

CONTENTS

Foreword by Fr. Rafael Capóxi

Preface by St. Maximilian Kolbe.....xv

Part I: Introduction

St. Maximilian Kolbe and Marian Consecration1

“Who Then Are You, O Immaculata?”13

Part II: Fourteen Steps to Prepare for Consecration to Mary

Step 1: Surrender to Jesus through Mary29

Step 2: Respond with Peace37

Step 3: Be Obedient to Your Superiors45

Step 4: Put Your Love into Action51

Step 5: Have Confidence in the Immaculata’s Will59

Step 6: “Love, and Do What You Will”65

Step 7: Be on Guard, and Realistic!71

Step 8: Find Strength in the Immaculata79

Step 9: Do Not Be Overconfident85

Step 10: Seek Mercy93

Step 11: Love Is an Act of the *Will* 101

Step 12: Do All Things Well 109

Step 13: Be Faithful according to Your State in Life 117

Step 14: Magnify the Magnifying Glass 125

Part III: The Call to Evangelization and Marian Consecration

An All-Consuming Fire 135

Consecration to the Immaculata	145
Appendix A: Step-by-Step Plan Leading to Marian Consecration	153
Appendix B: Marian Prayers	155
Notes.....	159

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE AND MARIAN CONSECRATION

Many of us have had the experience of a saint “stalking” us. For those of you who might be confused by what I mean, oftentimes in our spiritual journey a particular saint may pop up in different parts of our lives. Maybe we are given a prayer card by a relative, maybe we read something by a saint that deeply resonates within us, or maybe something that can only be explained as supernatural and grace-filled happens. This is the type of experience I had with St. Maximilian Kolbe.

In college I began developing a devotion to St. Maximilian, which grew during my theological studies. This particularly came through my love of the Blessed Mother and my devotion to her through *Marian consecration*—topics we will explore throughout this book. But it wasn’t until I was thrust out into the real world, away from the Catholic bubble that is Franciscan University, that I began to experience how much St. Max would influence my life.

On one occasion, I was speaking with a friend discussing my plans to attend World Youth Day in Kraków, Poland, when—completely out of nowhere, it seemed—I just knew that I needed to pray for something. It felt like the prayer was placed directly into my mind. I then said out loud to my friend, “I don’t know why, but I feel like I’m supposed to ask God to give me a relic of St. Maximilian Kolbe when I go to Poland.” Knowing that most relics of St. Maximilian were second-class (that is, a “non-bodily”

relic, typically something owned by the saint), I said out loud, “Lord, will you please *give* me a second-class relic of St. Maximilian Kolbe when I am in Poland?”

My friend quickly added that I should likewise ask for a relic of St. Faustina, since she spent a great deal of her time in Kraków and she is one of my favorite saints. I responded by saying that I wasn’t feeling called to ask for a relic of St. Faustina, but then gave in and said, “Lord, if you’re feeling extra generous, would you also throw in a relic of St. Faustina?”

Fast-forward to World Youth Day. The first day there I befriended two young Polish guys around my age, Piotrek and Marcin. We did not talk about St. Max at all, but we did discuss our love for Our Lady. The second day, when I had not yet been in Poland for even twenty-four hours, Marcin ran up to me and put his backpack on the ground at my feet. He seemed excited.

“Joshua, I have something for you,” he began. “I looked at the picture we took of the three of us yesterday, and from your eyes I knew that I needed to give you this. I was going to wait until the end of World Youth Day, but I feel like I need to give it to you now.”

I already knew what was happening and thought to myself, “Wow, already, Lord?” Marcin then reached into his backpack and pulled out a prayer card of St. Maximilian Kolbe. He told me that he was meeting with his spiritual director in Niepokalanów, the city of the Immaculata (St. Kolbe’s favorite title for Our Lady) founded by St. Kolbe, when the priest gave him a section of the blanket that belonged to Maximilian Kolbe. He further explained that the Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy had asked him to make prayer cards of St. Faustina to give to the pilgrims for World Youth Day (the prayer cards contained third-class relics—cloth that was touched to the remains of St. Faustina). Marcin then used a laminating machine to make prayer cards of St. Max with pieces of his blanket (second-class relics) inside the card.

“This is my last St. Maximilian Kolbe relic, and I knew I needed to give it to you.” Then he added, “Also, do you want one of the third-class relic cards of St. Faustina?”

I was honestly in awe that not only did God answer my prayer so directly, but he even answered my *afterthought* prayer!

In the years following this experience, I have often reflected on what occurred. St. Maximilian Kolbe was very loudly making himself known in my life as a powerful intercessor and, honestly, as my friend. But what has also been made clear to me in the years since is that the answer to the prayer came about through the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This book will focus precisely on that point. For Maximilian Kolbe, and for all of us, our prayers are answered through the Immaculata, our mother, who loves us and intercedes for every good and perfect gift from God.

Funneling Our Intentions toward Two Endeavors

St. Maximilian was a very intense man. We will hear more about his intensity shortly. He had tremendous zeal, a lot of energy, and a high level of intelligence. Honestly, he was probably fairly high in testosterone, as well, considering how he expressed his masculinity. He needed to know what to do with that energy, so after prayer and submission to Our Lady he funneled everything toward God’s will for his life, which, for him, was to be a soldier in the Blessed Mother’s army.

That is what we are going to do here. We will funnel our attention toward two endeavors:

- consecrating ourselves entirely to the Immaculata
- growing in holiness

In Kolbe’s words, “The Immaculata alone has from God the promise of victory over Satan. She seeks souls that will consecrate themselves entirely to her, that will become in her hands forceful instruments for the defeat of Satan and the spread of God’s kingdom.” After we examine St. Maximilian’s example and

his methods, we are going to discuss how to surrender everything to Our Lady—how to entrust everything to her maternal care. This will produce the greatest fruits in our lives, enable us to become holy no matter our circumstances or state in life, and fulfill our vocation—whatever it may be.

I cannot stress enough how consecration to Our Lady has completely changed my own life. Consecrating ourselves to Mary means giving Mary permission to conform our will to the will of God. It is at once a tall task and a simple task that we will explore more throughout this book. I do not want to come right out and say that consecration to Mary will make your life easier, but the truth is, when Mary is in control of our life, holiness *is* easier to attain. After the Incarnation and the sacraments, the assistance of Our Lady is the best free gift God has given us.

It is by this consecration that St. Kolbe, born Rajmund Kolbe, took the religious name Maximilian Maria, because his life was dedicated to giving God the *maximum* glory through *Mary*.

The Martyr of Charity

Before going into our methodology for this book—which will essentially be a step-by-step guide, or a “spiritual battle plan” if you will, for following Kolbe’s teachings and method for total consecration to Mary—let us first get to know our titular character.

When many hear the name St. Maximilian Kolbe, their minds are immediately drawn to the story of the Martyr of Charity, the humble Polish Franciscan priest who offered himself in place of the husband and father sentenced to die in Auschwitz concentration camp during World War II. This heroic act was the natural conclusion to the life of a soldier-saint. What fewer people know and discuss is that early in St. Kolbe’s studies, he was fascinated by Mariology. From a young age he devoted considerable time in prayer to the Blessed Mother and to the study of her participation in God’s plan of salvation.

St. Maximilian was truly united to Our Lady, and to the Holy Spirit through her. This is the man whose mere gaze was so piercing with love that the Gestapo officers couldn't even look him in the eyes while administering the lethal injection. That love and grace did not appear out of nowhere while he was imprisoned; rather it was on display at his final concluding act, the fitting climax to his story of love and dedication to Our Lady.

Rajmund Kolbe was born in 1894 in Poland. As a young child he excelled at math and science, and he aspired to become a soldier fighting to protect his beloved homeland—even drawing up military strategies in his personal journals. He had instilled in himself the love of valor, honor, and virtue. Later in his teen years, Rajmund joined the minor seminary because of his faith. When he had decided that he would leave to join Poland's national army, his mother showed up at the seminary to dissuade him from those plans.

Rajmund listened to his mother, but then took his original plans in a new direction. He understood her visit as a sign that his call to be a warrior would take on a more supernatural perspective. He would still become a soldier, but instead of fighting with physical weapons of brute force for his country, he would be knighted by Our Lady as a soldier under her command. He would fight with spiritual weapons against greater enemies: the forces of true evil in the world.

Throughout this book, we will discuss some of the revolutionary things Maximilian discovered and was able to contribute to our understanding of Mary and her relationship to the Holy Spirit, all of which apply not only to our outlook on prayer but also to how we live every day of our lives.

The Knight of the Immaculata

While studying in Rome, Maximilian observed a group of Freemasons trampling over images of St. Michael the Archangel and shouting blasphemies against the Church. Here was his opportunity to take up arms as a spiritual soldier. He founded

and mobilized a formal militia, which he called the Militia of the Immaculata. The goal of this militia was to fight against the enemies of the Church by winning over as many souls as possible to God. St. Kolbe knew the most powerful and effective way to accomplish that was through the intercession of Mary. In short, the more people he could get consecrated to Mary, the greater her army would become. Mary would crush the head of the serpent (cf. Gn 3:15), which manifested itself through the Freemasons, through immorality in the culture, and in other enemies of the Church.

Just as the people in Kolbe's time encountered difficulties in the world and struggled to grow in holiness, we have the same experience today. As Ecclesiastes 1:9 says, "there is nothing new under the sun." To Maximilian, consecration to Mary would answer Jesus's words in Luke 12:49: "I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!" Of this he said:

When the fire of love is ablaze, it cannot be constrained within the heart, but blazes forth and burns, consumes and absorbs other hearts. It conquers more and more souls over to its ideal, to the Immaculata. The Militia of the Immaculata focuses on such love, which goes so far as to win the hearts of all those who live in the present and who will live in the future, and that as soon as possible, as soon as possible, as soon as possible.¹

The Militia of the Immaculata, which we will discuss at greater length in the next chapter, was wildly successful (and is still active to this day). St. John Paul II even credited St. Maximilian and the Militia with preparing the people of Poland for World War II by inspiring them to hold fast to their faith and entrust themselves and their families to the Immaculata. As part of his militia, Kolbe started a magazine called *The Knight of the Immaculata*, which directly addressed the problems going on in the world and promoted a devotion to Mary as the solution.

It is from Maximilian's writing in this magazine that we will principally draw our material for this book.

Structure of the Book

The methodology we will employ in our time together will be very practical. St. Kolbe laid out a doable plan for our devotion to Mary—culminating in a total consecration to her that can be lived out every day. In the article “The Immaculata Is Yours—You Are Hers” in *The Knight of the Immaculata*, Kolbe outlined fourteen steps for living under the mantle of Our Lady, which we can think of as a spiritual battle plan for how we can overcome our own obstacles and grow in real holiness.

The next section of part I will provide more background to Kolbe's work with the Militia of the Immaculata and his Mariology, which will be our preparation for battle. From there part II will focus on explanation and application of Kolbe's fourteen steps. They are introduced here:

Step 1: Surrender Yourself to Jesus through Mary

Be at peace with things that are outside of your control, knowing that they are willed by Our Lady and, thus, by God.

Step 2: Respond with Peace

Act peacefully when encountering a difficulty; this is an opportunity to grow in holiness.

Step 3: Be Obedient to Your Superiors

Be obedient to legitimate superiors in your life. Their will for you is Mary's will for you, and therefore God's will.

Step 4: Put Your Love into Action

Show your love for the Immaculata, Jesus, and the Father through your actions; by this you will become holy.

Step 5: Have Confidence in the Immaculata's Will

Have confidence that Mary will only ever lead you to do what God wills for your life.

Step 6: "Love, and Do What You Will"

In times where the Immaculata's will is difficult to determine, follow the advice of St. Augustine: "Love, and do what you will."

Step 7: Be on Guard, and Realistic!

Be on guard that you do not fall into sin, but if you do, do not fall into self-condemnation—get back up!

Step 8: Find Strength in the Immaculata

Place all your trust in the Immaculata, not in yourself.

Step 9: Do Not Be Overconfident

When you fall into sin, it is because of pride and overconfidence. You cannot keep yourself from falling into sin, but the Immaculata can protect you.

Step 10: Seek Mercy

Seek forgiveness from the Immaculata and from Jesus immediately after falling into sin—do not delay!

Step 11: Love Is an Act of the Will

Love the Immaculata with your whole heart and being, but do not be concerned if you do not feel pleasant emotions all the time. Love consists in desiring to accomplish the Immaculata's will for your life and working toward it.

Step 12: Do All Things Well

Follow Jesus's example as the one who "has done all things well." Perform your ordinary actions well; they often matter more than your fewer extraordinary actions.

Step 13: Be Faithful According to Your State in Life

Be faithful to the obligations required of your state in life. The Immaculata will never call you to neglect your ordinary obligations; rather, she will help you to sanctify them.

Step 14: Magnify the Magnifying Glass

Mary's soul magnifies the Lord, so you ought to magnify that magnification. By spreading devotion to the Immaculata, you will spread devotion to Jesus. By helping others to trust the will of the Immaculata, you help them to trust the will of God.

Each step will be presented in practical and theological terms with concrete examples of how it can be applied no matter what your vocation or state in life. Since all of these steps are taken from a single article written by Kolbe, there may be times some quotations are used for more than one step. The purpose of repeating these quotations is so the power and poignancy they convey may be utilized where applicable in different reflections. By taking this approach, you may also use each step as a stand-alone meditation not contingent upon the others and as a tool for your time of prayer outside a formal consecration preparation period.

Part III ties our call to holiness through Marian consecration to the call to evangelization and the apostolate of St. Maximilian Kolbe, specifically relating to how men are called to be the spiritual leaders in the family—an obligation we cannot take lightly. The fitting end to St. Kolbe's life at Auschwitz was total submission to God through Mary—giving the true witness of faith through martyrdom, looking directly into the eyes of the Gestapo officer who administered the lethal injection while saying his last words, "Ave Maria." Thus, the fitting conclusion to this book is our own Marian consecration, which leads us not only to conquer our own passions but to conquer the whole world for Mary, the Immaculata.

In summary, this book is written for those who would like to give themselves wholly over to the Immaculata, for those who

would like to renew their consecration to her, for those who wish to go to battle against the evil of the world and the evil in their own lives, for those who wish to put in place the will of the Immaculata in their own lives, and for those who wish to spread devotion to her.

The “Step-by-Step Plan Leading to Marian Consecration” on page 153 offers directions for using this book to prepare for consecrating yourself to the Immaculata or renewing your consecration. Whether or not you are currently planning formal consecration, I strongly recommend you read that section now before proceeding.

To the Maximum!

St. Kolbe modeled for us the life of someone who radically gave himself over to God through the Immaculata. He did so in a visibly masculine way, which is something I would like to address now. Maximilian Kolbe was a man’s man, but not in the way today’s society views that description. Really, he was a “mama’s boy.” He found that the most masculine thing he could do was to devote himself to his spiritual mother. The way he lived out this devotion was in traditionally masculine ways: he was a soldier, he was truly a father to those around him, and he was a provider. As a priest, he acted out his devotion a little differently than a biological father or other layperson would, but his attitude and results were still the same.

As such, this book is written from a masculine perspective, keeping in mind a masculine audience. I am a husband and a father with traditional masculine values, and our titular saint was one of the coolest spiritual warriors of all time (in my own opinion, of course). The reflections and lessons in this book will be written in a man’s voice, as if he was sitting around a campfire talking to the guys who also want to be holy. This in no way makes this book only for men, but it is my aim to appeal to men who rarely get to read spiritual books written with them in mind.

Just as I can read St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Faustina, or St. Teresa of Ávila (who wrote in a much more feminine voice and structured her works in a more feminine way than did her spiritual director, St. John of the Cross) and profit spiritually, women need not shy away from this book, as the lessons apply equally to them. In fact, it is also my hope that not only can women grow in their own faith life from reading this book, but that St. Maximilian Kolbe will help women to encourage the men they know to follow these steps or to use the steps as standards for choosing a man to be a friend, husband, and father of her children.

For us guys, I will not mince words. St. Maximilian Kolbe would tell you to “man up!” And so will I. We are in this together.