

Today in the church we remember Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan friar based in his home country of Poland. Because of his work (which you can easily look up online) Maximilian was arrested by the Gestapo and, eventually, sent to Auschwitz. Here, he volunteered to take the place of a prisoner selected to die, and he eventually died in the camp on 14 August 1941 as a martyr.

When I realised that we remembered Kolbe today, I was reminded of a play I listened to the other day about Bobby Sands whose death I can easily recall. What was interesting about the play is that it was mostly from the perspective of his mother, Rosaleen and it dealt very sensitively indeed with the frustrations and anger that she must have felt. Kolbe too had family – siblings and parents – who must have suffered terribly coming to terms with his death.

Both men died a terrible death – with starvation involved (although Kolbe's death was accelerated with a lethal injection) – and both men died for something they believed in completely. And both men had a faith.

But that is where the similarities end. For Kolbe's faith and belief led him to die voluntarily, in order to protect another individual. The enormity of that deed seems incredulous to us. We have heard in the last few months of people working, tirelessly and voluntarily, to relieve the suffering of others. Indeed, we probably all have personal knowledge of good deeds undertaken to make this most unusual of times less stressful for some. It is not unusual for some people in our country to be rewarded for doing good deeds – honours and medals are awarded for such actions. But to do what Kolbe did takes faith on a level that few of us are privileged to hold, and so it is right that we recall his deeds, and honour his short life. In doing so, we raise living a life of faith to a level of importance that, hopefully, will inspire us to do more, to place faith at the centre of everything we do and to use it to guide all of our actions and deeds, not just some of them.

So let's pray for faith at a higher level, for an increase in the importance of God in our lives, and for love to be always at the centre:

Lord God, you know our hearts and the feeble way in which we sometimes regard our faith in you. Give us strength to hold on to that faith in the midst of difficulties, stresses and anxieties that our lives can offer. We know that you love us, and we know that you will hear our humble prayer. May we have the courage of our convictions and show you the love you deserve at every opportunity, not just those opportunities where it is easy. Hear our prayer Lord, know that it comes from the heart and look with kindness on us in our weakness. AMEN

Wishing you well for the next couple of weeks as the team take a break – stay safe.

Every blessing

Linda