



# The Holy See

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BENEDICT XVI

**GENERAL AUDIENCE**

*Papal Summer Residence, Castel Gandolfo*

*Wednesday, 13 August 2008*

***St Edith Stein and St Maximilian Mary Kolbe***

*Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

Having returned from Bressanone where I was able to spend a restful period, I am glad to meet with you and greet you, dear inhabitants of Castel Gandolfo, and you, pilgrims who have come to visit me today. I would like once again to thank all those who welcomed me and looked after me during my stay in the mountains. They were days of serene relaxation during which I continuously commended to the Lord all those who entrust themselves to my prayer. Those who write to me asking me to pray for them are truly numerous. They tell me of their joys but also their worries, their plans and their family and work problems, the expectations and hopes that they carry in their hearts, together with their apprehensions connected with the uncertainties that humanity is living at the present time. I can assure them that I remember each and every one, especially during the daily celebration of Holy Mass and the recitation of the Rosary. I know well that the principal service I can render to the Church and to humanity is, precisely, prayer, for in praying I confidently place in the Lord's hands the ministry that he himself has entrusted to me, together with the future of the entire ecclesial and civil communities.

Those who pray never lose hope, even when they find themselves in a difficult and even humanly hopeless plight. Sacred Scripture teaches us this and Church history bears witness to this. In fact, how many examples we could cite of situations in which it was precisely prayer that sustained the journey of Saints and of the Christian people! Among the testimonies of our epoch I would like to mention the examples of two Saints whom we are commemorating in these days:

Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, whose feast we celebrated on 9 August, and Maximilian Mary Kolbe, whom we will commemorate tomorrow, on 14 August, the eve of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Both ended their earthly life with martyrdom in the concentration camp of Auschwitz. Their lives might seem to have been a defeat, but it is precisely in their martyrdom that the brightness of Love which dispels the gloom of selfishness and hatred shines forth. The following words are attributed to St Maximilian Kolbe, who is said to have spoken them when the Nazi persecution was raging: "Hatred is not a creative force: only love is creative". And heroic proof of his love was the generous offering he made of himself in exchange for a fellow prisoner, an offer that culminated in his death in the starvation bunker on 14 August 1941.

On 6 August the following year, three days before her tragic end, Edith Stein approaching some Sisters in the monastery of Echt, in the Netherlands, said to them: "I am ready for anything. Jesus is also here in our midst. Thus far I have been able to pray very well and I have said with all my heart: *"Ave, Crux, spes unica"*. Witnesses who managed to escape the terrible massacre recounted that while Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, dressed in the Carmelite habit, was making her way, consciously, toward death, she distinguished herself by her conduct full of peace, her serene attitude and her calm behaviour, attentive to the needs of all. Prayer was the secret of this Saint, Co-Patroness of Europe, who, *"Even after she found the truth in the peace of the contemplative life, she was to live to the full the mystery of the Cross"* (Apostolic Letter *Spes Aedificandi*).

"Hail Mary!" was the last prayer on the lips of St Maximilian Mary Kolbe, as he offered his arm to the person who was about to kill him with an injection of phenolic acid. It is moving to note how humble and trusting recourse to Our Lady is always a source of courage and serenity. While we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption, which is one of the best-loved Marian feasts in the Christian tradition, let us renew our entrustment to her who from Heaven watches over us with motherly love at every moment. In fact, we say this in the familiar prayer of the Hail Mary, asking her to pray for us "now and at the hour of our death".

### To special groups

I am happy to welcome the young Irish pilgrims from Kildare and Leighlin who are with us this morning. My warm greeting also goes to the Heisei Youth Group from Japan. Upon all the English-speaking pilgrims, including those from Guam, Canada and the United States, I cordially invoke God's Blessings of joy and peace.

Lastly, I greet the *young people*, the *sick* and the *newlyweds*. Dear friends, may the light of Christ always illuminate your lives and make them bear fruits of good.

Thank you all. Again, I wish you a good week. Have a good Feast of the Assumption.

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