August 14th: Memorial of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, Priest and Martyr

Gospel text (*Jn* 15:12-16): Jesus said to his disciples, «This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this, to give one's life for one's friends; and you are my friends if you do what I command you. I shall not call you servants any more, because servants do not know what their master is about. Instead I have called you friends, since I have made known to you everything I learned from my Father. You did not choose me; it was I who chose you and sent you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. And everything you ask the Father in my name, he will give you».

«There is no greater love than this, to give one's life for one's friends»

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
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Today, we commemorate St. Francis Maximilian Maria Kolbe (1894-1941) remembrance. He died in the German death camp of Auschwitz. The Jesus' words we hear today: «Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends» (Jn 15:13), literally apply to this saint martyr. In fact, ten prisoners were to be executed by the Nazis in reprisal against one who had escaped from the concentration camp. Maximilian volunteered to take the place of one of those ten, who was married and a parent.

Maximilian and the other nine convicts were locked up in an underground bunker to be starved to death. There, Maximilian still provided them with another heroic service: while he could, he kept on celebrating the Mass and feeding his inmates with the Body of Christ. This fact reminds us of Jesus Christ gesture while agonizing on the Cross, and he thought of us, by sparing us and asking His Father to forgive us. Jesus really treated us as friends (cf. Jn 15:14) to whom - naturally – a committed offense is forgiven.

The date of martyrdom was, precisely, August 14th, i.e. practically on the eve of the feast day of the Assumption of Mary. It is nice that such a solemn Feast of the Virgin Mary has been preceded by the "dies natalis" of St. Maximilian Maria, inasmuch he was a "Marian soul". Amongst the sermons Maximilian preached we can find a very daring argument: insofar that for the greatest grace ever given to a creature (the divine motherhood, to become God's "mother") the Almighty asked Mary's consent, then - concludes father Kolbe - «no grace is granted without Jesus asking permission from Mary». And, since Jesus gave Mary to us as our mother, that 'yes', the permission, is always secured. This is a Friend!