

Mary Mediatrix of All Graces and

Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe

“It is accepted as certain and irrefutable in the Catholic Church, although it is not yet declared as a dogma, that the Mother of God is the Mediatrix of All Graces.”

St. Maximilian Mary

“It was November 27, 1830 in a convent on the Rue du Bac in the city of Paris. All the Sisters were gathered in the chapel for their evening meditation, including a young novice, Sr. Catherine Labouré. Suddenly, seen only by Sister Labouré, the Virgin Mary appeared in the sanctuary standing on a globe:

“The Virgin held in her hands a golden ball which she seemed to offer to God, for her eyes were raised heavenward. Suddenly, her hands were resplendent with rings set with precious stones that glittered and flashed in a brilliant cascade of light. So bright was the flood of glory cast upon the globe below that Catherine could no longer see Our Lady's feet.

“Mary lowered her eyes and looked full at Sister Labouré. Her lips did not move, but Catherine heard a voice.

“The ball which you see represents the whole world, especially France, and each person in particular.’

“These words stirred the heart of the Sister with fresh transports of joy, and the dazzling rays seemed to her to increase to blinding brilliance.

“These rays symbolize the graces I shed upon those who ask for them. The gems from which rays do not fall are the graces for which souls forget to ask.’

“At this moment Catherine was so lost in delight that she scarcely knew where she was, whether she lived or died. The golden ball vanished from Mary's hands; her arms swept wide in a gesture of motherly compassion, while from her jeweled fingers the rays of light streamed upon the white globe at her feet. An oval frame formed around the Blessed Virgin, and written within it in letters of gold Catherine read the words:

““O Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee.’

“The voice spoke again:

“Have a Medal struck after this model. All who wear it will receive great graces; they should wear it around the neck. Graces will abound for persons who wear it in confidence.’

“The tableau revolved, and Catherine beheld the reverse of the Medal she was to have made. It contained a large M surmounted by a bar and a cross. Beneath the M were the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, the one crowned with thorns, the other pierced with a sword. Twelve stars encircled the whole.

“And then the vision was gone.”¹

The Vincentian Father Joseph Dirvin comments:

“There is of course, a difference of emphasis upon doctrine in the two representations, for the first phase of the Apparition, in addition to honoring the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady in the words ‘conceived without sin,’ expressly demonstrates the doctrine that Mary is Mediatrix of All Graces. Very simply, this doctrine - considered by the Church to be certain although not yet

solemnly defined - teaches that all prayers and petitions, whether made to God directly, to Our Lady, or to the saints, are presented to God by His Mother; and that all graces, whether answers to prayer or gratuitously bestowed by God, pass to men through the hands of His Mother. In the first phase of the Apparition, the attitude of Our Lady, eyes raised to Heaven, lips moving in prayer, and the symbolic offering of the golden ball of the world, beautifully expresses the intercession of Mary, while the rays from her fingers express the bestowal of God's graces through her. In the second phase of the Apparition, the bestowal of the graces alone is represented by the rays flowing from the outstretched hands.”²

In 1842 there occurred an astounding event in Rome which brought official recognition to the Miraculous Medal. Alphonse Ratisbonne, a wealthy Jewish lawyer, whose hatred for anything Catholic had been increased by the conversion and ordination to the priesthood of his older brother Theodore, happened by chance on January 20, to be in the Church of S. Andrea della Fratte. A Catholic friend had dared him to wear a Miraculous Medal, and though appalled, Ratisbonne allowed his friend's little daughter to place the Medal on a ribbon around his neck:

“...Ratisbonne began idly to examine the architecture of the place, when suddenly a huge black dog appeared from nowhere and began to frisk in front of him, but in a menacing way, as if to bar his way. The dog disappeared as suddenly as it had come and Ratisbonne's eyes were drawn by a great burst of light, streaming from the little chapel of the Guardian Angels on the left-hand side of the nave. He raised his eyes and gazed into the calm and compelling eyes of the Virgin Mary. She appeared exactly as she was represented on the Medal, arms extended and hands bent down with the rays of grace which streamed from them. Ratisbonne saw her face for only a moment, for it was of such blinding beauty that he could not bear to look on it, but could only raise his eyes to the level of her hands, which he said ‘expressed all the secrets of the divine pity.’ Our Lady did not speak, but Ratisbonne ‘understood all.’”³

Alphonse immediately asked for baptism, and eventually joined his brother Theodore in the Holy Land. Theodore had founded the Congregation of Our Lady of Sion for the evangelization of the Jews, and Alphonse spent more than thirty years with him, laboring for the conversion of his own people.

Just 75 years later on January 20, 1917, all the student friars of the Seraphicum, the Franciscan College in Rome, among whom was the 23 year old friar, Maximillian Kolbe, had gathered at daybreak in the chapel for their morning meditation. The Rector, Fr. Stephen Ignudi

told the story of the miraculous conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne which he attributed to the power of the Miraculous Medal. Friar Maximilian was inspired to found the *Militia Immaculatae*, or Knights of the Immaculata movement, and to choose the Miraculous Medal as the shield and insignia of its Knights. He persuaded six of the most exemplary friar students at the college to join him in this work. It was just four days after the final appearance of Our Lady at Fatima:

“The description of this ceremony, which reminds one of the investiture of the ancient medieval knights, is given in the words of one who was the fortunate celebrant that evening, Father Joseph Pal:

“On the evening of October 16, 1917, in anticipation of October 17, the feast of St. Margaret Mary Alcoque, Friar Kolbe gathered us in the room next to that of Father Rector and read to us from a small sheet of paper the program he alone had traced out, the same one that is now known and published in the enrollment leaflet: *La Milizia de Maria Immacolata*. He asked us to approve it and to enroll ourselves in it. I was the first to do so, as a priest and as the oldest of the group. I think that Friar Maximilian was the last to sign it. I don't know whether this paper is now to be found at the headquarters of the *Militia*. It would be very interesting, for it showed how Friar Maximilian, unconcerned about external form, used an eighth of a sheet of paper to set up such a great work of apostolate and piety.

“From the room we all went to the chapel of the college and without the knowledge of the other students, I blessed the medals and put them on the first Knights of the Immaculata, on myself and on Friar Maximilian. Having done that, secretly and silently, each of us went to his cell. Everything had been done in secret. Only the Father Rector, who was not present, knew about it. The foundation of the M.I. had been laid.”⁴

The charter of the M.I., which the six friars and St. Maximilian signed, is very brief, and deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

"She will crush your head" (Gen. 3:15). "You alone [Mary] have crushed all heresies in the whole world" (former Office of the BVM).

I. Purpose of the Knights

“Pursue the conversion of every person living in sin, heresy, schism and especially Freemasonry, and the growth in holiness of all persons, under the sponsorship of the B.V.M. Immaculate.

II. Conditions for Membership

“1. Make a voluntary and total oblation of oneself to the B.V.M. Immaculate as an instrument in her most holy hands.

“2. Carry or wear the "Miraculous Medal."

III. Means of the Apostolate

“1. Once a day, if possible, beseech the Immaculata with the ejaculation: ‘O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you, and for all those who don't have recourse, especially for the Freemasons.’”

“2. Use all the legitimate means that one's particular state of life, condition, and varying opportunities make possible, the choice of which is left to the zeal and prudence of each member, and especially propagate the ‘Miraculous Medal.’”⁵

The citations from Genesis and the Divine Office are more than just a pious preamble. St. Maximillian said his first Mass in 1918 at the Church of St. Andrea della Fratte, the scene of the conversion of Alphonse Ratisbonne, on what would become the Feast Day of St. Louis Marie De Montfort, April 28. Like St. Louis Marie, St. Maximillian saw the whole of salvation history in terms of the enmities between Mary and the Devil, and between her seed and his seed.

Of the many miracles of grace associated with St. Maximillian and the Miraculous Medal, let me just record one:

"When Father Kolbe was in Zakopane [a tuberculosis sanatorium], he made the acquaintance of a certain intellectual. At every encounter he begged him: 'Sir make your confession.' But the man would answer: 'Father, I respect you, but I will not go to confession; perhaps another time...'

"After a few weeks, the gentleman was released from the sanatorium and went to say good-bye to Father Maximillian who warned him again: 'Sir, go to confession.'

"Once again the answer was: 'I beg your pardon Father; I have no time. I have to rush to the station.'

"Then at least accept this Miraculous Medal,' Father urged.

"The gentleman accepted it out of courtesy and left immediately for the station. Father Maximillian fell on his knees and implored from the Immaculata the conversion of the obstinate man.

"A moment later, a knock was heard. Still standing on the threshold, the same gentleman who had been in such a hurry exclaimed: 'Father, please hear my confession!'"⁶

We saw above that this Medal not only represents the Immaculate Conception, but also

Mary Mediatrix of All Graces. It should be noted that in this day when so many Catholic theologians are opposed to the definition of the doctrine of Mary Mediatrix of All Graces, that St. Maximilian said:

“It is accepted as certain and irrefutable in the Catholic Church, although it is not yet declared as a dogma, that the Mother of God is the Mediatrix of All Graces. during the first centuries of Christianity this truth was already known.

“The work of the Militia of Mary Immaculate and of the ‘Knight’ is based indeed upon this truth that Mary Immaculate is the Mediatrix of all Graces. If this were not so our whole activity would be illogical.

“The Holy Spirit does not work alone but through Mary Immaculate His Bride. That is why she is the Mediatrix of all the graces coming from the Holy Spirit.

“It makes me angry sometimes to hear it so often emphasized that the Mother of God is our only hope AFTER Jesus Christ. The statement is quite comprehensible, but the great care taken not to omit that little phrase, tends to detract from the honor of Jesus Christ rather than to contribute to it.

“Mary Immaculate is the Mediatrix of all graces. She is full of grace. Through her intercession for us, grace comes to us abundantly. Her earnest desire is for the soul to be born again according to the pattern of Jesus Christ. Our souls must be filled with the grace of God. This Our Lady obtains for us and watches over us, as she watched over and cared for the infant Jesus. She will teach us how to love Jesus in the way we should.”⁷

Like St. Louis Marie De Montfort, St. Maximilian Mary also believed that devotion to Mary was necessary for salvation:

“Jesus has honored his mother for all eternity, and will honor her for all eternity. No one can approach Him, nor become like Him, nor be saved, nor be sanctified, if he does not honor the Immaculate “(III, p.762).⁸

It is good to place the founding in 1917 of the Knights of the Immaculata in its historic setting. 1917 marked the fourth centenary of the Protestant Reformation (1517), and the second centenary of Freemasonry (1717). The Masons staged numerous anti-Catholic demonstrations in 1917 in Rome itself, which were actually witnessed by St. Maximilian. He writes:

“In the years which preceded the war, at Rome the capital of Christianity, the Masonic ‘clique,’ condemned many times by the Sovereign Pontiffs, conducted itself with more and more impudence. It did not hesitate even to agitate in the streets of the city, during the feasts in honor of Giordano Bruno, a black flag with the image of the Archangel Michael under the feet of Lucifer, and even to wave their Masonic ensigns in front of the windows of the Vatican. A dead

hand does not feel the least repugnance to write: 'Satan will govern at the Vatican and the Pope will serve him in the uniform of the Swiss Guard,' and other things of this kind. This mortal hate for the Church of Jesus Christ and for his Vicar was not just a simple prank of depraved individuals, but a systematic action flowing from the principle of Free-Masonry: 'Destroy all religion whatever, especially the Catholic religion.'" (III, p.771) ⁹

Fr. Francis Xavier Pancheri, O.F.M. is the author of an excellent life of our saint, *Maximillian Kolbe, A Saint for Our Times*, and although it is the Official Biography of the Canonization, it has never been translated into English, I suspect because of passages like the ones I am about to cite:

"Free-Masonry, nevertheless, is not - as many of its initiates think - autonomous in its action; it is on the contrary dominated and maneuvered cleverly by a 'coterie of Jews,' by the lords of international finance who wish to realize their millenaristic dream of power and proud domination of the whole world. 'The Free-Masons,' writes Kolbe in 1926, 'are none other than a coterie of fanatic Jews who foolishly propose to destroy the Catholic Church.'" (III, p.256)...

"...The well known book of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to him furnished the outline of a Jewish plan of universal domination, of the subordination of Free-Masonry and of the struggle against Christianity. This book which, as many others of his time, he considered authentic, had appeared in Russia at the beginning of the century and was translated into numerous languages. It proposed an effective program of domination prepared by the 'Jewish Elders,' to realize by the press, by political manipulation, and by international finance, their racist pride and contempt of the *goyim* (the infidels, that is to say the non-Jews). This book was violently contested by Jewish writers who called it a despicable hoax. He answered them as did Henry Ford in 1921, 'If the *Protocols* are a hoax, they are nevertheless promptly being fulfilled.'

"...The fundamental end of the Knights of the Immaculata is the sanctification of all men, 'love towards all, including the Jews and Free-Masons.' (II, p.183) One can understand the mentality of the majority of the Jews, opposed to Christianity by ignorance and by a lack of dialogue, because they still depend in this present time on the evil calumnies condensed in the Talmud, the poisoned source which has nourished the sons of Israel for centuries:

"...this work which inspires hatred towards Christians and towards Christ, fills the heads of the rabbis who then instruct the people on this foundation." (III, p.254) ¹⁰

Father Pancheri has a somewhat weak presentation of St. Maximillian in regards to *Nostra Aetate*, Vatican II's "Declaration on Non-Christian Religions," in which he points out that St. Maximillian was not an anti-Semite in the sense of the gratuitous anti-Semitism condemned by the Council. It is not anti-Semitic to defend Our Lord and His Church from the blasphemies of the Jews, although some Jews, with the connivance of certain ecclesiastics, would like to make it so. Just because St. Maximillian was aware of the calumnies of the Talmud, does not mean he did not always deal with the Jews in Christian charity. Here is a typical story:

“December 16, 1925

“I hopped on a railway carriage and with some difficulty managed to carry along a rather large package. It wasn't long before the clatter of irons rubbing against each other betrayed its contents.

“I bet those are the blades of a bookbinder you have in that package!’ says a Jewish man with a beard gone gray, sitting in front of me.

“Precisely!’ I confirm.

“I'm familiar with the noise because I myself have three large binding machines...

“I'm taking these blades to have them sharpened. Where do you take yours for sharpening?’ I ask.

“As he offered me the name of a firm, I gathered that he wanted to talk, so I felt free to pose him a straightforward question:

Excuse me, could I ask you what your purpose in life is?’...

...“But don't you envisage anything else beyond death?’

“As for myself, I just wish to die as soon as possible,’ another young Jewish man says. “What kind of a life is this, when there is no purpose? It would be fine if people did not love money. In our environment, we read in the Holy Scripture that the Rabbi should be someone who does not love money.

“Perhaps you mean written in the Talmud...’ I correct.

“Yes in the Talmud,’ he says...

“But what is there really in the other world? I believe everything just ends here!’ the other old man intervenes.

“You gentlemen belong to the same religious beliefs, so you would probably agree on this point,’ I resume.

“Among us people this is not taught very clearly,’ the young man adds.’¹

This typical story continues, but I think I have made my point. During the war, the Nazis dumped on the friary at Niepokalanow, 1500 Jews and 2000 gentiles from the Poznan area. The

friars, who had just returned from imprisonment, went begging in the neighborhood in order to feed their welcome guests. A subtitle of Patricia Treece's excellent biography of *St. Maximillian, A Man For Others*, is, "In the words of those who knew him," writes:

"Brother Mansuetus Marzewski had noticed that Father Maximillian had an especially tender love for the Jews. This love was reciprocated. Early in the new year (1940), the Poznan deportees were resettled away from the monastery. Before leaving, the Jewish leaders sought out Father Maximillian. According to Brother Juventyn, a spokesperson (Mrs. Zajak) said:

"Tomorrow we leave Niepokalinow. We've been treated here with much loving concern...We've always felt someone close to us was sympathetic with us. For the blessing of this all-around kindness, in the name of all the Jews present here, we want to express our warm and sincere thanks to you, Father Maximillian, and to all the Brothers. But words are inadequate for what our hearts desire to say,,,'

"In a loving gesture to Kolbe and his Franciscans, she concluded by asking that a Mass of thanksgiving be celebrated to thank God for his protection of the Jews and the friary."¹²

But her tenderest story is one told by a young Jewish boy whom St. Maximillian befriended at Auschwitz:

"I was from a beautiful home where love was the key word. My parents were well-off and well-educated. But my three beautiful sisters, my mother - an attorney educated at the University of Paris - my father, grandparents - all perished. I am the sole survivor. To be a child from such a wonderful home and then suddenly find oneself utterly alone, as I did at thirteen, in this hell, Auschwitz, has an effect on one others can hardly comprehend. Many of us youngsters lost hope, especially when the Nazis showed us pictures of what they said was the bombing of New York City. Without hope, there was no chance to survive, and many boys my age ran onto the electric fences. I was always looking for some link with my murdered parents, trying to find a friend of my father's, a neighbor - someone in that mass of humanity who had known them so I would not feel so alone.

"And that is how Kolbe found me wandering around, so to speak, looking for someone to connect with. He was like an angel to me. Like a mother hen, he took me in his arms. He used to wipe away my tears. I believe in God more since that time. Because of the deaths of my parents I had been asking "Where is God?" and had lost faith. Kolbe gave me that faith back."¹³

Members of the Knights of the Immaculata are required to say at least once a day the prayer on the Miraculous Medal, "O Mary conceived without sin pray for us who have recourse to you," to which St. Maximillian added, "and for all those who don't have recourse to you, especially for the Freemasons." We have seen that the founding of the Knights of the Immaculata in 1917, has a mystical connection with the founding of the Masons in 1717, and the apparitions of Our Lady at Fatima in 1917. Also in 1917 the Russian Revolution occurred, and St. Maximillian's addition has been made more generic in order to include the Communists,

"especially for the enemies of the Church, and for those recommended to you."

In 1937 St. Maximilian was invited to Rome to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the Founding of the Knights of the Immaculata. St. Maximilian spoke to a large crowd assembled in the Hall of the Convent of the Twelve Apostles, in the course of which he said, "We believe that a great day will come when the statue of the Immaculata will be enthroned by the work of her unconquered Knights, even in the heart of Moscow." (II, p.294) Fr. Quirico Pignaleri, one of the seven co-founders of the M.I. in 1917, pressed for further details, and St. Maximilian added, "first it is necessary to pass through a trial of blood." Father Pignaleri says that he interpreted this to mean that a trial would strike the City of the Immaculate.¹⁴

This prophecy seems to have been, at least partially, fulfilled in 1996. Fr. Louis Kondor, S.V.D., the Vice Postulator for the cause of Francisco and Jacinta, sent a special Christmas card to his friends. On the front there is a photograph with the caption: "The Pilgrim Statue of Our Lady of Fatima arrived at the Red Square in Moscow, 7 December 1996, eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Numerous priests and faithful joined a small procession, singing the Ave of Fatima." On the back of the card there is a photograph of a huge crowd in Red Square, and the statue of Mary enthroned in the midst, with the caption: "Handing over the Pilgrim Virgin to the Bishops of the former Soviet Union by the Bishop of Fatima, at the close of the solemn ceremonies of 13 October 1996, presided over by Cardinal Ratzinger. Until 13 July 1997, the Statue will traverse European and Asiatic Russia, and even Kazakistan." On the inside of the card Father Kondor writes in part:

"I have just returned from Moscow with Dom Serafim, Bishop of Fatima. What I witnessed there will remain forever unforgettable: Russia on its knees before the Pilgrim Virgin of Fatima, the immense multitude praying and singing, so as to obtain more efficaciously the protection of our Heavenly Mother for their native land.

"The fervour of that people! So many eyes filled with tears of joy! I repeat, this experience was truly overwhelming for me.

"Blessed are the eyes which see what you see...for I tell you that many...desired to see what you see and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it" (Lk. 10:23,24).....¹³

Let me conclude with a prayer of St. Maximilian Mary, the fervour of which gives us some idea why his apostolate was so amazingly successful:

"We believe that the Immaculata exists, that she leads us to Jesus, and if anyone were to teach differently, let him be anathema, let him be anathema!

"If the Immaculata wants something from us, there is no doubt but that we must obtain it; certainly! With her help we will do everything, we will convert the whole world. To work then!

Alone we cannot do anything but with the help of the Immaculata we will convert the whole world - I tell you - we will cast the whole world at her feet! Only let us be hers! in everything hers, unconditionally hers!"¹⁴

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8. Pancheri, Francesco Saverio, O.F.M., *Maximillian Kolbe, un saint pour notre temps*, translated from the Italian by Joseph Cochaud, revised by Irénée Strappazani, 1985, translated from the French T.M.S., Editions Lethellieux, 1985, p.17. The notations II, III, etc., refer to the *Collected Writings of Maximillian Kolbe*. They are currently being translated into English under the General Editorship of Fr. James McCurry, O.F.M., Conv. at the Maximillian Kolbe Marian Center, Granby, MA.
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11. *Maximillian Kolbe, Stronger Than Hatred: A Collection of Spiritual Writings*, translated from the Italian edition *Piu forte dell'odio*, G.Lentini (ed.), New City Press, New York, 1988, pp.23,24.
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