

The 75th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Week 38



Adolf Eichmann

Adolf Eichmann was one the most hunted and ruthless Nazi War criminals responsible for the Holocaust.

How does one become Adolf Eichmann?

Is one born that way?

Does one learn it at home, at school or on the playground?

Eichmann was a "joiner" who never stood out in a crowd but did have the ability to organize and negotiate. His major character flaw was an almost total inability to look at anything from another person's point of view. He was always able to disassociate himself from his "emotions" and remain "objective" so that concentration camps were discussed in terms of "administration and economy" instead of extermination and genocide.

At anytime, Eichmann could have requested a transfer without fear for his life or repercussions. He did not. Instead he chose to deport Jews to concentration camps solely for the purpose of his own advancement.

How does one do that?

There were two ways the Nazis silenced their Conscience.

The first was rather than pity the poor Jews being murdered, and say "what horrible things I did," they turned in on themselves and said, what horrible things I had to watch in the pursuance of my duties and how heavy the task that weighed upon my shoulders!"

The second method was the war itself. Dead people were seen everywhere, so instead of using terms such as murder, they justified their actions by calling it a "hardship" and a result of war.

At first his conscience did function as he tried to divert a shipment of Jews, but he later said that his conscience was put at ease because all of the "respectable people" around him were doing it. The irony of Hitler's Germany was that people had to be tempted "not to kill!" As he listened to those around him, Eichmann stated that he had a kind of Pontius Pilate feeling where he was free of all guilt.

As the months went by, his opportunities to feel like Pontius Pilate increased while his need to feel pity decreased for it had become the law of the land and that is just how things were done!

He always acted "duty bound" and against his "inclinations".

He said that he was never a "Jew hater" and that he acted only out of obedience. In truth he not only murdered Jews but he murdered his conscience as well.

The court in Jerusalem which tried him for war crimes, however stated that manifestly criminal orders must NOT be obeyed.

His only defense was that he was doing what he was told.

Eichmann clearly knew what he was doing and knew the consequences of his actions and freely chose to do them. The question which now arises were there any impediments to his actions that might mitigate his crime and sin.

Prior to the war, the German Catholic bishops had already condemned the Nazi party. His passion was for advancement in the Nazi party and that he was not compelled by fear, for he could have requested a transfer at anytime. In addition he had no "habitual" impediments that may have lessened the seriousness of his actions. In other words he was not "habitually" carrying out orders, but fulfilling them with the sole purpose and desire for advancement.

While he claimed that he never "personally" hated Jews, it was a constant hallmark of the Nazi party of which he was a member.

His prejudice flowed from his own free choice to follow Hitler and to advance his own personal goals.

Eichmann continually renewed his fundamental stance and option day after day by giving orders for the deportations of Jews and gypsies to Concentration camps.

His on going identity was more important than his initial choice to be a Nazi, for he repeatedly reaffirmed his choice everyday, with every order, with every deportation.

While Rudolf Hess seeing that the Nazis were going to lose the war, tried to slow the Jewish genocide and later pleaded guilty and begged for mercy, Adolf Eichmann maintained his innocence right up to the end.

Eichmann continuously willed, "not to know, what he was morally obliged to know!!"

Prayer : Heavenly Father, may I never wash my hands of my responsibility, but only my soul from its sins.

Meditations and Questions

1. How do we form our Conscience?
2. How do we silence our Conscience?
3. To what am I morally obligated?
4. Do I listen to the Bishops?
5. Do my personal goals and desires ever conflict with my Faith and Conscience?