

A Letter To the Militia of Mary Immaculate

By John Paul II

In the footsteps of Father Kolbe to bear witness to the truth (John Paul II)

After the recitation of the Angelus on Sunday, 18 October, 1981, the Pope met participants in the National Congress of the Militia of Mary Immaculate (known as the Militia of the Immaculata in the United States), the Marian movement founded in Rome by St. Maximilian Kolbe in 1917. The Holy Father delivered the following address:

Beloved in Christ!

1. The reason that moved you to ask for this special audience is the commemoration of the fortieth anniversary of the death of Blessed Maximilian Mary Kolbe and of the tenth anniversary of his beatification. You belong, in fact, to the "Militia of Mary Immaculate", founded by him, and you have wished to celebrate these two important and meaningful dates by meeting with the Pope.

And, as you can imagine, I am really happy to welcome you with all the affection and warmth of my heart, because of the beauty and greatness of the ideal that you are trying to live, following the example and teaching of Father Maximilian Kolbe, an illustrious son of my country, Poland, a fascinating example with his intelligence and his holiness.

I address my warm greeting, therefore, to the Minister General of the Friars Minor Conventual, to the superiors and religious, and to all of you, each one in particular, who represent the many nuclei of the "Militia" scattered all over the world. I greet you and I thank you for having come to Rome, where in October, 1917, Father Maximilian, as you know, founded the Militia of Mary Immaculate.

I thank you above all for wishing to commemorate here with me the dates of his death and his beatification, which arouse in me a wave of memories and emotion. How often, in fact, have I gone on pilgrimage to the place of torture and glory, to the "bunker of hunger," in the Auschwitz camp, where he died on 14 August forty years ago, the victim of hatred, but at the same time the victor with his love! And how I remember my last visit, on 7 June 1979, during the journey in Poland, when, entering the haunting room, I knelt at that "Golgotha of the modern world". You also make me remember with intense nostalgia the solemn day of his beatification on 17 October, 1971, when I was round the altar with the Holy Father Paul VI and Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski, and the visit paid on 26 February of this year to the City of Mary Immaculate at Nagasaki, which he founded.

BELOVED FATHER KOLBE

2. Remembering these dates, we seem to see among us the person of Father Maximilian, serious and stern, affable and smiling; and again we hear Paul VI's eulogy of him in the memorable beatification homily: "Blessed means safe and glorious. It means a citizen of heaven, with all the peculiar signs of the citizen of the earth; it means a brother and friend, whom we know is still ours, in fact, more than ever ours...; it means an advocate protector in the kingdom of charity; finally, it means an exemplary model, a type of man to whom we can adapt our art of living..." (*Insegnamenti di Paolo VI, IX, 1971, page 906*). Paul VI himself mentioned Father Maximilian again in the Apostolic Letter *Gaudete in Domino* (22 May, 1975) as "A luminous image for our generation... a genuine disciple of St. Francis".

Before such an elect example, which is also, however, so human and close to us, reflection becomes more personal and more responsible for you, who belong to the Militia of Mary Immaculate.

The Statutes, approved in their updated form on November 8, 1974, affirm that the association "wishes to extend as much as possible the very gentle Kingdom of the Sacred Heart of Jesus through Mary Immaculate, or rather to be in the service of Mary Immaculate in this mission that she has as Mother of the Church".

This was Father Maximilian's ideal, to which he dedicated his life, intellectual talents, physical strength and tireless activity. Membership in the Militia means complete dedication to the Kingdom of God and to the salvation of souls through Mary Immaculate.

LIVE IDEALS FERVENTLY

3. I exhort you therefore to live this ideal of yours with more and more fervent commitment. In our society, your consecration to Mary Immaculate must make you serene, confident and courageous witnesses. Like Father Maximilian you are passionately in love with truth. The Church today essentially needs unity in truth. In fact, it is truth that gives the courage for great decisions, heroic choices, definitive dedication. It is truth that gives the strength to live difficult virtues, the evangelical beatitudes, youthful purity, and consecrated and conjugal chastity! It is knowledge and love of truth which gives rise to priestly, religious and missionary vocations and which moves to charity, to the extent of self-sacrifice, as Father Maximilian did. And the truth is Christ known, followed and witnessed: "I am the light of the world" (Jn 8:12), the Divine Master said, and he added: "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14). The two affirmations are equivalent, clearly laying down the line of conduct and responsibility of every Christian: "He who follows me will not walk in darkness" (John 8:12; 12:46).

From truth there logically springs the aspiration to holiness, which was Father Maximilian's supreme ideal. So he wrote: "It is not pride to want to be as holy as possible and to sanctify as many souls as possible, trusting solely in God, through Mary Immaculate: (*Gli scritti di Massimiliano Kolbe, Citta di Vita*, Firenze 1978, Vol. II, page 715). From truth springs the sense of complete trust and surrender to the Almighty, especially in the tribulations and turmoil that accompany human history.

BE STRONG IN THE FAITH

4. Be strong in faith and live with enthusiasm the commitments of the Militia of Mary Immaculate, to which you belong, following the teaching and examples of Father Maximilian Kolbe. "To suffer, work, love and rejoice": this was his program and the summary of his life. May it be so also for you, with the help of the Blessed Virgin. And may my blessing, which I impart with great affection to you and to all the members of your Militia always accompany you.

Note: The Militia of the Immacolata is known as the Militia of Mary Immaculate in other countries.