



## The Pair of Brown Shoes

A number of years ago we were given a beautiful pair of brown shoes. They hadn't been worn and were good quality. But we don't wear brown shoes so what could we do with them? We realised that we had two Sisters from another community coming to visit us and they did. There was the answer. The Sisters duly arrived and we brought out the shoes. Their eyes lit up. Unfortunately there was only one pair of shoes and when they both tried them on, they fitted both of them. They lived by trusting the heavenly Father to provide for them so that precluded a visit to a shoe shop and also they were expensive shoes. They looked at each other and neither spoke. Then one of them said to the other with a warm smile, "You have them". It was a sacrifice, as anyone watching this scene could see.

Numerous opportunities come our way to, "sacrifice", quietly and lovingly. In fact, the secret of it all is love. Why not look at opportunities this next month to be loving and sacrifice. Take the word, "sacrifice", which is at the heart of our Christian faith, down from the shelf, dust it and start living it. A guest here recently asked us to pray for a friend who had been diagnosed with cancer. Then she said, "I am going to fast from television for a month and pray for him". That for many of us would be quite a sacrifice but she didn't look at it in this way because she was, "fasting", out of love. St Paul refers to a gift sent to him as a sacrifice.<sup>i</sup> It is easy to give out of plenty, a surplus so to speak but it is sacrificial and pleasing to the Lord, when it is costly to us.<sup>ii</sup>

Supremely however in the New Testament, "sacrifice", is associated with Jesus who laid down his life for us. Many years ago we became familiar with the story of Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish priest. Related to us by German sisters, it was an inspiration to them and it became so for us. On the 17<sup>th</sup> February 1941 he was taken as a prisoner in to Austwitz. Despite savage ill-treatment he comforted other prisoners. He insisted that, "everything, even suffering would one day come to an end and the way to glory was through the cross".<sup>iii</sup> One day, as a reprisal for a prisoner who had escaped, ten men were chosen at random to be starved to death. One of the men was a married Polish sergeant, Francis Gajowniczek. He was distraught. Maximilian Kolbe stepped forward asking to take his place. He argued that he was "old and useless". He was actually 47 years old, a brilliant scientist, mathematician and religious journalist. His request was granted. He was the last to die. He comforted each one of the others as they died. The guards could not bear, we are told, his quiet composure and eventually hastened his end by injecting him with carbolic acid. Sergeant Gajowniczek survived the concentration camp and so the story became known.

Father Kolbe wrote to his mother from Austwitz, "Pray that my love will be without limits".<sup>iv</sup> Pray that our love will be without limits.

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<sup>i</sup> Phil 4:18

<sup>ii</sup> Luke 21:2-4

<sup>iii</sup> A Calendar of Saints James Bentley pg 155

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid. pg 155