

## No. 16670

No. 16670, Maximilian Kolbe, stood with the others in the compound, waiting. The Camp Commandant faced them sternly.

"The prisoner who escaped has still not been captured," he snapped.

There was a pause.

The Commandant spoke again:

"Ten of you will go to the hunger cells in his place! You will die there slowly, I promise you!"

Guards went among the prisoners and seized hold of ten of them at random. Maximilian looked on, helplessly. He knew one of the men who had been taken. He knew the man's wife and children.... It suddenly became clear to him what he must do. He made his way through the lines of prisoners till he stood, an old man, before Commandant Fritsch.

The Commandant looked with great contempt on Maximilian Kolbe.

"What is it?" he barked.

"I will take the place of No. 16674 in the hunger cell."

"Will you, indeed," said the Commandant, eyeing the "priest" with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity. "Those ten are going to die, you know."

"I know. But he has a wife and children. I have none."

The Commandant shrugged, and motioned to one of the guards to take Kolbe in place of No. 16674. "He is a fool!" he muttered to himself as the priest was led away....

Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest, No. 16670 in a German concentration camp, was the last to die in the hunger cells. He endured for 2 weeks and had the grizzly experience of tending the other nine as they slowly starved to death. In the end, he was killed by an injection—his bravery was too embarrassing to the Commandant.

The man he saved, No. 16674, lived to see the war end, the camp liberated. And he told the world the story of No. 16670.