

My Catholic Roots:

How does St. Maximilian Kolbe teach me what it really means to be a human person?

“Planted and built up in Jesus Christ, firm in the faith.” Col. 2:7

NOVEMBER, 2010

VOL. #1 ISSUE #3

Photo Credit Jun de Dios, MI Member from California



**“Without the Creator,
the creature fades into
nothingness.”**

(Second Vatican Council,
Gaudium et Spes, 36)

World Youth Day Message 2011

Dear young people, to set God aside is to separate ourselves from (the) source and, inevitably, to deprive ourselves of fulfillment and joy: “without the Creator, the creature fades into nothingness” (Second Vatican Council, Gaudium et Spes, 36).

In some parts of the world, particularly in the West, today’s culture tends to exclude God, and to consider faith a purely private issue with no relevance for the life of society. Even though the set of values underpinning society comes from the Gospel – values like the sense of the dignity of the person, of solidarity, of work and of the family – we see a certain “eclipse of God” taking place, a kind of amnesia which, albeit not an outright rejection of Christianity, is nonetheless a denial of the treasure of our faith, a denial that could lead to the loss of our deepest identity. For this reason, dear friends, I encourage you to strengthen your faith in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. You are the future of society and of the Church! As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians of Colossae, it is vital to have roots, a solid foundation!

~ Benedict XVI



YOUR QUESTIONS GOD'S ANSWERS

How can I find out who I really am?

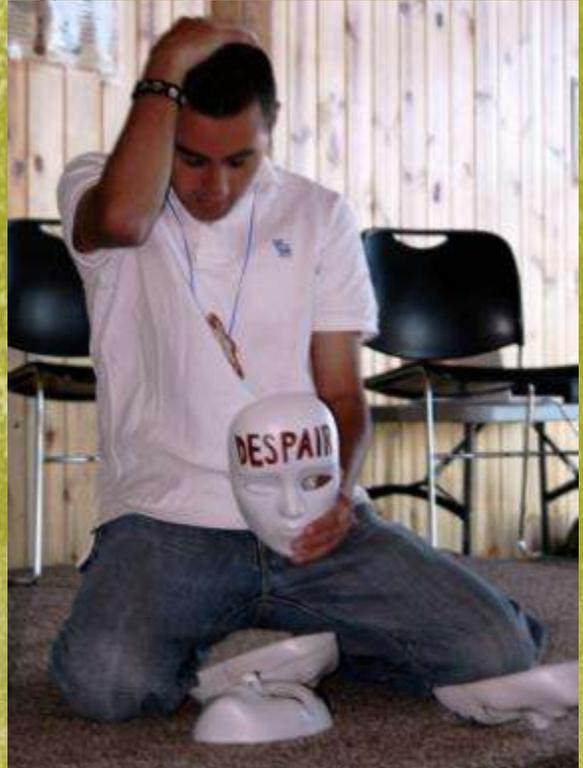
Peter Kreeft

Young people wonder “Who am I, really?” more often than older people do. Older people often think this is because young people know so much less. I think it is because young people know something more – one thing, at least, that older people often forget: that everybody’s real self is a mystery, that once we stop fooling ourselves, we recognize that we don’t really know who we really are. The whole human race can learn this one great lesson, at least, from (young people): to be human is to wonder who you really are.

Lesson one is to know that we don’t know. Socrates, the great ancient Greek philosopher and “the father of philosophy”, was called the wisest man in the world by the Delphic oracle (prophet); and the only way Socrates could interpret that saying was that he was wise only because he alone knew he was not wise.

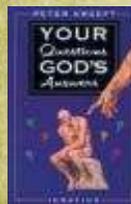
In other words, there are only two kinds of people in this world: the wise, who know they are fools, and fools, who think they are wise. Read more about this in Proverbs 14:33, Isaiah 29:13-14, and Corinthians 1:19-20. All of us, at any age, can have an “identity crisis”. To be human is to lack knowledge of our complete identity, to know only what we have been so far, not what we are yet to be. Day by day, year by year, choice by choice, we make ourselves into this kind of person or that kind of person. Every time we change anything in the world, we also change ourselves a little. Every time we help or harm another, we help or harm ourselves. Our selves are always under construction.

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Only by finding God can I find my true self. That’s where the secret of my identity is. To try to find out who I am by ignoring my Creator is like trying to find out who a character is by ignoring the character’s author.

~ Peter Kreeft



Peter Kreeft, *Your Questions, God's Answers*, published in 1994 in San Francisco by Ignatius Press.

⇒ Who then can possibly know my whole self? Much of me is no longer; for it is in the dead past, and no one remembers it all. Much of me is not yet; for it is in the not-yet-born future, and no one knows what the future holds. Except one. God, our Creator, knows us, all of us, because he designed us, just as a writer designs characters in a novel.

Only our Author knows us completely. In God's mind, and there alone, can we find the secret of our identity. God alone knows all things, our past, our present, and our future.

Therefore only by finding God can I find my true self. That's where the secret of my identity is. To try to find out who I am by ignoring my Creator is like trying to find out who a character is by ignoring the character's author.

But how can I know God? I'm only a human being, and not the most brilliant human being in the world, by any means. How could little me possibly figure out the mind of the great God? No way. But I can know God on one condition: if God takes the initiative and tells me about himself and about myself, if God teaches me, if God "reveals" himself (Jn 6:44-45).

That's what the Bible is: God's revelation, God's words about who he is and who we are.

DIG DEEPER Scripture & Tradition

[Proverbs 14:33, Isaiah 29:13-14,](#)
[Corinthians 1:19-20, John 6:44-45](#)
[CC #1700](#)
[WYD Message](#)

A Story about ST. MAXIMILIAN

From *Mary's Knight* by Claude Foster

One of St. Maximilian's last homilies for his Auschwitz congregation

Upon the first moments of internment in the (Auschwitz) camp, the Nazi's were effective in taking the prisoners possessions, dignity, and even their very identity as human beings. Names were obliterated. Every prisoner was given a number.

Fr. Maximilian received the number 16670. However, hidden within the frail, beaten body of Fr. Kolbe, exuded a powerful soul whose Faith could never be stolen or extinguished and whose Love would empower others to reclaim the dignity and humanity that once had been stripped away from them.

"Don't permit our tormentors to create us in their image. I've told you many times, hate is not creative, only love is creative. As one of our saints has assured us, '*We experience love when we bring love to that place where no love exists.*'"

The Immaculata wills that we love everyone. In this place where the weak are exploited by the strong, where bread is stolen from the starving and where the dying are robbed of their last article of clothing, we must persistently witness to love."

"God is love' (1 Jn. 4:16), and since every effect is similar to its cause, consequently every creature lives on love...in fact, Love is the main spur and motor of every healthy activity."

~ St. Maximilian Kolbe

Cultivating Communion

Group Activity Page

How does St. Max teach me what it really means to be a human person?

Authentic “Me” Drawings

Goals	Personal Introspection, Different perspectives, Interconnection
Time	20-30 minutes (not including processing)
Physical contact	None
Physical challenges	Drawing on a large sheet of paper
Number of participants	8-15
Space requirements	Enough room for people to spread out their paper, and wall space to hang the drawings.
Materials needed	Drawing materials, wall tape, and a sheet of flip chart or butcher paper for each participant, including facilitators
Preparation	Post a large copy of the list of the activity questions in clear view of participants, or provide a handout of the activity questions to each participant.

Instructions

1. Give each participant (including the facilitators) a sheet of flipchart or butcher paper and some drawing materials.
2. Ask people to spread out so that everyone has space to reflect and draw.
3. The instructions are to draw a figure representing yourself, and inside the figure to write or visually represent the following elements:

Activity Questions

- ❖ **Head:** What comes to mind when you read the following: *“To try to find out who I am by ignoring my Creator is like trying to find out who a character is by ignoring the character’s author.”* (Peter Kreeft)
 - ❖ **Arm:** Inscribe a number on the arm (like the one the Nazi’s tattooed on St. Maximilian’s arm). Describe a time when you or someone you know was treated like a number or a ‘nobody’.
 - ❖ **Heart:** What does the following quote teach you? *‘We experience love when we bring love to that place where no love exists.’*
 - ❖ **Soul:** A change you’ve noticed in your soul since you first understood you were created in the image & likeness of God.
 - ❖ **Eyes:** If you had a pair of magic glasses and could see your heart from God’s perspective, what would you see?
 - ❖ **Mouth:** If you could speak one sentence to the Pope about who you are, what would you say?
 - ❖ **Hands:** If you were arrested and taken to Auschwitz, what three things (other than nutrition & people) would you smuggle in and why?
4. Have everyone hang up their drawings.
 5. Then, have the group spend a fixed amount of time in silence looking at everyone’s drawings.

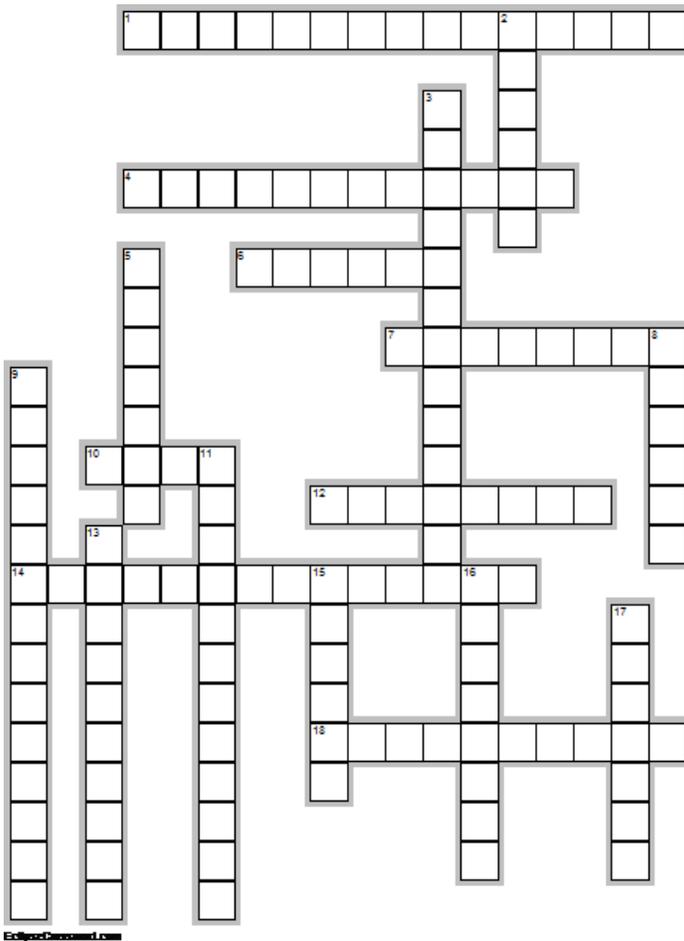
Processing Activity Dynamics

- We don’t often know what is in people’s minds and hearts. We sometimes make assumptions about people based on what they say, do, or how they personify themselves online that prove to be wrong once we get to know them on a deeper level.
- How do we communicate with others about ourselves? How do we choose what is appropriate to share about ourselves and what is to be kept private?
- What surprised you about what others put on their drawings?
- Did anything you wrote about yourself surprise you?
- Do you want people to know the authentic “you”, or are you more concerned about presenting the best “you”?
- Are any two drawings the same? Each is unique, though we may have a lot in common.
- In this digital age where people tend to communicate more often, but less from their person, what does this exercise reveal about authentic communion?

Tilling the Soul

My Activity Page

How does St. Max teach me what it really means to be a human person?



Across

1. The number the Nazi's tattooed on St. Maximilian's arm. (5 #s spelled out) HINT: [A Story about St. Maximilian](#)
4. That which the Nazi guards could not strip away from St. Maximilian. (2 words) HINT: [Story about St. Maximilian](#)
6. "Every (1 word) is similar to its cause." HINT: [Quote of St. Maximilian](#)
7. St. Maximilian was martyred in what concentration camp? HINT: [A Story about St. Maximilian](#)
10. "Hate is not creative, only (1 word) is creative." HINT: [Story of St. Maximilian](#)
12. "Only by finding God can we find our (2 words)." - HINT: [Peter Kreeft, How can I find out who I really am?](#)
14. "All of us, at any age, can have an (2 words)." HINT: [Peter Kreeft, How can I find out who I really am?](#)
18. "Our selves are always under (1 word)." HINT: [Kreeft, How can I find out who I really am?](#)

Down

2. "We experience love when we bring love to a place where no love (1 word)." HINT: [Story of St. Maximilian](#)
3. The Catholic publisher of Peter Kreeft's "Your Questions, God's Answers." HINT: [Your ?s, God's Answers](#)
5. "Without the (1 word) the creature fades into nothingness." HINT: Gaudium et Spes, 36; [Benedict XVI WYD Letter](#)
8. "It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be (1 word) by God.' Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me." HINT: [John 6:45](#)
9. "Human beings make their own contribution to their (2 words)." HINT: [Catholic Catechism #1700](#)
11. "We see a certain (3 words) taking place, a kind of amnesia..." HINT: [Pope Benedict XVI WYD Letter](#)
13. "That's what the Bible is: God's (1 word), God's words about who he is and who we are." HINT: [Peter Kreeft, How can I find out who I really am?](#)
15. You are the future of society and the (1 word)." HINT: [Pope Benedict XVI WYD Letter](#)
16. "Only by finding God can I find my true self. That's where the secret of my (1 word) is." HINT: Kreeft's, [How can I find out who I really am?](#)
17. "Young people know something more – one thing, at least, that older people often forget: that everybody's real self is a (1 word)." HINT: [Peter Kreeft, How can I find out who I really am?](#)

[Click for Answer Key](#)