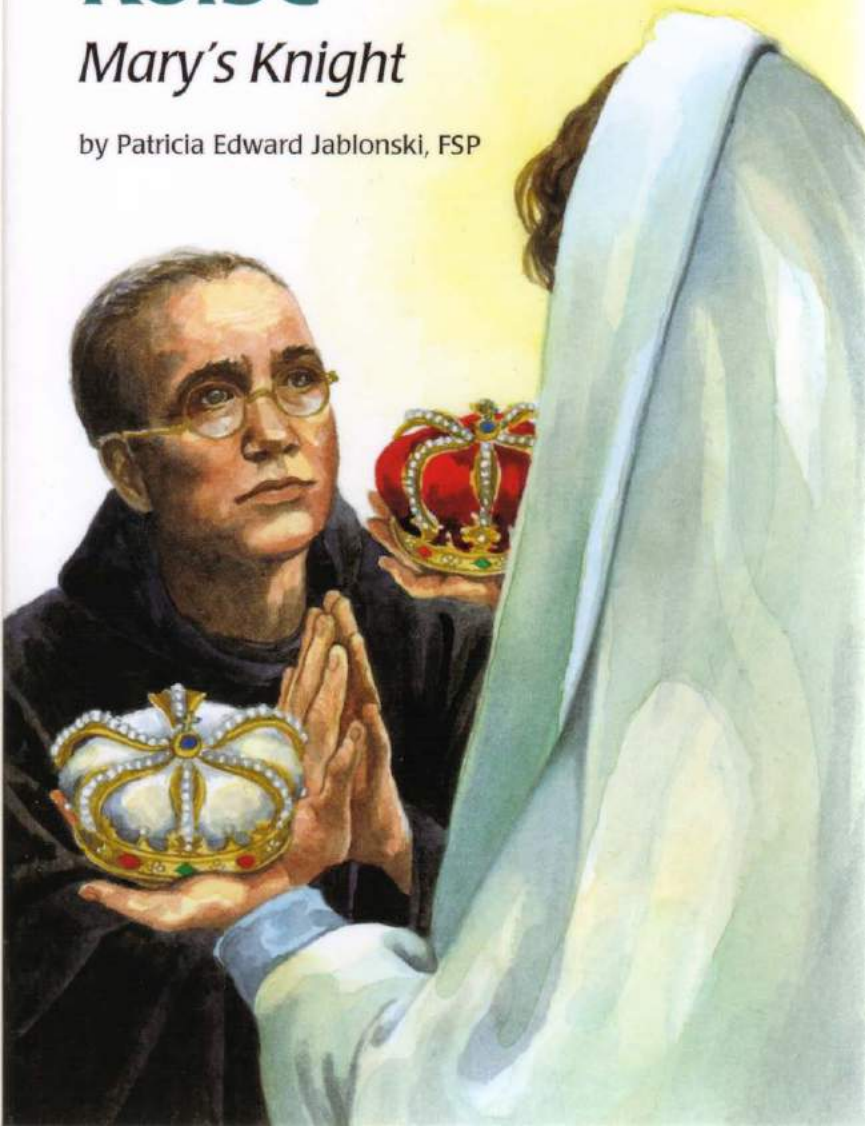


Saint Maximilian Kolbe

Mary's Knight

by Patricia Edward Jablonski, FSP



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Written by
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THE RED AND THE WHITE

Yes. She was still there.

Raymond Kolbe pressed his hands to his eyes and rubbed hard. What was happening? Did he dare look again?

A gentle voice broke the stillness. "Do not be afraid, Raymond. I bring you two crowns. Will you accept them?"

The kindness in the Lady's voice melted the boy's fear into confidence. He uncovered his eyes and raised his head. The weavers' son was face to face with the Mother of God!

How beautiful she was! So much more beautiful than Raymond had ever imagined. He wished that all time would stop. He wanted to stay there forever—in the presence of the Blessed Virgin, whose motherly smile seemed to embrace him in a special act of love. But with a gentle insistence, Mary was holding out two crowns to him.

"The white crown means that you will always be pure," she explained; "the red, that you will die a martyr."

The ten-year-old grew serious as he studied the crowns. He definitely wanted to try to keep his heart free from sin. But martyrdom? That would mean giving up his life for his faith. He stole another glance at Mary. She was intently watching him. His thoughts raced on. *Martyrdom! Jesus died on the cross for me. How could I ever refuse him anything?* Raymond knew what his answer must be.

"My Mother," he replied in a trembling voice, "my holy Mother...I accept both crowns!"

The Blessed Virgin was very pleased. Her smile grew even more brilliant. Then, as silently as she had come, she was gone. The kneeling boy was alone again. His heart was pounding so hard that the echo of its thumping seemed to shake the walls of the church.



"Raymond, what are you doing there behind the cupboard?"

The unexpected call of his mother startled the boy to his feet. With a hasty puff, he extinguished the oil lamp flickering



"I accept both crowns!"

before the family shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa. This was his chance. It had been days now since the visit of the Blessed Virgin, and he still hadn't told either of his parents about it. Glancing back at Mary's image, he whispered, "My Lady, help me to tell Mama—now."

A faint smile played at Mrs. Kolbe's lips as she waited for her son. More pronounced, though, were the wrinkles of worry that tightened her usually serene expression. Something was definitely wrong with Raymond. And she was going to find out what it was.

The boy finally emerged from the corner, his eyes puffy and red.

"You've been crying, haven't you," Mrs. Kolbe gently prodded. "Can we talk about what's wrong?"

Raymond didn't answer.

His mother made another attempt. "You know, I've noticed a change in you lately, Raymond, a change for the better. You're much more obedient than you used to be." Again Mrs. Kolbe waited for some reaction. But her son only stared at the floor. "I've also seen how much time you spend before the altar of Our Lady of Czestochowa," she went on. "I'm happy to see that you go there

to pray. But since you've been crying, something must be bothering you. Don't you want to tell me about it?"

Still no response. Mrs. Kolbe decided to try another tactic. "Now Raymond, don't make me take back what I said about your being obedient.... Tell me everything!"

The boy suddenly broke down and began to sob. "Remember, Mama, how one day you asked me what would become of me because I'm so stubborn?"

Mrs. Kolbe thought for a moment, then nodded.

"Well that question really made me think about the way I'd been acting. I felt very sad, and from then on I tried to be better. And I went to pray more in front of the picture of the Blessed Mother." Raymond paused to catch his breath, then hurried on in an excited tone. "When I first went to pray in front of the Virgin's shrine, I asked her what would become of me."

Mrs. Kolbe blinked back the tears that were beginning to cloud her own eyes.

"I asked Mary a second time in church," Raymond continued, "and then..." his voice dropped to a whisper, "she appeared to me!"

While his mother listened in awe, Raymond described all the details of the ap-

parition. With his characteristic simplicity, he concluded, "Ever since that day, Mama, whenever we go to church, I feel that I'm not going with you and Papa, but with the Blessed Mother and Saint Joseph."

There! The truth was out. Raymond could relax. Amazed though she was, Mrs. Kolbe silently praised God for the miraculous favor he had shown her son. She couldn't doubt Raymond. She knew it wasn't like him to make up such stories. Even more, the change in his life proved that he was telling the truth.

Mrs. Kolbe later wrote, "From this time on, Raymond was never the same. He would often excitedly come to me, anxious to talk about his desire to become a martyr."

Raymond himself never again spoke directly about his meeting with the Mother of God. But he quietly became more dedicated to Mary. He realized that she was the Mother, Teacher, and Queen who would lead him to Jesus.

He would follow her.