

**Reflection:** *(Based on the Gospel of Luke 24: 13-35)*

After the two disciples encountered the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus that day what did they do? They turned around and headed back to Jerusalem. Back to a place where anyone who even mentioned the name Jesus, would put their own life in danger. But the two now had a purpose – to testify, to tell the Good news, Jesus has risen.

Every life has a purpose. No matter where we find ourselves, no matter whether times are good or bad, whether we are rich or poor, healthy or not- we have a purpose. That purpose simply put is this: To bring God's love into this world, to be His presence, to be the love of Christ to those around us.

I'd like to tell you about someone who carried out that purpose with great courage.

Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan Friar who was born in Poland in 1894. His parents were relatively poor, and in 1914, his father was captured by the Russians and hanged for his part in fighting for an independent Poland.

Maximilian had a strong religious yearning from a very young age- he entered the seminary at age 13 and was ordained a priest at age 25.

In Poland, Fr.Kolbe founded a monastery and helped publish religious books, magazines and a daily newspaper. The monthly magazine grew to have a circulation of over 1 million and was influential amongst Polish Catholics. Kolbe even gained a radio license and publicly broadcast his views on religion. Fr. Kolbe was always creative in using the latest technology to spread the Gospel message.

In 1930, Kolbe travelled to Japan, where he spent several years serving as a missionary. He founded a monastery on the outskirts of Nagasaki (the monastery actually survived the atomic blast). During his time in Japan he contracted tuberculosis, so he returned home to Poland in 1936.

In 1939 when Poland was overrun by the Nazi forces, he was arrested, but was released after three months. After his release, many Polish refugees and Jews sought sanctuary in Kolbe's monastery.

Fr. Kolbe and his community helped to hide, feed and clothe 3,000 Polish refugees, (of which 2,000 were Jews). Kolbe also made illegal radio broadcasts, in which he denounced the crimes of the Nazis. In 1941, he also

published a magazine in which he strongly criticized the Nazis and called on all people to use their conscience to end the atrocities. He wrote this quote:

*‘What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it. The real conflict here is an inner conflict. Beyond all the armies of occupation and the extermination camps, there are two enemies at war in the depth of every soul: good versus evil, sin versus love. And what use are the victories on the battlefield if we ourselves are defeated in our innermost personal selves?’*

Shortly after this publication, he was arrested by the German Gestapo for hiding Jewish people. He was sent to an Auschwitz concentration camp to do hard labor. Continuing to serve as a priest, Kolbe was subjected to violent harassment, including beating and lashings. Despite the awful conditions of Auschwitz, Fr. Kolbe retained a deep faith, and dignity in the face of appalling treatment.

In July 1941, three prisoners appeared to have escaped from the camp; as a result the Deputy Commander of Auschwitz ordered 10 prisoners to be chosen to be starved to death in an underground bunker to set an example for anyone else thinking about escape.

One of the men selected had a wife and children. Hearing this Kolbe volunteered to take the man’s place. He told officials ‘I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.’ Kolbe was permitted to do so.

The men were led away to the underground bunker where they were to be starved to death. There, Kolbe would lead the men in prayer and singing hymns to Mary. Father Kolbe never asked for anything, didn’t complain; rather he encouraged the others, and ministered to them. Even the prison guards admired his faith.

After two weeks, nearly all the prisoners had died due to dehydration and starvation. Because the guards wanted the cell emptied, the remaining prisoners and Kolbe were executed with a lethal injection. Those present say he calmly accepted death.

Word of his deeds and courage spread around to the Auschwitz prisoners, giving them a rare glimpse of light and human dignity in the face of cruelty. After the war, his reputation grew and he became symbolic of courageous dignity.

Fr. Kolbe was canonized as a martyr saint by Pope John Paul II in 1981. The man whose place Fr. Kolbe took in the bunker actually survived the concentration camp and attended Saint Kolbe's canonization. The Pope said: "Maximilian did not die rather he gave his life ... for his brother."  
(Pause)

It is unlikely that any of us will be called to serve God in such a dramatic manner. But we do share the same, equally important purpose with Saint Kolbe – to be God's love in this world.

In today's Scripture readings we see Peter (in the first reading) and the two disciples in the Gospel, answering Jesus call to "acknowledge Him before others"- or in other words, be His loving presence in our world. How do we do that? How do we fulfill our purpose?

Our second reading today reminds us it starts by having Faith in Jesus.  
Personal faith, rooted deep in our hearts.

Believing in our heart, that He is the Son of God, who loves us, listens to our prayers, want to be with us.

Believing He is our Savior, that He came to live among us to show us how to live a life that is pleasing to God- a life that leads us to true happiness.

Believing that His death on the cross means something- it means He gave over His life rather than deny his teachings, rather than deny His love for you and me.

Faith deeply rooted in our hearts means taking on Jesus attitude and believing in His teachings- like being poor in spirit; having things but not letting them own you. Being Humble-standing in awe of all of God's creation and realizing our complete dependence on God.

And Faith in Jesus means believing in His power, His power to change hearts- for the better. Believing in His power to dwell in us through the Holy Eucharist.

Jesus calls us to "acknowledge Him before others". That starts inwardly, in our hearts, but we can't really fulfill our purpose by just keeping it all inside. We have to live it. We have to act on Jesus commandment to love God and love each other.

Acknowledging Jesus before others involves how we live our lives every day. How we show our faith to others- how we bring God's love to them. Especially in trying times like those we face today.

It involves the work we choose to do, how we spend our free time, the words and tone we use when speaking to others (are we always angry or complaining- or do we speak kindly, do we bring peace and calmness to our workplace, our school, our homes)

We might not publish a religious magazine that reaches millions or have an underground radio show as St. Kolbe did, but we can talk about Jesus and His teachings to our friends, family, and our children. We can speak out against injustice when we see it. We can teach others kindness, mercy and forgiveness- by practicing these qualities ourselves.

We might not be called to take the place of someone who is suffering or in danger like St. Kolbe did, but we can share the pain of someone who is hurting, visit them and spend time with them, listen, encourage, pray with them, let them know we care. One of the cruelest aspects of this pandemic is the physical isolation and loneliness that accompanies it. But it cannot isolate us spiritually, we are united in Christ and need to move forward confident in that fact.

We all know people who are imprisoned- imprisoned by physical suffering, or emotionally suffering. There is a world full of people desperately longing to hear that they matter, that God' loves them-**we can bring that message, that love to them.** Like St. Kolbe we can offer others a glimpse of light, of human dignity, of the love of Jesus. Have you ever seen a time when it is needed more?

Bringing God's love into this world will be fun and exciting at times, other times it may be frustrating, challenging, inconvenient, difficult. Jesus urges us in today's Gospel to keep at it. He tells us Never be afraid because He is really present with us today as He was then in the breaking of the bread.

God gives us the strength and ability to live out our purpose, to be His love, in ways we could never have imagined. We see that in the life of Saint Kolbe.

Never think that even the smallest act of love is unimportant or goes unnoticed by God. It's all-important.

God watches over even the smallest of sparrows-and He knows every hair on our head. What a great comfort to know God cares for us, counts on us and is always close by.

Amen.

