the sick and those who were experiencing suffering.

However, toward those who caused him grief and difficulties of various kinds he tried to have concrete attitudes of understanding, patience and forgiveness. His gracious efforts extended literally to every person he met, without distinction (believers and non-believers, Jews, Buddhists, fellow detainees or Nazi guards...). Any situation or circumstance was always providential in his eyes: on the train or in the sanatorium, during missionary travels in his country or abroad, in a customs office where he was waiting for the paperwork processing or through the newspaper's pages, in the confessional, or in the middle of the camp barracks.

Finally, the most difficult step of this interior assimilation of the missionary manner of Mary, the Virgin presenting offerings, was the willingness to offer day by day his life for others, for God, the willingness to experience suffering out of love. Daily contemplation of the active participation of Mary in the Mystery of the Cross made him ready to embrace suffering and pain (physical, spiritual and emotional) as a valuable and effective means for collaborating with Christ in the salvation of the world.

“Let us remember that love lives and is nourished by sacrifices. ... When love to her, to the goodness of God in her, to the love of the Divine Heart which is personified in her, when that love has seized us and penetrated us, then sacrifices will become a necessity for the soul. “Love of the Immaculata consists not only in an act of consecration, even if it is recited with great fervor, but in suffering many hardships and working for her unceasingly. Yet everything if, when, how and to the extent she herself wants.”

Closing Prayer

Day 27

Opening Prayer

Collaborating in Her Maternal Mission

This interior manner has given an equally Marian character to his work and the initiatives undertaken. Maximilian is well known as the initiator of newspapers and magazines, founder of the City-friary of Niepokalanów (City of the Immaculata) in Poland and Japan, but we should emphasize the Marian manner that animated and characterized these apostolic achievements, particularly highlighting three aspects:

1. passion for others
2. dialogue
3. the gift of self

1. Maximilian, in responding to his missionary call, made a precise, decisive choice. In current terms we would say that he put man at the center of his missionary action, man created in the image and likeness of God, man with his thirst for happiness, truth and love; he wanted to reach people in a hurry, where they were, to introduce the Immaculata in the heart of every person, so that conquered by her for Christ, they would discover their own high dignity as children of God and feel themselves directly involved in the same mission: to win every person for God through the Immaculata. To realize this plan as quickly as possible Kolbe employed the press, started to use the radio and wanted to use cinema, theater... any lawful means!

In the 1930s, when Father Kolbe decided to travel to Japan in response to the exhortation of Pope Pius XI and of his Minister General, Fr. Alfonso Orlini, who called for the evangelization of the world, Catholic missions were linked to a well-defined territory and organized into specific structures: parishes, prefectures and dioceses, normally assigned to a single religious institution, which generally undertook the building of churches, schools and hospitals.

Kolbe approached his missionary working thinking “outside of the box,” outside of the classical patterns of his time. Establishing the new Japanese mission, in a land where Catholics were a minority, Maximilian considered the whole nation as a mission territory. He chose to invest his energies in evangelization and formation of consciences, in the commitment to enlighten minds with the splendor of Truth and to inflame hearts²⁵ with the fire of the Gospel, following the example and with the mediation and guidance of the Immaculate Mother of God and Mediatrix of grace.

This is why, with the help of translators (not only Catholics but also Protestants, Buddhists, Shinto) he devoted himself to publishing a newspaper in Japanese, the Knight of the Immaculata, which in December 1930 reached the print run of 25,000 copies. He made the difficult and courageous choice to privilege the spiritual works of mercy, directed to man’s eternal salvation, a choice that would not allow him to easily measure his results, but that reflected Mary’s maternal manner.

In that context, in fact, Maximilian realized that the community of Mugenzai no Sono would be called to witness to the “Gospel of charity,” but also to offer to Japanese brothers and sisters the “charity of the Gospel” in an appropriate way, communicating Christian values, sharing with them the new Life and working for its growth, until they reached the full maturity of Christ.

Closing Prayer

Day 28

Opening Prayer

Dialogue and Gift of Self

2. If we think back to the short but intense life of Maximilian, we can easily imagine him always engaged in dialogue with others, with university students in Krakow, with the other patients in Zakopane, with state officials, with fellow prisoners, even with his tormentors in Auschwitz. Maximilian was aware that the first manner of evangelizing is the personal contact with the other. “A poor way which does not need many tools, but yet is very effective,” as the Italian bishops stated in their letter *L’amore di Cristo ci sospinge*, in April 1999. “A poor, but not easy, way, because it demands to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) through a daily and wide testimony, through relationships faithful to the Gospel, full of meaning on a personal, family and community level.” And St. Maximilian, as a brother and a friend, like the Good Samaritan in the parable, as a mother, as the blessed Mother, knew how to be close, to listen to, to be compassionate, to console, to enlighten and to talk with candor and respect.

3. A time comes, perhaps for all of us, when we realize that words are no longer enough to express and witness to Love. Jesus used these words to prepare His disciples to understand where the mission that was entrusted to them was to lead them: “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life.... Love one another ... so that the world may believe” (cf. Jn 15-17). Fr. Maximilian learned from Jesus, Mary, St. Paul, St. Francis, that we are missionaries when we are ready, day by day, to give our lives, to spend and consume them for love, with love, like a mother. Maximilian had been training for this throughout his lifetime. He understood the logic of Jesus: “Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit” (Jn 12:24), and he followed it immediately, letting himself be led day-to-day by Mary, by the Holy Spirit, making it his rule of life. And so he was a missionary and finally a martyr, which means a witness of Christ’s charity.

In the Spiritual Exercises’ notes of 1937, we find a very short sentence: “*Da teipsum aliis = amor* (Give yourself to others = love).” A short sentence that contains the whole mystery of a lifetime.

Questions for discussion:

- Will we accept the legacy that St. Maximilian entrusts to us: to be missionaries like Mary, attentive to the signs of the times, the needs of the world, in the most diverse realities and to become a reflection of the goodness and mercy of God’s tenderness?

Commitment in our life:

To be consecrated to Mary without limit or to renew our consecration to her with refreshed zeal. To become part of the MI and to participate in its mission in the Church and the world.

Closing Prayer

Day 29

Opening Prayer

Introducing the Militia of the Immaculata

(by Antonella Di Piazza, FKMI)

The Beginning of a Great Adventure

“A lot of water has already passed under the bridge: it all took place nearly 18 years ago, so I have almost forgotten a number of details.” Thus, at the prompting of his superior, Fr. Kornel Czupryk, Fr. Maximilian begins to unveil the beginnings of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI) in one of his unpublished writings (KW 1278) - a precious gift for us!

It is winter of the year 1917. Friar Maximilian is in Rome, at the International Theological College of the Franciscan Order, preparing for his priestly ordination. He is only 23 years old, but his mind and heart embrace already universal horizons. He takes deep interest in the life of his Franciscan family, the Church and the world. He loves God and the Immaculate Virgin with evangelical simplicity, and desire to live the Gospel to the letter, serving the Lord with the generous dedication of his Seraphic Father Francis, the knight of the Great King. Goodness attracts him to the highest ideal, while the manifestations of evil move him to action.

“When in Rome the Freemasons started coming out in the open daringly, flaunting their banners under the windows of the Vatican, depicting, on the black banners of the followers of Giordano Bruno, St. Michael the Archangel crushed under the foot of Lucifer, and openly lashing out against the Holy Father in propaganda pamphlets, the thought came of setting up an association committed to fighting Freemasonry and other servants of Lucifer. To make sure that such idea was coming from the Immaculata, I sought counsel from my spiritual director at the time, Fr. Alessandro Basile, a Jesuit.... Having obtained assurance from holy obedience, I decided to get down to work” (KW 1278).

Young Friar Maximilian observes with lucidity the destructive effects of atheistic secularism, represented by the Freemasonry that impudently celebrates its 200th anniversary. He is aware of the spreading of dangerous religious indifferentism and various antireligious theories, as well as of the subtle decline of morality. He suffers in witnessing a certain quietism among Catholics, despite the persecution the Church undergoes in various nations and the popes’ unrelenting appeals to live out the missionary dimension of the Christian calling. However, Friar Maximilian does not stop at a pessimistic outlook of reality. He knows that Jesus is the Lord of history, the Prince of peace. He understands that the Immaculate Virgin is the new Woman, called by Jesus Himself to be the model, guide and Mother of grace for all men of every time and place: “Woman, behold your son” (Jn 19:26). Maximilian ponders, prays and discerns.

A few months later, the young Franciscans spend their vacation outside Rome, at the “Vigna” friary. “During a football game, blood started coming out of my mouth. I drew aside and lay down on the grass. Br. Girolamo Biasi, of blessed memory, took care of me. I spat up blood for quite a while. Soon after, I went to the doctor. Two weeks later, the doctor finally allowed me to go out for the first time. In the company of another cleric, Br. [Giovanni] Ossanna I got to the ‘Vigna,’ albeit with

difficulty. When the clerics saw me, they cheered and were in high spirits, and brought me fresh figs, wine and bread. Having had something to eat and drink, my aches and pangs ceased, and for the first time I mentioned the idea of starting an association to Br. Girolamo Biasi and Fr. Iosif Pal, who had been ordained a priest before me although we were attending the same year of theology. However, I stipulated that each of them should consult their spiritual directors first, to make sure that it was in fact God's will." (ibid.)

As it happens often, a great adventure begins with the coming together of friends who share one grand ideal... sometimes around a basket of fresh figs!

The Happiness of all Humanity in God through the Immaculata

St. Maximilian left behind a simple account of the first steps that resulted in the founding of the Militia of the Immaculata (MI). He emphasized how initially the association began with three fellow students of the International Seraphic College, during their summer vacation. Eventually other young friars joined them. Let us listen to St. Maximilian's own memories of that historical October 16, 1917:

"Thus, with the consent of the Fr. Rector, on October 16, 1917, the first meeting of the first seven members took place, namely: (1) Fr. Iosif Pal, a young priest of the Romanian Province; (2) Br. Antoni Głowiński, deacon of the Romanian Province (d. October 18, 1918); (3) Br. Girolamo Biasi, from the Province of Padua (d. 1929); (4) Br. Quirico Pignalberi, of the Roman Province; (5) Br. Antonio Mansi, of the Province of Naples (d. October 31, 1918); (6) Br. Enrico Granata, of the Province of Naples; (7) myself.

"The meeting took place at night, in secret, in a locked, inner cell that was constructed by means of a temporary wall. In front of us there was a little statue of the Immaculata between two lighted candles. Br. Girolamo Biasi acted as secretary. The purpose of this first meeting was the discussion of the 'program of the MI' (the enrollment form), especially since Fr. Alessandro Basile, who was also confessor to the Pope [Benedict XV], had promised he would ask the Holy Father for a blessing of the MI" (KW 1278).

From the start, the plan outlined in the original charter of the MI is exciting and universal: "To reach out to so many unhappy souls, in order to strengthen innocent hearts in goodness, in order to help everyone draw nearer to the Immaculata, Mediatrix of all graces" (cf. KW 1328). In other words, the MI plan is to work tirelessly for "The happiness of all humanity in God through the Immaculata" (KW 1088).

Yes, the young Maximilian was already an intelligent and creative strategist, an enthusiastic leader, able to bring others to get involved. Above all, he was a daring and passionate disciple of the Lord, who desired ardently the greatest glory of God, the spreading of His Kingdom "on earth as it is in heaven," and the authentic happiness of each person in Him Who is its only true source – and this, through the Immaculata.

Through the Blessed Virgin Mary, Maximilian encountered the Lord Jesus and in Him the living Water of eternal Life (cf. Jn 4:14), which has to be shared with everyone. At the foot of the Cross, Mary was the first one to welcome Jesus' thirst, the thirst of the Crucified Love to quench the thirst of our

hearts, and Maximilian wanted the MI to be a docile and generous instrument in Our Lady's hands for the fulfilling of this dream: the happiness of all people in God.

If the word "happiness" appears constantly in his Writings, we can be sure it's not by mere chance! When later Maximilian would trace the portrait of the Knight of the Immaculata, he wrote that an MI member "does not confine his heart only to himself or to his family, his relatives, his neighbors, his friends, his fellow countrymen. Rather, along with them he embraces the whole world, each and every person individually, for all were redeemed by the Blood of Jesus without exception, and all are our brothers and sisters. He desires true happiness for all, enlightenment through the light of faith, purification from sin, a rekindling of the heart through love for God, a love that sets no limits" (KW 1088).

Let us be set ablaze by this passion for the true happiness of all humanity in God through the Immaculata! Let us make of it our dream, together, with the audacity of St. Maximilian, by inviting others to a deeper relationship with Jesus through consecration to Our Lady.

Closing Prayer

Day 30

Opening Prayer

When Everything Seems to Fail...

"For more than a year after that first meeting, the MI made no progress. In fact, all kinds of setbacks piled up, to the point that members were uncomfortable even mentioning it among themselves. One of them even tried to convince the others that the MI was something useless.

"It was then that, with wonderful signs of election, the Immaculata summoned to her side Fr. Antoni Głowiński, and ten days later, Br. Antonio Mansi, both victims of the Spanish flu. As for me, the condition of my lungs got worse: every time I coughed, I spat blood. That is when it all started to change. Having been excused from school, I took the opportunity to copy out the 'Program of MI' and gave it to the Most Rev. Fr. General, in order to obtain his blessing in writing. 'If there were at least 12 of you..., ' said the Most Rev. Fr. General. He wrote his blessing and voiced his desire (I believe on that very occasion) that the MI should be propagated among our youth. Membership started to increase, and has increased more and more ever since" (KW 1278).

St. Maximilian himself continued to recall the first steps of the Movement that later would spread rapidly throughout Poland and in other nations. But now he speaks of the time of gestation, the time during which the grain of wheat has to die in order to become a full kernel and eventually bread (cf. Jn 12:12-26). Maximilian helps us to recognize the Gospel logic at work. For more than one year the MI had not seen any progress, while difficulties and setbacks attempted to extinguish enthusiasm. Everything seemed to fail. The death of two of the young co-founders and the worsening of Maximilian's TB, however, marked the beginning of change.

The MI began to flourish precisely thanks to this paschal journey of suffering and death, which gave rise to an increasingly numerous response from people who chose to embrace its ideal of total dedication to Our Lady as instruments of love in her immaculate hands.

During the past 100 years of life and mission, the MI has experienced many times this paschal journey of passion, death and resurrection in the footsteps of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the lives of St. Maximilian and other MI members as well as in various realities around the world. It is actually a good sign!

“Nothing great comes without pain in God’s works. And could there ever be too great a sacrifice, when it comes to the Immaculata? We are consecrated to her not only in theory, but actually, and in practice. And until we grow tired in our fight to conquer the world for the Immaculata, suffering will not cease to come upon us. And the more strenuously we struggle, the heavier and more numerous will be the suffering that befalls us. But only until our death. Then there will be the resurrection. And even if (but that is impossible) the Immaculata were to give us no reward for this, yet we would still consecrate ourselves to her with fervor and enthusiasm throughout our entire lives. For we do not consecrate ourselves in view of a reward, but solely for her” (KW 631). Let us be encouraged by this supernatural perspective in order to spend ourselves generously for this great ideal!

All Means, Especially the Miraculous Medal...

In the program that Friar Maximilian had drafted for the MI, the Immaculata’s strategist described the means that the newly established association would have to use in the work of evangelization: “1. To entreat the Immaculata possibly every day with this ejaculatory prayer: ‘O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you, and for all those who do not have recourse to you, especially the Freemasons.’ 2. To use all legitimate means, according to one’s possibilities in the various states and conditions of life, as occasions arise: which is entrusted to the zeal and prudence of each; let the special means be the Miraculous Medal” (KW 21).

In the course of the years, Father Maximilian would not hesitate to state that, in addition to the supernatural means – prayer and sacrifice – all legitimate means inspired by love and all inventions are to be at the service of the Gospel through the Immaculata: “Art, literature, theater, cinema, books, journalism, radio, etc., etc.” (SK 991 Q). His mind and heart were always drawn toward new horizons in order to reach every person as soon as possible and to share the gift of Mary, the new life of grace. He would never forget to remind himself and others, however, that in this enterprise we are called to be personally engaged: “But before everything else we ourselves must be hers, even to the utter annihilation of our ego, to a total holocaust, without reserve and without limits (“penance, penance, penance”). Everything for her sake, then: our soul, our body, all the faculties of the soul and of the body, talents, energy, science, art, etc., etc... everything! Everything: the past, the present, and future, life, death, eternity. In a word, everything, everything without even the slightest, tiniest reservation” (ibid.).

While he valued all means, Maximilian reminds us that among them the Miraculous Medal, which Our Lady herself gave us through her appearances to St. Catherine Labourè, has to be cherished in a special way. The Medal is a small yet powerful tool for touching hearts, a mini-catechism on Our

Lady's role in the history of salvation. How many stories of spiritual and physical healing, of conversion and openness to the workings of grace are connected to the Miraculous Medal...! The Medal is not only the exterior sign of our total consecration to Mary (cf. KW 991 Q), but also a tool we can all use to introduce her to others: "Behold your Mother!"

Let us discover the simple effectiveness of offering the Immaculata's Medal to a friend, a family member or even a stranger. We will be surprised by what the Lord can do through small means accompanied by faith and love.

Closing Prayer

Day 31

Opening Prayer

Our Only Motive

"Love toward the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is the only motive that spurs us to bind as many as possible, as closely as possible, to Him through the Immaculata" (KW 1094). Since the beginning of the journey of the MI, the young Fr. Maximilian emphasized that the love of God, of which the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus is the symbol par excellence, is the ultimate goal of the life and activity of the new Marian association.

The fundamental dimension of the MI spirituality is indeed total consecration to the Immaculata, but Fr. Maximilian highlighted always that Mary is wholly relative to God, to Christ, and her maternal action is completely directed toward leading hearts to Jesus. Love for Him and the pursuit of His Kingdom, therefore, represent the drive and the ultimate purpose of every MI member's commitment.

Fr. Kolbe constantly pondered and explained how devotion and consecration to Our Lady are the means for reaching the end of all: "As she is the most perfect instrument in the hand of God, in the hand of divine mercy, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, so we are instruments in her hand. Thus through her we are the instruments of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, that is, of God's mercy. Thus our watchword is 'Through the Immaculata to the Heart of Jesus'" (cf. KW 339).

In order to expel every doubt he states: "Precisely because we have consecrated ourselves to the Immaculata without limits, with much greater courage, despite our wickedness, we come closer to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. In reality, therefore, we are fully, completely and exclusively consecrated to the Immaculata with all of our actions, and in her and through her, we are again fully, completely and exclusively consecrated to Jesus Christ" (KW 643). Therefore, he stresses the need to draw closer to Our Lady through total consecration: "To be more and more of the Immaculata, to belong to her more profoundly, and so let fly more and more the wings of love, especially toward the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus and the manifestations of His love" (KW 1284).

With similar expressions, St. Maximilian elucidates how authentic devotion to Mary leads to a deeper love for Jesus, in fact to love Him with the Immaculata's Heart, while making us participate

in her maternal mission: “Thus the divine life, the life of the Most Holy Trinity flows from the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary, into our wretched hearts, but often also through other created hearts” (KW 503).

St. Maximilian introduces us to a marvelous stance: We are members of the Mystical Body of Christ and members one of another (Cf. Eph 4:25), called to be “neighbors” to one another (cf. Lk 10:25-37), to become instruments of good, channels of grace, of divine life for one another. Like Mary! This is the crucial mission of the MI: to sow Mary into all hearts so that she, the Mother, may lead them to the knowledge of her Son and kindle in them the fire of love toward His Sacred Heart. May this life-giving fire spread everywhere...!

Our Ideal

The rapid spread of the MI in Poland and in many other nations was a reason for Fr. Maximilian’s ongoing gratitude. His missionary zeal, however, moved him to dream of winning the whole world and each soul for God through Mary Immaculate.

In the June 24, 1936, issue of the *Mały Dziennik* newspaper, he published an article that would also appear in the *Knight of the Immaculata* magazine. It seems as if he felt the urgency to stop and ponder: “Why have we come all the way to the ‘country of the blooming cherry trees,’ and why do our aspirations embrace the entire globe? What are we aiming at? What is our ideal?... I shall sincerely affirm that it is not easy to understand our ideal and it is even more difficult to examine it in depth; or, rather, we can always delve deeper into it and know it in a way that is ever more explicit, but we shall not be able to get to the bottom of its sublime depth. For what reason? Because in this case it has to do with the Mother of God.... From the Divine Maternity flow all the graces bestowed upon the Most Holy Virgin Mary, and the first of these graces is the Immaculate Conception. This privilege must be particularly dear to her if, at Lourdes, this is how she herself wanted to be called: ‘I am the Immaculate Conception.’ We too desire to call her with this name which is so dear to the heart. *The Immaculata: here is our ideal*” (KW 1210).

Suddenly Maximilian seemed to tear the veil, so to speak, to allow his readers to understand the ideal at the heart of the MI life and mission: “To approach her, become like her, permit her to take possession of our heart and all our self, that she may live and act in and through us, that she may love God with our heart, that we may belong to her without any restriction: this is our ideal. To radiate in the surroundings, conquer souls for her in a way that, before her, the hearts of our neighbors may be opened so that she may extend her dominion in the hearts of all those who live in any corner of the earth, without regard for racial, national, linguistic differences, and similarly in the hearts of all those who will live in any moment of history till the end of the world: this is our ideal” (ibid.).

Fr. Maximilian did not hesitate to point to the high ideal: “Besides, may her life be ever more rooted in us from day to day, from one hour to another, from one moment to another, and this without any limitation: this is our ideal. Again, may her life develop in the same way in every soul that exists and will exist in any time: this is our cherished ideal” (ibid.).

Printed as a small poster, this article would be posted in the friars’ cells and workshops in Niepokalanów, as an invitation never to lose sight of the Ideal, to penetrate the heart of the

Immaculata, the Mother of Jesus our Brother, the Mother of our supernatural life, so that each daily action, small or great, may be a continual letting oneself be led by the Holy Spirit to the ultimate goal: holiness, the high measure of Christian life whose luminous sign is Mary herself.

Closing Prayer

Day 32

Opening Prayer

The MI within the Church

The evening of October 16, 1917, Friar Maximilian presented to his companions the program for a new Marian association, the Militia of the Immaculata, which he had handwritten on a small piece of paper. With not much consideration for the form, in a few essential points he had drafted the aim, conditions and means for achieving a universal-scale project.

Shortly after, Fr. Kolbe submitted the MI program to the approval of the Church. As early as January 1922, the Militia of the Immaculata received approval as a pious union, that is, an association of the faithful aiming to promote works of charity and apostolate, according to the Code of Canon Law in force from 1917 to 1983.

At the beginning of his apostolic work in Poland, Maximilian drafted a statute for the priests of the Franciscan Order (cf. KW 1370); he also revised bylaws for the MI men's circle that a group of laymen had composed in close collaboration with him (KW 1371). Later, Fr. Kolbe offered his own observations for the MI general statutes that a group of friars were composing in Rome. Overall, Fr. Maximilian appears to have been more concerned about the "spirit" of the statutes than of the "letter," making sure that the norms conveyed an authentic spirit of total dedication to the Immaculata for the coming of the Kingdom of God in all hearts, a spirit "without boundaries" that can hardly be enclosed within the limits of legal norms.

Following the 1983 promulgation of the new Code of Canon Law by Pope St. John Paul II on October 16, 1997, the MI received pontifical approval as an international and universal public association of the faithful. The MI is therefore a public association because it enjoys legal status thanks to the Church's approval; it's universal, because, having been approved by the Holy See, the MI operates in the name of the universal Church and is open to all Catholics (lay persons, clerics and members of institutes of consecrated life); it's international because the MI can freely spread all over the world. In other words, the MI received from the Church the highest recognition, which reflects St. Maximilian's original and universal inspiration.

The MI is and will always be a broader reality than what even the better-drafted statutes would be able to articulate. In St. Maximilian's own words, the Militia of the Immaculata "is a global vision of Catholic life in a new form, consisting in the bond with the Immaculata, our universal Mediatrix before Jesus" (KW 1220), and it is called to be an extension of Mary's maternal presence and universal mission. "Strictly speaking, the aim of the Militia of the Immaculata is the goal of the

Immaculata herself (ibid.), whose single desire “is to raise the level of our spiritual life to the summits of holiness” (ibid.). In 1935, Fr. Maximilian wrote also that the MI “should not present itself as one more organization among the many that already exist, but rather deeply permeate all organizations” (KW 658), so as to make Mary’s presence visible and effective everywhere.

After over 100 years of life and mission, the MI continues to be a gift for the Church and for each person thirsting for God’s love and Mary’s tenderness.

All Aboard... for Spreading the Gospel with the Immaculata

One of St. Maximilian’s genial qualities was his ability to share the MI ideal and mission with persons of all ages, nationalities, backgrounds, and walks of life. From the beginning of his priestly ministry, as soon as he returned to Poland after his studies in Rome, he began to engage priests and lay persons, men and women, young people and adults, inviting them to embark on a spiritual journey of total dedication to the Immaculata.

In Krakow, a university town, he approached students and seminarians, as well as freelance professionals, workers and families. He started formation gatherings for various groups, but he soon realized that this was not enough in order to reach all people. As a result, he launched a humble magazine, *The Knight of the Immaculata*, and called MI members to action everywhere: in their own families, at work, in the schools and in every area of life. Accordingly, during the past 100 years, the MI has continued to spread worldwide and to welcome new members from among the people of God, so much so that on October 16, 1997, the Church numbered it among the International Public Associations of the Faithful.

If the MI was born within the Franciscan community, from the very beginning St. Maximilian was convinced that Our Lady wanted to gather around herself a true ecclesial family, in which everyone, according to each one’s vocation, would place his or her talents at the service of the Gospel, by living and working in communion so as to spread the Kingdom of God.

St. Maximilian’s vast correspondence shows how he was always in dialogue with the most diverse recipients: Franciscans from various countries, lay men and women, priests, women religious, young people and children. He shared his dreams and plans, encouraged them in difficulties, and tirelessly passed on the ideal that the Immaculata entrusted to him. He built bridges, wove relationships, stirred up the spirit of initiative, inviting his interlocutors to contribute their gifts and talents according to their means and abilities. In other words, he elicited everyone’s participation so that the message might penetrate everywhere and reach everyone “as soon as possible.”

St. Maximilian was indeed a pioneer in this and offers a legacy of great importance today. In the Church and society, often marked by sharp polarizations, the MI is called *to be a family* in which we strive for holiness in the footsteps of Mary while welcoming and harmonizing the variety of vocations and gifts in the unity of our Catholic faith and of our common ideal. How could we ever forget how St. John Paul II emphasized the urgency of embracing a *spirituality of communion*? We are to be a family gathered around Mary so as to become witnesses and instruments of that plan for communion which is the crowning point of human history in God’s design.

St. Maximilian entrusts to each MI member his charism and vision, and invites us to give ourselves without reserve to the Immaculata and to be passionate messengers of the overflowing Life and Love of God that comes to us through Our Lady's Immaculate Heart.

How Do I Enroll in the MI

Membership in the MI is open to Catholics of age 7 or older.

A. SELECT the date on which you want your name recorded in the official register of the MI, preferably a Marian feast day, fill out the enrollment form and mail it to the MI National Center, P.O. Box 5547, Peoria, Illinois, 61601. You may also enroll online at MilitiaoftheImmaculata.com.

B. PREPARE for your consecration and enrollment by spiritual reading, the Rosary and the reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation on or shortly before the day of your enrollment.

C. ON THE DAY of your Marian consecration and MI enrollment, attend Mass, if possible, and recite the Official Act of Consecration composed by St. Maximilian. Give yourself wholeheartedly to Our Lady so as to let the Holy Spirit guide you on the path to holiness with her! Subject to the usual conditions, a plenary indulgence is granted by the Church for enrollment in the MI. This special gift was bestowed on the MI by Pope Pius XI in 1926. Implore Our Lady and St. Maximilian to show you how you may serve the Lord as an instrument of love and mercy in your life and be ready to share with everyone the gift you have received.

Enjoy being part of the MI Family and stay in touch by prayer and regularly visiting the MI websites:

**MilitiaoftheImmaculata.com
MIYouth.org**

Wear a Miraculous Medal and pass them on to others! Get involved and attend MI local events, if possible.

Closing Prayer

Day 33

Rite of Total Consecration to Mary in the Militia of the Immaculata

*In the absence of a priest or deacon, you may perform the Rite of Consecration on your own or with another MI member present. However, the Blessing of the Miraculous Medal must be done by a priest or deacon, but may be done at a later date.

Priest: Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord has inspired you to entrust and consecrate yourselves wholly to Mary in order to become instruments of His grace in the Militia of the Immaculata movement for the conversion and sanctification of all mankind. Do you wish, therefore, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live your lives in perfect union with the Immaculata and to be for all your brothers and sisters a light and an example of Christian life?

All: Yes, I do.

Renewal of Baptismal Promises

Priest: The act of total consecration to Our Lady will lead you to live your Baptism fully. For this reason we now renew the promises that our parents and godparents made for us.

Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?

All: I do.

Priest: Do you reject the glamour of evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?

All: I do.

Priest: Do you reject Satan, father and prince of darkness?

All: I do.

Priest: Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth?

All: I do.

Priest: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father?

All: I do.

Priest: Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting?

All: I do.

Official Act of Consecration to the Immaculata
Composed by St. Maximilian Kolbe

Priest: Let us now recite together the formula of consecration composed by St. Maximilian Kolbe, the founder of the Militia of the Immaculata. I invite all members of the MI present to renew their consecration by joining in the recitation of this formula. Candidates for the MI who have already consecrated themselves to Mary using the formula of St. Louis de Montfort or other similar formulas, not only renew their consecration by reciting the formula of St. Maximilian, but also explicitly commit themselves to serve the Immaculata's cause as instruments in her Immaculate and merciful hands to draw all strayed and indifferent Catholics and all other persons into the blessed Kingdom of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

All: O Immaculata, Queen of Heaven and earth, refuge of sinners and our most loving Mother, God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to you. I, (name), a repentant sinner, cast myself at your feet humbly imploring you to take me with all that I am and have, wholly to yourself as your possession and property. Please make of me, of all my powers of soul and body, of my whole life, death and eternity, whatever most pleases you.

If it pleases you, use all that I am and have without reserve, wholly to accomplish what was said of you: "She will crush your head," and, "You alone have destroyed all heresies in the world." Let me be a fit instrument in your immaculate and merciful hands for introducing your glory to the maximum in all the many strayed and indifferent souls, and thus help extend as far as possible the blessed kingdom of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus. For wherever you enter, you obtain the grace of conversion and growth in holiness, since it is through your hands that all graces come to us from the most Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Priest: Allow me to praise you, O sacred Virgin.

All: Give me strength against your enemies.

Blessing and Investing with the Miraculous Medal

Priest: Our help is in the name of the Lord.

All: Who made heaven and earth.

Priest: Let us pray.

Almighty and merciful God, who through the many apparitions of the Immaculate Virgin on earth has deigned to work great wonders, bless + these medals, so that all who wear them in love and veneration might enjoy your protection and gain your mercy. Through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The new consecrants approach the priest and receive the blessed medal.

Priest: Receive this holy medal, wear it with faith and venerate it with love.

Priest: Be faithful now to all you have promised and be assured that the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God will protect and defend you from all harm in soul and body. As the Immaculate Virgin is ever ready to renew her wondrous acts of kindness, may she obtain for you in her mercy whatever you humbly ask of God, so that both in life and in death you may rest happily in her motherly embrace.

All: Amen.

Final Exhortation

Priest: Let us pray to Our Lady using the prayer recommended for daily recitation by St. Maximilian:

All: O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you, and for all those who do not have recourse to you, especially the enemies of Holy Church and all those recommended to you.

Be Consecrated to Mary!

Marian Consecration and Enrollment in the MI

To request more information about the Marian consecration and membership in the MI, to join the MI, or to send a donation to support Our Lady's mission, please photocopy and fill out this form, place it in a stamped envelope and mail it to the MI National Center.

Members receive a frameable MI membership certificate, a Miraculous Medal and correspondence from the MI National Center-USA, including the monthly MI e-newsletter.

YES, I would like to join the MI. I understand the conditions for membership as described in this booklet and I will pursue the purposes of the MI. Please enroll me as of this date:

I wish to support the work of the MI with a donation of \$ _____

Please make your gift payable to Militia of the Immaculata.

Mr./Mrs./Ms./Other _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cellphone _____

E-mail _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____

*By providing your email address, you will be able to receive the MI monthly e-newsletter and other notices. Thank you.

MI National Center-USA
P.O. Box 5547, Peoria, IL 61601
331-223-5564
MINational@MissionImmaculata.com