



Who is St Maximilian Kolbe?

St Edward's Parish has joined with Holy Spirit Parish to be the Parish community of St Maximilian Kolbe. So who is St Maximilian Kolbe?

On 8 January, 1894 a boy called Raymond Kolbe was born, the second son of a poor weaver in Poland.



In his infancy Raymond seems to have been normally mischievous but one day, after his mother had scolded him for some mischief or other, her words took effect and brought about a radical change in the child's behaviour.

Later Raymond explained this change: *'That night I asked the Mother of God what was to become of me. Then she came to me holding two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked if I was willing to accept either of these crowns. The white one meant that I should persevere in purity, and the red that I should become a martyr. I said that I would accept them both.'*

In 1910 he became a Franciscan monk, taking the name Maximilian.

He studied at Rome and was ordained in 1919. He returned to Poland and taught Church history in a seminary. He built a friary just west of Warsaw, which eventually housed 762 Franciscans.

In 1930 he went to Asia, where he founded friaries in Nagasaki and in India.

In 1936 he was recalled to supervise the original friary near Warsaw. When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, he knew that the friary would be seized, and sent most of the friars home.

He was imprisoned briefly and then released. He returned to the friary, where he and the other friars began to organize a shelter for 3,000 Polish refugees, among whom were 2,000 Jews.

The friars shared everything they had with the refugees. They housed, fed and clothed them.

In May 1941 the friary was closed down and Maximilian and four companions were taken to the death camp Auschwitz, where they worked with the other prisoners.



Prisoners at Auschwitz were slowly and systematically starved, and their pitiful rations were barely enough to sustain a child: one cup of imitation coffee in the morning, and weak soup and half a loaf of bread after work.

When food was brought, everyone struggled to get his place and be sure of a portion. Father Maximilian Kolbe however, stood aside in spite of the ravages of starvation, and frequently there would be none left for him. At other times he shared his meagre ration of soup or bread with others.

In the harshness of the slaughterhouse Father Kolbe maintained the gentleness of Christ.

At night he seldom would lie down to rest. He moved from bunk to bunk, saying: *'I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?'*

A prisoner later recalled how he and several others often crawled across the floor at night to be near the bed of Father Kolbe, to make their confessions and ask for consolation. Father Kolbe pleaded with his fellow prisoners to forgive their persecutors and to overcome evil with good. When he was beaten by the guards, he never cried out. Instead, he prayed for his tormentors.

When a prisoner escaped from the camp, the Nazis selected 10 others to be killed by starvation in reprisal for the escape. One of the 10 selected to die began to cry: "My wife! My children! I will never see them again!" At this, Father Kolbe stepped forward and asked to die in his place - his request was granted.



As the ten condemned men were led off to the death Block of Building 13, Father Kolbe supported a fellow prisoner who could hardly walk.

No one would emerge alive - Father Kolbe (known as prisoner 16670) was the last to die on August 14th 1941, after enduring two weeks of starvation, thirst, and neglect.

He was canonized by Pope John Paul II in 1982. His feast day is August 14th.