



## Memorial of Saint Maximilian Mary Kolbe, Priest and Martyr



**Date:** Thursday, August 14, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

**First Reading:** Joshua 3:7–10a, 11, 13–17

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 114:1–6 | **Response:** Alleluia!

**Gospel Acclamation:** Psalm 119:135

**Gospel Reading:** Matthew 18:21–19

**Preached at:** the Chapel of Richartz House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

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**M**y dear brothers in Christ,

When you reach a river and there's no bridge, you can either turn back or step forward in trust. Today, on the feast of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, we are being asked to take that step—with courage, with faith, and with love that costs something.

In the first reading from the Book of Joshua (Joshua 3:7–17), the Israelites reach the edge of the Promised Land, but the Jordan River is in flood. There's no safe way across. Still, God tells the priests to walk into the water carrying the Ark of the Covenant. And as they do, the waters stop. The river opens. The people cross on dry land. It wasn't human planning that made it possible—it was the trust to obey God's word. The Ark—the sign of God's presence—went first. The people followed.

Psalm 114 puts it beautifully: “The sea looked and fled; the Jordan turned back.” Even nature responds when God draws near. But this is not just about rivers and old stories. The Jordan still stands in front of us today. Sometimes it's an economic crisis. Sometimes it's an old wound in the family. Sometimes it's guilt we carry that we've never spoken aloud. But the same God still leads the way. The same God still calls us to take the first step.

In the Gospel (Matthew 18:21–19:1), Peter asks a question that comes from a tired heart: “How many times should I forgive? Seven?” That already sounds generous. But Jesus answers, “Seventy-seven times”—and some translations say

“seventy times seven.” Either way, the number isn’t meant to be counted. It’s symbolic. It means without limit. Forgiveness, Jesus is saying, is not something we measure—it’s something we live.

He tells a story to make the point. A servant is forgiven a huge debt—millions in today’s money—and then refuses to forgive someone who owes him a tiny amount. It shocks us because we see ourselves in it. We ask God for mercy, and then we hold grudges. Jesus is clear: if we don’t forgive others, we’re acting against the very mercy that saved us. It’s not just hypocrisy. It’s a deep wound to the heart of God.

That’s why the Sacrament of Reconciliation matters so much. It’s not just a duty or a rule. It’s a place of truth. In the quiet and sacred space of Confession—what the Church calls the “internal forum”—we speak openly before God. We lay down what we’ve carried. We don’t have to pretend. And God meets us there with mercy. He doesn’t just forgive us—He restores us, and gives us the grace to forgive others in return.

And let’s be clear: forgiveness is not pretending that nothing happened. It’s not forgetting. And it’s not saying the wrong was okay. Forgiveness is a choice. Often it’s a long process. But it begins when we hand the hurt over to God. When we say: I won’t let this wound become my home. Forgiveness doesn’t erase justice. It makes justice possible without hatred. It breaks the cycle of revenge.

Saint Maximilian Kolbe lived this. A Polish Franciscan who loved Mary deeply, he trusted that where she is, Jesus is close. In Auschwitz, when a man was chosen to die, Kolbe stepped forward and said, “I am a priest. Let me take his place.” He was thrown into a starvation bunker, but he didn’t give in to bitterness. He prayed. He encouraged others. He forgave. And when he was finally killed by injection, he died with peace, as a man who had followed Christ to the end.

Let us pause and imagine that cell. The dark. The hunger. The sound of prayer in the night. Who is with you there? What do you feel? What hope lives even there? Then bring it back to your life. Where is God asking you to step forward—not knowing how it will end, but knowing He is with you?

Here in Zimbabwe, forgiveness is not just a religious idea. It's something our country needs to survive. We know what injustice feels like. We know how pain can pass from one generation to the next. But Catholic Social Teaching reminds us: every person has dignity, even the one who hurt us. Mercy is not weakness. It is strength that builds peace. It is the only way out of the cycle of hurt and blame.

In Joshua's story, the priests stepped first—but they didn't walk alone. The whole people followed. That's how forgiveness works too. It begins with one person. Then two. Then families. Then, by God's grace, a community. Even a country. If we wait until we feel ready or until the other person deserves it, we may never begin. The Ark has already gone before us. The river will not drown us. God will meet us there.

So today, on the feast of Saint Maximilian Kolbe, let's ask for his courage and his peace. Let's meet God again in Confession—not to be scolded, but to be healed. Let's forgive someone—not because it's easy, but because it's holy. Let's take the step we've been avoiding. And let's trust that God will do the rest.

Amen.

For reflection today:

- What is the “Jordan River” in my life right now—the hard place where God is asking me to trust Him?
- Who do I need to forgive—or begin to forgive? And have I asked God for the strength to do it?
- Have I been to Confession recently, and let God's mercy heal what I cannot fix on my own?

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.