



Podcast: Patron Saint of this Difficult Age: St Maximilian Mary Kolbe Feast Day, 14<sup>th</sup> August 2021

Mgr Daniel McHugh

*Journey of Faith - Life from Holy Mass - with Monsignor Daniel McHugh*

Hello, I am Monsignor Daniel McHugh.

I had lunch on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> August with my friends Leo and Lila Hughes. Knowing Lila was originally from Poland I went with this Podcast on St Maximilian Kolbe in mind. I had a surprise, Leo brought to the table the St Maximilian Statuette, the Grand Prix Award from Niepokalanow 2011, which he had received for the film "The 13<sup>th</sup> Day" on the story of Fatima. I took a picture of it, and it forms the background to this Podcast. On the website of 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Catholic International Film and Multimedia Festival, the Award was given "for reminding about a very important message to the world contained in the Blessed Virgin's words to the children in Fatima. The simplicity of form and the high artistic level helps to contemplate about the important content of the message." This wonderful award, so richly deserved, led me to the fact that it is sponsored by the Franciscan Friars of Niepokalanow where Maximilian Kolbe was a Friar, and to his major contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of which Pope St John Paul II had declared him Patron. Many people will know that he was killed by Nazis in Auschwitz concentration camp in 1941, but maybe not of his important contribution to evangelization using modern media ahead of his time. The Friars made use of the most modern printing technology and distribution strategies for their materials. As a student he excelled in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. In those days they had started a radio station, and Fr Kolbe even had plans for a movie studio. With other Friars he founded the City of the Immaculate to expand his evangelization efforts, and this was to bring the community to the attention of the Nazis. His Publishing House issued many anti-Nazi German publications, and in World War II, he provided shelter for refugees and hid 2000 Jews.

Maximilian's devotion to Our Lady began at home where his mother recited the Angelus, the Rosary and the Liturgy of Lorreto daily. Later he became very active in promoting the Immaculate Virgin Mary, a belief that in time was to lead to the Definition of the Dogma of the Assumption in 1950. By the provenance of God, he was to be executed by lethal injection on 14<sup>th</sup> August in Auschwitz and he was cremated there on 15<sup>th</sup> August, the Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Blessed Lady.

By the age of 21 St Maximilian Kolbe earned a Doctorate in Philosophy, and by the age of 28 he would also have a Doctorate in Theology. But, it was because of his sacrificial love for another human being that he was eventually Canonized in 1982 by Pope St John Paul. I visited Auschwitz in the early 1970s and there I saw the cell in which he died. The story is well known of how he stepped in to offer himself in place of the father of a family who was one of the 10 selected to be killed by starvation in reprisal for an escape by a

**Monsignor Daniel McHugh**

Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese

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prisoner. He said to the Camp Commandant “I am a Catholic Priest. Let me take his place. He has a wife and children.” His request was granted. Maximilian Kolbe, prisoner no. 16770 suffered 15 days of torment before succumbing to the lethal injection of carbolic acid. The condemned man, whose life he saved, survived Auschwitz and was present at Maximilian’s Beatification by Pope St Paul VI in 1971, and Canonization by Pope St John Paul II in 1982.

The Franciscans of the Immaculate’s Website for this inspiring Saint explains: “Only a Saint can stand firm, with constancy and unwavering hope, throughout life’s many difficulties and sufferings.”

For me it all began with Maximilian’s commitment to Truth, and that is where the Pope John Paul II’s Film Festival has its roots: in 1999 he wrote a letter to Artists urging them to use their medium to express and share a message of hope, struggle, triumph and love. That is what the Film Festival has set out to recognize and encourage.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe is among twenty modern martyrs from across the globe who have been honoured with a statue on the Façade of Westminster Abbey. This Priest who had no greater love than to lay down his life can be seen above the west door.

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Co-ordinator for Ethnic Chaplaincies in the Archdiocese