





- 1 It was 1941, and one of the prisoners had escaped from Auschwitz, the Nazi Concentration Camp in southern Poland. The punishment on the whole camp was that ten other prisoners would die. The camp commandant walked up and down between rows of prisoners. The tenth man he selected was a Polish soldier. The sergeant broke down and begged for mercy because of his wife and young family who would have no support without him.
- 2 A thin figure moved forward, took off his cap, and asked if he might take that man's place in the death cell. "Who are you?" he was asked. "I am a Catholic priest," he replied. He was Prisoner 16670, Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest.
- 3 The exchange was agreed. Now that the group was 10 in number, they were marched off to Block 13 - the death-block. They were not to be shot or gassed. They were to die very slowly by being starved of even the very little food that the prisoners were normally given. Their very slow death was designed to put others off from trying to escape.
- 4 In the following days, the guards observed the condemned men dying slowly. They also saw that the men were gathered round Father Maximilian, laughing together, praying and singing hymns. One by one the men died - a slow death over 14 days. The last one alive was Maximilian Kolbe and, on this day - August 14th - in 1941, a guard injected him with phenol into his left arm. He died almost immediately.
- 5 The Polish sergeant - Franz Gajowniczek - survived Auschwitz and the war itself. Each year he visited that dreadful place and laid a wreath beside Block 13 where Maximilian Kolbe died instead of himself.
- 6 In 1982, 41 years after Maximilian Kolbe's death, Pope John Paul II canonised him - declared him to be a saint.
- 7 *Let us pray:*
**Lord Jesus, you said
 that no-one could have greater love
 than to give up their life
 for someone else.**
**Remind us
 in our personal circumstances today
 that care and compassion
 and love and sacrifice
 can change everything. Amen.**




 *Kolbe was aged 47 at his death. Fellow-Pole, John Paul II, canonised him on 10th October 1982. They had both lived in the town of Krakow in Poland and, at the time of Maximilian Kolbe's imprisonment, the future Pope was working in a stone quarry and a chemical factory whilst preparing to become a priest.*

 *Franz Gajowniczek later said: "At first I felt terrible that another man was dying in my place. But then I realised that he had done this not just to save my life, but to be with the other nine in their terrible agony of dying. His nearness to them in those dreadful last hours was worth more than a lifetime of preaching."*

 *Auschwitz is situated 20 miles outside the city of Krakow in Poland, near the Czech and Slovak borders. It was the largest concentration camp run by Nazi Germany. More than 1.5 million people were killed there. As that is too large a figure to begin to grasp, we might picture the same number of people as in 1,500 secondary schools that each have 1,000 students.*

 *John 15¹³: Jesus said: "No greater love can anyone have than to lay down their life for their friends."*

 All that I am; If God is for us ("neither death nor life can ever take us from his love"); Take my hands

This is an excerpt from the page of this date in
'Praying Each Day of the Year',
a 3-volume book
by Nicholas Hutchinson, FSC.

For details:

<http://www.matthew-james.co.uk/>

Could make use of a search engine
to research this topic further.

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the prayer and education website
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