

# Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941)

Maximilian Kolbe was a Polish Conventual Franciscan friar most famous for volunteering to die in place of a stranger at the [Auschwitz concentration camp](#).

Kolbe (born January 8, 1894; died August 14, 1941) was born as Rajmund Kolbe and was later also known as Maksymilian or Massimiliano Maria Kolbe and "Apostle of Consecration to Mary."

He was canonized by the Catholic Church as Saint Maximilian Kolbe on October 10, 1982 by [Pope John Paul II](#), and declared a martyr of charity. He is the patron saint of drug addicts, political prisoners, families, journalists, prisoners and the pro-life movement. Pope John Paul II declared him the "The Patron Saint of Our Difficult Century".

Maximilian Kolbe was born in January 1894 in Zduńska Wola, which was at that time part of Russian Empire. Maximilian was the second son of Julius Kolbe and Maria Dabrowska. His father was an ethnic German and his mother of Polish origins. He had four brothers, Francis, Joseph, Walenty (who lived a year) and Andrew (who lived 4 years). His parents moved to Pabianice where they worked first as basket weavers. Later his mother worked as a midwife (often donating her services), and owned a shop in part of her rented house which sold groceries and household goods. Julius Kolbe worked at the Krushe and Ender Mill and also worked on rented land where he grew vegetables. In 1914 Julius joined Józef Piłsudski's Polish Legions and was captured by the Russians for fighting for the independence of a partitioned Poland.

In 1907 Kolbe and his elder brother Francis decided to join the Conventual Franciscans. They illegally crossed the border between [Russia](#) and [Austria-Hungary](#) and joined the Conventual Franciscan junior seminary in [Lwów](#). In 1910 Kolbe was allowed to enter the novitiate. He professed his first vows in 1911, adopting the name Maximilian, and the final vows in 1914, in [Rome](#), adopting the names Maximilian Maria, to show his veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In 1912 he was sent to [Kraków](#), and in the same year to a college in Rome, where he studied philosophy, theology, mathematics, and physics. He earned a doctorate in philosophy in 1915 at the Pontifical Gregorian University, and the doctorate in theology in 1919 at the Pontifical University of St. Bonaventure. During his time as a student, he witnessed vehement demonstrations against Popes St. Pius X and Benedict XV in Rome and was inspired to organize the Militia Immaculata, or Army of Mary, to work for conversion of sinners and the enemies of the Catholic Church through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The Immaculata friars utilized the most modern printing and administrative techniques in publishing catechetical and devotional tracts, a daily newspaper with a circulation of 230,000 and a monthly magazine with a circulation of over one million.

In 1918 Kolbe was ordained a priest. In 1919 he returned to the newly independent Poland, where he was very active in promoting the veneration of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, founding and supervising the monastery of Niepokalanów near [Warsaw](#), a seminary, a radio station and several other organizations and publications. Between 1930 and [1936](#) he took a series of missions to [Japan](#), where he founded a monastery at the outskirts of Nagasaki, a Japanese paper and a seminary. The monastery he founded remains prominent in the Roman Catholic Church in Japan. Kolbe decided to build the monastery on a mountain side that, according to Shinto beliefs, was not the side best suited to be in tune with nature. When the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Kolbe's

