

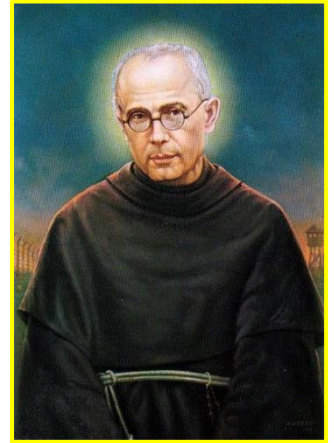
St. Maximilian Kolbe Novena Prayers

- **Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian** (from August 6 to 14)

O St. Maximilian Kolbe, faithful follower of St. Francis, inflamed by the love of God you dedicated your life to the practice of virtue and to works of the apostolate.

Look down with favor upon us who devoutly confide in your intercession.

Having consecrated yourself to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, you inspired countless souls to a holy life and various forms of the apostolate in order to do good to others and to spread the kingdom of God. Obtain for us the grace by our lives and labors to draw many souls to Christ.



In your close conformity to our Divine Savior you reached such an intense degree of love that you offered your life to save a fellow prisoner. Implore God that we, inflamed by such ardent charity, may through our living faith and our apostolic works witness Christ to others, and thus merit to join you in the blessed vision of God. Amen.

Readings and Meditations for Each Day of Novena

Day 1: Maximilian's Call to Holiness

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: Raymond Kolbe was born of poor parents in Poland on January 7, 1894. Raymond came to love the Blessed Virgin quite early in life. This devotion did not prevent him from getting into trouble. His lively nature tried the patience of his mother. Once she remarked in exasperation, "Raymond, what is going to become of you?" After this incident there was a noticeable change in his behavior. His mother became worried. Upon questioning him, she found Raymond at first reluctant to tell her his "secret." Finally he told her how much her reproach had troubled him. He had prayed to Mary, and asked her the same question, "Mother of God, what will become of me?" She took compassion on the miserable boy and appeared to him holding in her hands two crowns, one white, the other red. She asked Raymond which one he would choose; the white signified purity, the red martyrdom. "I choose both" he answered.

Meditation: Every genuine conversion experience be it that of a mischievous child or that of a hardened adult involves the individual's humble recognition of his own weaknesses and capacity for sin. May Maximilian's humility be ours in our pursuit of Christian holiness through ongoing conversion.

Novena Prayer for St. Maximilian's Intercession

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Through the Militia of the Immaculata movement, which Maximilian founded, he spread a fervent devotion to Our Lady throughout the world. He gave up his life for a total stranger and loved his persecutors, giving us an example of unselfish love for all people, a love that was inspired by true devotion to Mary.

Grant, O Lord Jesus, that we too may give ourselves entirely without reserve to the love and service of our heavenly Queen in order that we may better love and serve our neighbor in imitation of your humble servant, Maximilian. Amen.

Day 2: Maximilian Discerns God's Will

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: When Raymond Kolbe was a seminary student at Lwow, Poland, he bowed his face to the floor during Mass one day and promised the most holy Virgin that he would fight for her. It was a surprising thing to do, especially since he had already chosen to be a Franciscan priest. Not knowing how he was to fulfill his promise he began to picture to himself a struggle with material weapons. The more he thought about it the more he felt attracted to a military career, fighting for the freedom of his homeland under the banner of Our Lady of Czestochowa. Finally, he decided he had made a mistake: he would give up the idea of studying for the priesthood. He was on his way to inform the Minister Provincial of his decision when he was called to the parlor. His mother had just arrived for a visit. What Maria Kolbe told her son we do not know, but shortly afterward Raymond was invested in the Conventual Franciscan habit and took the name Maximilian Maria.

On September 5, 1911, he made his first vows. The following year, another crisis arose, and again Maximilian Kolbe's destiny hung in the balance. His superiors had decided to send him to Rome for philosophical and theological studies, but Friar Maximilian requested that his name be stricken from the list. That night he reconsidered. Had he not placed his own will in the way of God's will as expressed by his superiors? Was it not better to obey? The following morning he told his Provincial that he was prepared to go to Rome.

Meditation: Discernment of the direction that God wishes our lives to take requires an absolute truthfulness with oneself and God. May Maximilian's inner honesty be ours as we strive continually to do God's will.

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Day 3: Maximilian's Consecration to Mary

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: It was in Rome that Friar Maximilian learned the true meaning of his call to fight for Mary. Exposed to the rabid anti-Christian forces that burgeoned in Europe he saw the need for a new era of evangelization that would bring all peoples back to God. Suddenly during prayer one morning, Friar Maximilian was enlightened to understand the critical importance of the role God had given Mary in this work. Meditating on the Miraculous Medal conversion story of Alphonse Ratisbonne, a young nineteenth-century Jewish agnostic, Friar Maximilian was illumined to perceive Mary's role as the Holy Spirit's indispensable partner and instrument in the evangelizing work of conversion and growth in holiness. He saw that this work was a spiritual war with Satan, and that Mary needed consecrated souls to serve as her knights in this battle. Maximilian lost little time putting this inspiration into action.

On October 16, 1917, he and six fellow Franciscans established the Militia of the Immaculata (MI) movement. Its goal was as simple and vast as the Church's mission: the interior transformation of all souls in Christ through the Immaculata. To achieve this goal, Friar Maximilian proposed a practical spirituality of "Total Consecration to Mary." He and all "MIs" would make a free and total offering of themselves to Our Lady, so that they might become instruments in her work for Christ.

Meditation: True consecration to Mary is a Marian way of living a life of close union with Christ through the Holy Spirit. May we find in Maximilian's spirituality of Marian consecration a powerful means for living Christ's Gospel and spreading it to others.

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Day 4: Maximilian's Faith

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: After his ordination, Father Maximilian returned to Poland in July 1919, worn by tuberculosis. Despite his poor health, he was assigned to the Franciscan friary at Cracow

where the climate is fatal to tubercularsas a university professor. Not only was his body exhausted but at times his soul was harrowed by ridicule from some of his own Franciscan confreres. He had hoped on returning to interest all the friars at Cracow in his work. A good number of priests, brothers and student friars did respond to his call, but others shrugged their shoulders. They listened to him, then laughed among themselves, calling him a bore and a dreamer. One friar even found a nickname which delighted the detractors for awhile: "Marmalade." The young priest walked very slowly, like animated marmalade, to avoid any abrupt movement that could provoke hemorrhage. Maximilian bore this mockery with patience and mildness. Faith, alone, allowed him to find in God and the Immaculata the affirmation and support that some of his confreres initially denied him.

Meditation: When all seems lost and one is stripped of everything, there remains one vital source of spiritual energy: faith. May Maximilian's faith be ours, especially when adversity robs us of the affirmation and support we crave.

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Day 5: Maximilian's Hope

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: Through Father Maximilian's efforts, the influence of the MI movement began to spread through Poland in the 1920s. As distances became too great for his one unaided human voice to reach, Maximilian realized that only the printed word would suffice. With a complete lack of capital, but full trust in providence, he began publishing the Knight of the Immaculata (Rycerz Niepokalanej) a sixteen-page magazine. Once when bankruptcy seemed imminent, he threw himself at the feet of the Immaculata and begged for help. As he was about to leave the church, he found an envelope on the altar with these words on it, "For thee, O Immaculate Mother." Inside was the exact sum to pay the debt.

In 1927 when quarters for his printshop became too small, he entered into negotiations to purchase a large tract of land for a whole "City of the Immaculata" (Niepokalanow), where he and the friars would expand their apostolate. However, he again lacked capital. He explained to the landowner, Prince Drucki-Lubecki, that he could not afford the price. Abruptly the Prince decided to make a free gift of it to Maximilian and the friars. By 1939 Niepokalanow had become the largest Franciscan friary in the world with over 700 friars and students. The circulation of their magazine exceeded 750,000 copies per month.

Meditation: When the customary human solutions to the complexities that beset our lives prove ineffective, we are placed in a situation of total dependence upon God. May Maximilian's unflinching hope complete trust in God's providence be ours throughout the course of our life.

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Day 6: Maximilian's Sanctification of Labor

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: Father Maximilian's zeal for the inner conversion and sanctification of all people was not confined by national boundaries. With appropriate ecclesiastical permission, he and four other friars sailed to the Orient in 1930. They established themselves in Japan, where they hoped to publish the Knight of the Immaculata in Japanese. As a condition to publish the magazine, Father Maximilian was obliged to teach philosophy in the diocesan seminary. In exchange, the bishop would allow diocesan priests to help in the translating of articles into the Japanese language. Remarkably, Father Maximilian was able to publish the first issue of *Seibo no Kishi* within one month of his arrival. Father Maximilian soon founded a second City of the Immaculata, *Mugenzai no Sono*. Throughout his apostolic labors in Japan, Father Maximilian suffered constantly from high fevers, violent headaches, and abscesses, due to overwork and an inadequate diet. He concealed these problems so well, however, that for some time only his most intimate companions had any awareness of the seriousness of his condition.

Meditation: Work can serve to enhance our dignity as God's people, when we work diligently to nourish our families and build up God's kingdom. May Maximilian's zealous commitment to each task at hand stimulate our own religious zeal for the daily work that God has entrusted to us.

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Day 7: Maximilian's Obedience

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: Scarcely two months after his arrival in Japan and the first publication of a Japanese version of the Knight of the Immaculata, Father Maximilian was summoned by his superiors to defend this enterprise at the Province Chapter in Lwow, Poland. Obedient as always, he left Japan for this meeting, but his heart was heavy because there was no one capable of maintaining the gigantic work in his absence. Father Maximilian had no doubts that only through full obedience would his own labors for the Immaculata's cause be fruitful. At the chapter, the very future of the Japanese Niepokalanow was put to question. The expenses were heavy, and the capitular friars discussed the prudence of undertaking such a foolish venture. Father Maximilian followed his usual tactics. Having explained all his arguments and spoken from the abundance of his heart, he remained silent, waited, closed his eyes, with his hands under his capuche he held his rosary and very slowly while his superiors discussed the business he summoned his council, reciting innumerable Hail Marys. He won on all scores and returned to Japan with full permission to continue the Immaculata's work there.

Meditation: Submission to legitimate authority frees us from the tyranny of our own willfulness, stubbornness or selfishness. May Maximilian's obedience to authority in the Church move our consciences along the lines of a more generous obedience to Christ's chosen representatives.

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Day 8: Maximilian and the Eucharist

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: Under Father Maximilian's spiritual leadership, the friars of Niepokalanow and

Mugenzai no Sono had incredible success in their press apostolate. Their secret for success was a community life of prayer centered on the Eucharist. In the mid-1930s, when the friars of Niepokalanow were about to inaugurate their first newspaper, the *Maly Dziennik* (Little Journal), they had formidable opponents in the secular press of Poland. For nine days, the friars prayed day and night before the Blessed Sacrament. The newspaper venture met with a tremendous success. Years later, Father Maximilian initiated a program of daytime adoration of the Eucharist at Niepokalanow. This began on December 8, 1939, the day on which Father Maximilian and the friars were released from a three-month imprisonment by their Nazi captors. He immediately introduced adoration of the Eucharist in order to increase his “active forces of prayer.” Every half hour, day after day, a fresh group of four friars took its place before our Lord in the tabernacle. This became the friars’ primary apostolate.

Meditation: For every Christian, prayer is not a luxury but a necessity. Maximilian knew that prayer before the Eucharist is the ultimate source for fruitful Christian living. May our own reverence for the Eucharist reflect this same conviction.

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Day 9: Maximilian’s Love

Opening Prayer to St. Maximilian

Reading: On February 17, 1941, Father Maximilian was arrested by the Gestapo for the second time. Subjected to extreme cruelty throughout his captivity, Father Maximilian prepared himself and his fellow prisoners for the ultimate moment: “They will not kill our souls . . . they will not be able to deprive us of the dignity of a Catholic. We will not give up.”

Love was to impel Father Maximilian to become a “martyr of charity” in the notorious Auschwitz concentration camp. After the escape of a prisoner, ten inmates were condemned to death by starvation. Sergeant Francis Gajowniczek cried out, “What will happen to my poor family?” At that moment, Father Maximilian slipped out of line, and boldly asked the commandant if he could take the place of Sergeant Gajowniczek. The astounded officer consented. Amidst the horror of the death bunker, love triumphed. Daily prayers, rosaries and hymns were heard as Father Maximilian ministered to his nine fellow victims. Finally after two weeks, on August 14, 1941, the Nazis hastened Maximilian’s death by the injection of carbolic acid.

Meditation: True charity always places the needs of others ahead of our own because true

charity sees Christ himself mirrored in the face of others. May Maximilian's total love for God and neighbor always through the Immaculata characterize our own approach to Christ in others.

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