In today's gospel, Jesus says "You shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." And, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." We have heard these words, over and over, and they are the foundation of our belief system, our faith. Yet, they pose a serious challenge when we try to live them on a daily basis.

Loving God, a spiritual being, with all our heart, soul, and mind, more than anyone or anything can be a little daunting, and loving our neighbors as much as we love ourselves is equally difficult, it is hard enough to treat our loved ones this way.

Achieving this kind of self-giving love requires a skilled teacher, someone who's walked the walk and has experience with the modern world as we know it. I found that Saint Maximilian Kolbe fits this description. His life of 47 years ended in 1941, and he is both known for dedicating his life to God and as well as "laying down one's life for another," having exchanged himself for another prisoner who was sentenced to death in a concentration camp during World War II.

For some background, his life started in a normal way, he grew up as an energetic child in Poland, but soon after his First Holy Communion, his life was touched by a heavenly force. He saw a vision of the Blessed Mother who came to offer him a white crown of purity or a red crown of martyrdom. He replied that he would like BOTH. His mother, who reported on the incident after his death, said Maximilian began behaving differently after the event and spent time praying before an image of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

For a man from a poor family, St Maximilian had an eventful life, spending 7 years in Rome studying to become a priest and then, after contracting tuberculosis he spent a year in recovery, where he offered spiritual guidance to other patients. Before becoming a priest, he started a Church-approved organization called the Militia Immaculata, aimed at spreading the Good News while battling a rise in atheism.

He travelled to Japan to setup a mission, and visited China, India, and much of Europe evangelizing about Jesus and Mary. He used technology to reach his audience, employing the printing press to distribute a faith-based magazine in several languages. His organization continues to thrive, with over 3 million members in 47 countries.

If we asked St Maximilian for advice on living the two greatest commandments, he would probably invite us to consecrate our lives to the Immaculate Mother. This isn't about worshiping Mary, rather it's about receiving Mary as our mother as Jesus discusses in John 19. He says to Mary from the cross, "Woman, behold, your son."

And he says to the disciple whom he loved, “Behold, your mother." The gospel says, "From that hour the disciple took her into his home.“ This was at the end of Jesus’s ministry and he says the words, “It is finished.”

St Maximilian wrote a guide for new Militia Immaculata members entitled, “Behold your Mother.“ This document further unpacks the giving of Mary. It says, “Jesus is on the cross, the cross that raises him to heaven, and from which he draws all people to himself. In this solemn context, the gift of His mother occurs, the ultimate act of His giving himself for our salvation."

You may ask, but who is the “beloved disciple?” The guide says, “It is the one who receives the word and obeys the Commandments of Jesus.” These are the commandments we read in today’s gospel. The disciple he loved represents all the disciples of the Lord, it is you and me, each of us is loved by Jesus.

The gospel continues, “And from that hour the disciple took her into his home.” He takes Mary, among his own things, into his inner life space, and she will be a part of his daily life from that point forward. We are also called to bring Mary into our inner life, into our hearts, to help us navigate the commandments of her Son, and intercede with Him on our behalf.

Jesus says , “Unless you turn and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.” As spiritual children, we need a mother, and Mary is assigned by her Son to play that role. Saint Maximilian says, “In Mary’s womb our soul must be reborn after the form of Jesus Christ. She is bound to feed the soul with the milk of her grace, and raise it as lovingly as she nourished, looked after, and raised Jesus.”

When Jesus calls out the two foundational commandments in today’s gospel, His Blessed Mother is part of His plan for us. Think about how this changes your perspective on Mary. We all have some form of relationship with the Blessed Mother. I grew up saying the rosary in the car on road trips and on occasions when someone close to us needed prayer, but before I wrote this homily, I didn’t always think of relying on Mary as a mother, to protect, comfort, and guide me.

Whether we formally consecrate ourselves to the Blessed Mother as a member of St Maximilian’s Militia Immaculata or look on Mary in a new way as we pray the rosary more often, we should remember the words of Jesus on the cross and know He wants to share His mother’s love with us.