

## Niepokalanow, Poland: Saint Maximilian Kolbe's "City of the Immaculata"

### The History of Niepokalanow:

Here, not far from Warsaw, is the Franciscan Friary founded by Saint Maximilian Kolbe. It was begun at a time when anti-Catholic rhetoric was at its height, leading up to the Communist revolution in Russia in 1917. Saint

Maximilian decided to fight back, and on October 16, 1917 he and six others formed a group calling themselves the Knights of the Immaculata. His goal was to form a place in honor of the Immaculate Virgin. Obtaining land from Prince Jan Drucki-Lubecki, he was able to construct the monastery and it was consecrated on December 7, 1927.



Although Saint Maximilian was absent through much of this time, traveling to missions in Japan, he was able to help oversee its development. It grew rapidly up to the outbreak of World War II in 1939, having a large printing operation (publishing a daily Catholic newspaper), a radio station, as well as a seminary.

Saint Maximilian returned from time to time, and finally in 1936 he came back to serve as the spiritual father of Niepokalanow. As mentioned earlier, the German invasion of 1939 brought an end to all this: the priory was

sacked and Father Kolbe, along with 40 priests, was arrested and held in detention. They were released a few months later, but the Gestapo kept close watch on Father Koba and his printing operation. On February 7, 1941, Father Kolbe was again arrested and charged with aiding the Jews as well as the Polish underground. He was held in Warsaw for three months before being transferred to Auschwitz, where he gave up his life for a fellow prisoner.

Under communism the oppression continued.



## About the Shrine of Niepokalanow:



Today, Niepokalanow is in full operation and welcomes visitors. Pope John Paul II celebrated Mass here in 1983 on his second visit to Poland (he made his first historic visit to Poland a few years earlier, in 1979). The site is open to all.

There are daily Masses, Confessions and a host of other spiritual activities available for visitors. St. Maximilian prayer cards with a relic (material touched to the hair of St. Maximilian) are available as well.

