

Saint Maximilian Kolbe

Book Title: *Saint Maximilian Kolbe: Mary's Knight*

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World War II and the Holocaust are hard topics to teach to children because it is difficult to wrap our own heads around the terrible atrocities that occurred. As an adult, I still don't understand why the Nazis felt like they had to murder so many innocent people. What was Hitler's problem!? How could something like this happen, not too long ago? It's quite scary to think about, and really something that we would like to shield our children from for as long as possible. But I've never been a fan of the saying, "Ignorance is bliss;" I'm much more of a "knowledge is power" kind of gal.

You know your child best. If you think they can handle it, research World War II with your child. There are several books that are appropriate for upper-grade children on the Holocaust (*Number the Stars* and *The Diary of Anne Frank*) that you could read together. Visit museums or talk with someone who lived during the war. Once your child has a basic understanding of what concentration camps were then I would highly recommend our Encounter Book on Saint Maximilian Kolbe. His sacrifice, devotion, and martyrdom become so much more powerful knowing what terrible places the concentration camps were. His example encourages us all to find the strength to sing, even when life gets tough. And this is a lesson that every kid needs to learn.

Discussion/Written Response Questions

1. Maximilian's entire family devoted themselves to God. What does your family enjoy doing together? Do you have a special hobby or interest that you all share?
2. Many people thought that Maximilian's dreams of making movies and starting a magazine were "crazy." It turns out that these were great ways to preach. What is innovation? How can we tell the difference between innovation and a crazy idea?
3. Maximilian volunteered to take the place of a man with a family in the starvation bunker so that he could live and hopefully one day return to his wife and children.

- What is the nicest thing that you have ever done for someone? What is the nicest thing someone has ever done for you?
4. How did Maximilian maintain a positive attitude at Auschwitz? What helps you when you feel scared? Are there some things in your life that you have a negative outlook on but seem small after reading what Maximilian went through? How will you change your attitude when those negative thoughts creep in?

Geography Connection

Poland

History Connection

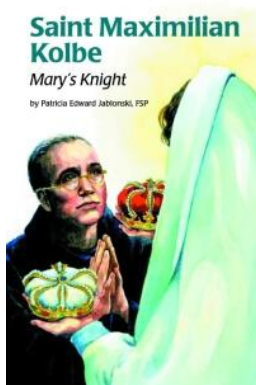
World War II and the Holocaust

Class Project

Start a class newsletter that can be sent out to parents or distributed around the school. Students can brainstorm their own story ideas and pitch them to the class. Anyone interested in helping to gather information, draw an illustration, or write the story can volunteer. Everyone in the class should play a part in the newsletter's production. Afterwards, have a class discussion about the difficulties of producing a newsletter and compare them to the difficulties that Maximilian faced when first starting his magazine.

Compare/Contrast

Create a Venn diagram comparing the lives and martyrdom of Maximilian Kolbe and Edith Stein.



Saint Maximilian Kolbe was born January 8, 1894 in Poland. He was very mischievous and often got into trouble. His mother once said in frustration, "I don't know what's going to become of you!" Maximilian Kolbe went to the Blessed Mother with this question. She appeared to him, holding in her hands two crowns, one white, one red. "She asked if I would like to have them – one was for purity, the other for martyrdom. I said, 'I choose both.' She smiled and disappeared." After that he was not the same.

He entered the minor seminary of the Conventual Franciscans in Lviv (then Poland, now Ukraine), near his birthplace, and at sixteen became a novice. Though he later achieved doctorates in philosophy and theology, he was deeply interested in science, even drawing plans for rocket ships.

Maximilian sought to combat religious indifference through the Militia of the Immaculata and the Knights of the Immaculata, a religious magazine under Mary's protection.

But he is best known for offering his life at Auschwitz for a fellow prisoner, a husband and father who had been condemned to die in a starvation bunker with others in retaliation for an escaped prisoner.

He was beatified in 1971 and canonized in 1982.

Those who read this book will meet someone whose great love for Mary, the Mother of God, sustained him throughout his whole life. Like Maximilian Kolbe it is possible to be brave even in difficult situations and love others even when it costs.

Ages 8 – 12

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