

Chapter Four Motivated by Love

How was your experience of last week's challenge to being attentive to the manifestations of perfectionism in your life, and praying through them?

Verse of the week: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (Jn. 15:13)

Read Matthew 5:48

"So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect."

And read James 1:2-4

"Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance have its full effect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

1. We were just talking about avoiding perfectionism. So what does our Lord ask of us here?

Why does our Lord call us to be perfect in love?

What does this look like?

Read Matthew 5:3-10

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

“The Beatitudes display the mystery of Christ himself. They are directions for discipleship.”¹ Every Christian is called to imitate Christ. The Beatitudes describe aspects of Christ that we should embrace with our entire heart.

Do they sound like a description of the ideal athlete?

2. How does this translate to the athlete?

¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (Doubleday: New York, 2007), 74.

We want to be able to control the emotions and passions that flood us during times of competition and moments in life that become more intense than we expect.

“We all have self-defeating thoughts and behaviors that undermine performance. I call them gremlins, the little invisible creatures that prevent athletes from performing at their best. Here’s my gremlin checklist: fear, anger, anxiety, self-consciousness, perfectionism, stubbornness, lack of motivation, competitiveness, distractions, and persistence.” (Gary Mack, Mind Gym, page 42)

Let’s go back to Matthew 5:48 - The call to perfection for an athlete, and in fact for everyone, is the call to love as Christ loves. As our love grows, it becomes the motivation for everything we do. When it becomes our motivation in competition, it focuses our minds and gives us a greater mental advantage.

Read John 15:12-17

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another.”

Jesus actually *commands* us to love others as he has loved us. Not a suggestion but a command!

Why do you think Jesus commands us to do this?

3. What does Jesus say is the greatest love a man can have?

Does anyone have a story of someone who has loved in this way? Or loved in a comparable way?

Love is the strongest force in the world. It is the greatest of all motivations. When we are strongly motivated in a task, our focus increases greatly. Think of Christ on the cross, and the motivation He had to persevere -- it was the love he had for each of us!

What are some other forces or motivations for people?

What are some of your motivators on the field (practice or competition) and life?

Story of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Raymond Kolbe was born on January, 1894, the second son of a poor weaver at Zdunska Wola near Lodz in Poland.

In 1910 he became a Franciscan, taking the name Maximilian. He studied at Rome and was ordained in 1919. He returned to Poland and taught Church history in a seminary. He built a friary just west of Warsaw, which

eventually housed 762 Franciscans and printed eleven periodicals -- one with a circulation of over a million -- including a daily newspaper.

Inevitably, the community came under suspicion by the rising Communist party and was watched closely. In May 1941, the friary was closed down and Maximilian and four of his companions were taken to the death camp Auschwitz, where they were put to work with the other prisoners.

Prisoners at Auschwitz were slowly and systematically starved, and their pitiful rations were barely enough to sustain a child: one cup of imitation coffee in the morning, and weak soup and half a loaf of bread after work. When the food was brought, everyone struggled to get his place and be sure of a portion. Father Maximilian Kolbe however, frequently stood aside in spite of the ravages of starvation, and often there would be nothing left for him. At other times, he shared his meager ration of soup or bread with others.

In the harsh environment of Auschwitz, Father Kolbe maintained the gentleness of Christ. At night he seldom would lie down to rest. Instead, he would move from bunk to bunk speaking with other prisoners, saying: "I am a Catholic priest. Can I do anything for you?"

A prisoner later recalled how he and several others often crawled across the floor at night to be near the bed of Father Kolbe, to make their confessions and ask for consolation. Father Kolbe pleaded with his fellow prisoners to forgive their persecutors and to overcome evil with good. When he was beaten by the guards, he never cried out. Instead, he prayed for his tormentors.

A Protestant doctor who treated the patients in Block 12 later recalled how Father Kolbe waited until all the others had been treated before asking for help. He constantly sacrificed himself for the others.

In order to discourage escapes, Auschwitz had a rule that if a man escaped, ten men would be killed in retaliation. In July 1941 a man from Kolbe's bunker escaped. The dreadful irony of the story is that the escaped prisoner was later found drowned in a camp latrine, so the terrible reprisals had been

exercised without cause. Nonetheless, the remaining men of his bunker were led out to face their terrible punishment.

'The fugitive has not been found!' the commandant Karl Fritsch screamed. 'You will all pay for this. Ten of you will be locked in the starvation bunker without food or water until you die.' The prisoners trembled in terror. They knew that after few days in this bunker without food and water, a man's intestines dried up and his brain turned to fire.

The ten were selected, including Franciszek Gajowniczek, who had been imprisoned for helping the Polish Resistance. He couldn't stifle a cry of anguish. 'My poor wife!' he sobbed. 'My poor children! What will they do?' When he uttered this cry of dismay, Maximilian stepped silently forward, took off his cap, and stood before the commandant and said, 'I am a Catholic priest. Let me take his place. I am old. He has a wife and children.'

Astounded, the icy-faced Nazi commandant asked, 'What does this Polish pig want?'

Father Kolbe pointed with his hand to the condemned Franciszek Gajowniczek and repeated 'I am a Catholic priest from Poland; I would like to take his place, because he has a wife and children.'

Observers believed in horror that the commandant would be angered and would refuse the request, or would order the death of both men. The commandant remained silent for a moment. What his thoughts were on being confronted by this brave priest we have no idea. Amazingly, however, he acceded to the request. Apparently the Nazis had more use for a young worker than for an old one, and were content to make the exchange.

Franciszek Gajowniczek was returned to the ranks, and the priest took his place.

Gajowniczek later recalled:

'I could only thank him with my eyes. I was stunned and could hardly grasp what was going on. The immensity of it: I, the condemned, am to live and someone else willingly and voluntarily offers his life for me - a stranger. Is this some dream?'

I was put back into my place without having had time to say anything to Maximilian Kolbe. I was saved. And I owe to him the fact that I could tell you all this. The news quickly spread all round the camp. It was the first and the last time that such an incident happened in the whole history of Auschwitz.

For a long time I felt remorse when I thought of Maximilian. By allowing myself to be saved, I had signed his death warrant. But now, on reflection, I understood that a man like him could not have done otherwise. Perhaps he thought that as a priest his place was beside the condemned men to help them keep hope. In fact he was with them to the last.'

Father Kolbe was thrown down the stairs of Building 13 along with the other victims and simply left there to starve. Hunger and thirst soon gnawed at the men. Some drank their own urine, others licked moisture on the dank walls. Maximilian Kolbe encouraged the others with prayers, psalms, and meditations on the Passion of Christ. After two weeks, only four were alive. The cell was needed for more victims, and the camp executioner, a common criminal called Bock, came in and injected a lethal dose of carbolic acid into the left arm of each of the four dying men. Kolbe was the only one still fully conscious and with a prayer on his lips, the last prisoner raised his arm for the executioner. His wait was over.

So it was that Father Maximilian Kolbe was executed on 14 August, 1941 at the age of forty-seven years, a martyr of charity.

The heroism of Father Kolbe went echoing through Auschwitz. In that desert of hatred he had sown love.

The cell where Father Kolbe died is now a shrine. Maximilian Kolbe was beatified as Confessor by Paul VI in 1970, and canonized as Martyr by Pope John Paul II in 1981.

What are your initial thoughts about the story? Do you think you would have done the same?

Although we may not be called to give of our lives the way St. Maximilian did, what are some practical ways we can lay down our lives for others?

Revisit Verse of the week: **“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” (Jn. 15:13)**

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

“Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, (love) is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

How can we increase our love?

1. By decreasing everything that is contrary to it - by growing in virtue.
2. We increase our intimacy with God through prayer, Scripture reading, participation in the sacraments and fellowship so that He ultimately increases our love.

ACTION POINT:

Pray over 1 Cor. 13:4-7 each night and ask God to increase your love and have it become a greater motivator in your life.

CLOSING PRAYER