

Day 148 – Saturday, August 15

I should have been on the ball. Yesterday was the feast of St. Maximilian Kolbe. His story is one of my favorite stories. I would like to share it with you. Please accept my apologies for being late.

But before I do I should also tell you that [today](#) is the feast of the Assumption Mary, and there is normally a huge pilgrimage at St. Laurent Shrine. Due to COVID 19 there will not be a pilgrimage. However, the diocese has video of the Bishop celebrating this event. Please go to <https://www.padiocese.ca/> and scroll down if you want to participate in this event.

Rajmund Kolbe was born on 8 January 1894 in [Zduńska Wola](#), in the [Kingdom of Poland](#), which was then part of the [Russian Empire](#). He was the second son of weaver Julius Kolbe and [midwife](#) Maria Dąbrowska. His father was an [ethnic German](#) and his mother was [Polish](#). He had four brothers. Shortly after his birth, his family moved to [Pabianice](#). In 1907 Kolbe and his elder brother Francis joined the [Conventual Franciscans](#). From 1919 to 1922 he taught at the [Kraków seminary](#). Between 1930 and 1933, Kolbe undertook a series of [missions](#) to [East Asia](#). Kolbe returned to Poland in 1933 for a general chapter of the order in Krakow. Poor health forced Kolbe to stay in Poland.

After the outbreak of [World War II](#), Kolbe was one of the few friars who remained in the monastery, where he organized a temporary hospital. After the town was captured by the Germans, he was arrested by them on 19 September 1939 but released on 8 December. He refused to sign the [Deutsche Volksliste](#), which would have given him rights similar to those of German citizens, in exchange for recognizing his ethnic German ancestry. Upon his release he continued work at his friary, where he and other friars provided shelter to refugees from [Greater Poland](#), including 2,000 Jews whom he hid from German persecution in the Niepokalanów friary. On 17 February 1941, the monastery was shut down by the German authorities. That day Kolbe and four others were arrested by the [Gestapo](#) and imprisoned in the [Pawiak](#) prison. On 28 May, he was transferred to [Auschwitz](#) as prisoner 16670

Continuing to act as a priest, Kolbe was subjected to violent harassment, including beating and lashings. Once he was smuggled to a prison hospital by friendly inmates. At the end of July 1941, one prisoner escaped from the camp, prompting the deputy camp commander, to pick ten men to be starved to death in an underground bunker to deter further escape attempts. When one of the selected men cried out, "My wife! My children!" Kolbe volunteered to take his place.

According to an eyewitness, who was an assistant janitor at that time, in his prison cell, Kolbe led the prisoners in prayer. Each time the guards checked on him, he was standing or kneeling in the middle of the cell and looking calmly at those who entered. After they had been starved and deprived of water for two weeks, only Kolbe remained alive. The guards wanted the bunker emptied, so they gave Kolbe a lethal injection of [carbolic acid](#). Kolbe is said to have raised his left arm and calmly waited for the deadly injection. He died on 14 August. His remains were cremated on 15 August, the [feast day](#) of the [Assumption of Mary](#).

In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley

Sincerely,
Fr. Jim Kaptein