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*Monthly Spiritual Message*

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**SON OF THE IMMACULATE**

Brother and Sisters in the SFO,

This year in Poland, the 70th Anniversary of the death of St Maximilian Kolbe is being celebrated. By the grace of God, I will be attending the Mass in Auschwitz to recall the life and testimony of St Maximilian Kolbe.

Kolbe, the Franciscan priest who stepped out of line in Auschwitz to exchange his life for another, encourages us to trust in Christ and to offer ourselves for the good of others. As a friar and priest directed by his love for Christ and sustained by his communion with the Mother of God, he gave his life to save another.

St Maximilian, through his self-sacrifice, allowed the victory of Christ's Cross and Resurrection to shine in the hellish death camp of Auschwitz. By stepping out of line, he defeated the diabolical hate of the Nazis. The victimhood and crucified love of Calvary overcame the ugly darkness of the Third Reich.

The Mother of God prepared her friar son to share in the redemptive suffering of her son Jesus Christ and to show forth the Divine Mercy. Maximilian knew the power of living in relationship with Our Lady. She guided him to the Calvary of Auschwitz, where he could unite himself with the crucified Saviour to save the life of the Polish prisoner, Franciszek Gajowniczek. (He died in 1992.)

St Maximilian reminds us of the gift of Mary as our Mother given to us by Jesus from the Cross. "Behold, your mother".

As Franciscans, we see how St Francis and St Clare lived as children of Mary and followed Our Lady's example of discipleship in the imitation of the poor crucified Christ. They understood the role of the handmaid of the Lord who always followed the will of the Father. The sinless Virgin Mother, filled with the Holy Spirit as the Immaculate, strengthened Francis and Clare to give of their selves totally in union with Christ Crucified.

Let us renew our love for our Immaculate Mother who embraces us and says, "Do whatever he tells you." St Maximilian understood that consecration to Our Lady meant entering into relationship with her and receiving the gift of her Motherhood from Christ. Mary constantly intercedes for each of God's children to receive the new wine of the salvation of Christ.

How can we ignore the Blessed Virgin? She loves us and desires that we come into full communion with the Holy Trinity, for eternity. Consecration is responding to her motherly care for each of us and allowing Mary to be our Mother, as she was to the Apostles and the first members of the Church. We see this in the Acts of the Apostles, where Mary the Mother of Jesus is praying with the apostolic community for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

St Francis called Our Lady: Virgin made Church and Spouse of the Holy Spirit. St Francis reminds us that, as members of the Church, we look to Our Lady as our model of holiness. How important it is that we who have publicly promised to live the Gospel seek the help of our heavenly Mother.

Mary of Nazareth, the Mother of God, teaches us obedience, charity and total self-giving for Christ. She is the model of all virtues, as St Francis describes Our Blessed Mother in his Salutation of the Virgin.

As Franciscans, we have a rich tradition of devotion to Our Lady. St Louis, King of France, and St Elizabeth of Hungary were both devoted to the Mother of God. They knew the value of Our Lord's mother.

In our day, we need not be ashamed of being faithful devotees of Our Lady. Yet we must remember that our Marian devotion is to be faithful to the Word of God and anchored in the teachings of the Church, not based on false apparitions or misguided sentiment.

May St Maximilian Kolbe teach us that Mary, our Mother and Queen, is truly our Lord's gift to each of us. He invites us to take her home into our hearts, as the apostle John did, and to learn from the example of Mary's trust and self-giving. So, like St Maximilian Maria Kolbe, may we live each day for God in union with Our Lady, the Immaculate, and so have the courage to bring the love and mercy of Christ into the darkest places.

St Maximilian entered eternal life from the death cell at Auschwitz on the vigil of Our Lady's Assumption. May Our Lady's Assumption encourage us in our Franciscan vocation to trust fully in the victory of Christ's Cross and Resurrection.

St Maximilian, pray that we too, through the intercession of the Immaculate, may come to the fullness of eternal life and of the glory of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

Br Louis Mary Schmid OFMConv  
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**Regional Assistants are requested to distribute this Monthly Message  
to all local Assistants of our Order in the Regional Fraternity.**