

He had returned to Poland by the time the Nazis invaded his homeland. Because of his father's ancestry, he was offered German citizenship, but he turned it down.

Sending his fellow brothers away from Niepokalanów, he remained, producing anti-Nazi publications and sheltering refugees, including an estimated fifteen hundred Jews. In February 1941, it was closed down and he was arrested, arriving in Auschwitz-Birkenau three months later.

In 1971 St Paul VI beatified Kolbe as a martyr of charity. When, in October 1982, Kolbe's fellow Pole, St John Paul II, canonised him, he ruled that St Maximilian Kolbe had been killed out of the Nazis' hatred for the faith, the *odium fidei* of the traditional definition of martyrdom. The fellow prisoner whose life he saved, Franciszek Gajowniczek, a Catholic, witnessed both events. "I want to express my thanks for the gift of life," he said in Rome in 1971, remembering how he had felt that day in 1941 about "the immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me – a stranger?" That unconditional love of the stranger is Kolbe's legacy – as a patron saint of both prisoners and the pro-life movement.

Peter Stanford is a Catholic writer and broadcaster (peterstanford.org). His latest book, *Pilgrimage*, is published by Thames & Hudson.



SUNDAY BULLETIN

ST MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

It was July 1941 and the third "selection" ordeal Ted Wojtkowski had endured at Auschwitz-Birkenau. "Selection" was an inhuman form of official revenge when a prisoner had escaped from the Nazi concentration camp. The first time, the whole block had been forced to stand to attention for two days without food or water; the second, ten men were selected and gunned down. This time, another ten were to be locked in a bunker to starve to death.

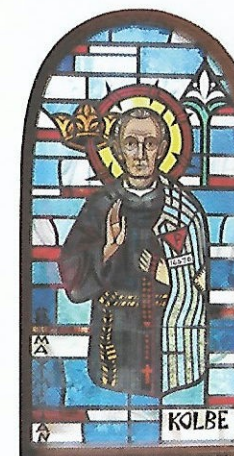
"One of the men selected started to cry out, 'oh, my children, my wife'," Wojtkowski wrote many years later. "At the same moment Father Kolbe stepped out in front of the commandant and expressed his wish to be substituted for the father of the children. 'You must be some kind of crazy priest,' said the commandant in wonder. Then he called out loudly, 'exchange!' And the two prisoners changed places. I looked at Father Kolbe's face – so peaceful, so serene. His altruistic act inspired me for the rest of my life." It has inspired many others since. Another prisoner reported that Maximilian Kolbe tried to sustain the nine other men in the bunker by leading them in prayer as one by one they died. He was the last one left. The guards wanted it over, so they approached him to give him a lethal injection of carbolic acid. He held out his arm, accepting his fate without struggle.

Raymond Kolbe, as he was baptised, was born in 1894 in Poland, into a devoutly Catholic home. At twelve, he saw a vision of the Virgin Mary, who held out to him two crowns, one white for purity and one red for martyrdom. She asked him if he was willing to accept either. He replied, "both". That was the pattern of his life. At seventeen, he entered the novitiate of the Conventual Franciscans and took the name Maximilian. As a young man, studying in Rome, he was one of the founders of the Army of the Immaculate One, set up to defend the Church, through the intercession of Mary, from those who attacked it. Ordained in 1918, he was first a seminary teacher, and then in 1927 established a new monastery near Warsaw, named Niepokalanów, or the City of the Immaculate. It was his base in publishing Catholic books and newspapers, and later for a radio station. In these years, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, for which in the age before antibiotics there was no cure. Ill-health did not stop him heading for China, India and Japan, where he established a new monastery at Nagasaki. If he did not survive the Second World War, it did, its sheltered position on a hillside protecting it from the blast of the atomic bomb dropped there in 1945.

Martyrs of our times



Today Peter Stanford begins a new series looking at some of the people of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries who have given their lives for the faith.



Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**See, I have God for my help.
The Lord sustains my soul.
I will sacrifice to you with willing heart,
and praise your name, O Lord, for it is good.**

FIRST READING Jeremiah 23:1-6

PSALM Psalm 22

**RESPONSE The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.**

1. The Lord is my shepherd;
there is nothing I shall want.
Fresh and green are the pastures
where he gives me repose.
Near restful waters he leads me,
to revive my drooping spirit. **R.**
2. He guides me along the right path;
he is true to his name.
If I should walk in the valley of darkness
no evil would I fear.
You are there with your crook and your staff;
with these you give me comfort. **R.**
3. You have prepared a banquet for me
in the sight of my foes.
My head you have anointed with oil;
my cup is overflowing. **R.**

4. Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
all the days of my life.
In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
for ever and ever. **R.**

SECOND READING Ephesians 2:13-18

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
The sheep that belong to me listen to my voice,
says the Lord,
I know them and they follow me.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL Mark 6:30-34

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Behold, I stand at the door and knock, says the Lord.
If anyone hears my voice and opens the door
to me,
I will enter his house and dine with him, and he
with me.**

Next Sunday's Readings:

2 Kings 4:42-44
Ephesians 4:1-6
John 6:1-15



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