

75th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Week 47



Francis Gajowinczek

Who was Francis Gajowinczek?

How did he go from an obscure, faceless, unknown prisoner to being an instrument of God's Mercy and a missionary of St. Maximilian?

Francis was born November 15, 1901 and was a Sergeant in the Polish army. He had a wife and two sons and was captured by the Nazis in Zakopane while trying to cross the border to Slovakia after the defeat of the Polish forces at the Modlin Fortress in 1939 and sent as a prisoner of war to Auschwitz.

When a prisoner escaped from Auschwitz in the summer of 1941, commandant Karl Fritsch ordered that ten prisoners die would by starvation if he was not found.

Francis (number 5659) was one of those ten selected.

When he cried out that he had a wife and sons. Maximilian Kolbe (number 16670), Stepped forward and offered to take his place.

After spending 5 year, five months and nine days in German concentration camps, he was liberated by the Allies and reunited with his wife, Helena, six months later. His sons were killed in 1945 by a Soviet bombardment of Poland before he was released from prison.

On Oct 2, 1971, he was invited to the Vatican by Pope Paul VI where he attended the beatification of Maximilian Kolbe.

While there, he spoke and gave thanks for the gift of life.

Later, in Houston Texas he gave a conference where he said, "so long as I have breath in my lungs, I would consider it my duty to tell people about the heroic act of love by St. Maximilian Kolbe."

Francis died March 13, 1995 and is buried in the cemetery in Niepekalanow, Poland, 53 years after having had his life spared by St. Maximilian Kolbe.

Prayer : Lord Jesus, there is no greater love than to lay down a life for a friend. May I lay down my life in my everyday crosses that I carry and thus show my love for those around me. Amen

Questions and Mediations

1. How did Francis Gajowinczek feel when Maximilian took his place?
2. How did Francis Gajowinczek show his gratitude?
3. Who are my friends?
4. How can I show them my love?
5. How can I show my love Jesus for being my friend and laying down His life for me?