

DAY 12: Who Are You, O Holy Saints of God?

Saint Maximilian used to give spiritual conferences to the new men in his religious community, the novices. One day, he taught them a lesson they would never forget: “How to become a Saint.” The future saint began by telling his listeners that sanctity isn’t so hard. It’s the result of a simple equation, which he wrote on the blackboard: “ $W + w = S$.” The capital W stands for God’s Will. The small w stands for our wills. When the two wills are united, they equal Sanctity.

This lesson wasn’t just for the novices. Kolbe repeated it over and over, in different ways, to his whole community. In Poland, Kolbe had founded the world’s largest Franciscan monastery, which he named Niepokolanow (“City of the Immaculate”), and he continually urged the more than 600 friars there to become soldier saints for God under the generalship of Mary Immaculate. Why under Mary Immaculate? Because, among creatures, she alone does the will of God perfectly. Therefore, when our wills are united with hers, they’re necessarily united to God’s will. Here are just two of the countless examples of how Kolbe would make this most important point:

Let us pray much that we would understand more and more what the Immaculata said at the Annunciation: “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done unto me [fiat mihi] according to your word.” As God wills, so be it. In this thought, all happiness is contained, already here on earth, all destiny fulfilled. ...

Let us beg our Blessed Mother that she might teach us how our soul might be a “handservant” of the Lord, as was her own. God did not reveal Himself directly to the Mother of God, but rather through a messenger. We too have divine messengers.... Let us pray that we would know how to say to every one of these messengers: God’s will be done. And in this is everything that we are placed upon this earth to learn.

To be one in will with Mary of the great fiat, the only human being whose will has never deviated by her choice from God’s, is to be perfectly united to the will of God. And it is this alignment of your will with his that is the pressing business of your life.

Doing God’s will is not easy — unless we have the Immaculata’s help, “Through the Immaculata we can become great saints, and what is more, in an easy way.”⁴³ Becoming a saint was Kolbe’s number one goal. Literally. In his retreat notes before his ordination to the priesthood, he made a list of his spiritual goals. The first goal reads, “I wish to be a saint and a great saint.”⁴⁴ He knew the Immaculata would help him and even make the path to great sanctity an easy one.

How does Mary make sanctity easy? We read many reasons for this last week, during our closing reflection on St. Louis de Montfort’s teaching. But Kolbe emphasized another reason why Mary makes sanctity easy. It has to do with her being the Mediatrix of all grace, an idea he expresses in his formula for Marian consecration, “God has willed to entrust the entire order of mercy to [Mary].”⁴⁵ It’s God’s will that she distribute his graces. Why? Because it’s God’s will to unite himself to Mary by his Holy Spirit, “The Holy Spirit does not act except through the Immaculata, his spouse. Hence, she is the Mediatrix of all the graces of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁶ And hence, it’s “easy” to become holy when we stay close to and ask for graces from the one whose very job it is to distribute them for God.

We can get a better idea of Mary as Mediatrix of grace if we look at her image on the miraculous medal, which comes to us through her apparitions to St. Catherine Labouré. Kolbe was deeply moved by this image, because it depicts Mary standing on a globe with rays of light (graces) streaming from the rings on her fingers. In one of the apparitions, Catherine noticed that rays did not stream from all of Mary's rings. Mary explained that the rays and graces were available but did not come because nobody asked for them. Kolbe's way is not just to ask for these graces but to allow Mary to take us completely into her hands, so as to make us channels of these very graces for the whole world. We'll learn more about this way tomorrow.

Today's prayer:

Come, Holy Spirit, living in Mary. Unite my will to the will of the Immaculata, which is one with your will.