

Death camp survivor visits school

By Marie Webb

Whig Staff Writer

It's been 45 years since Ziggy Gorson was liberated from the death camp in Auschwitz, Poland, but the memory of six years of torture and torment are as vivid today as the number 52821 on his wrist.

Gorson spoke of his ordeal, and his friendship with fellow prisoner Maximillian Kolbe, a Catholic priest, to an attentive audience of students at Good Shepherd School in Perryville.

The life of Kolbe, canonized a Saint by the Catholic Church, and his acts of heroism while a prisoner in the Nazi death camp were the subject of a prayer service recently conducted by the junior high pupils at Good Shepherd.

The day following the service Stanley Zdrojewski, a seventh grade student, read a story in the Catholic Standard newspaper about Ziggy Gorson and his relationship with St. Maximillian while the two were prisoners at Auschwitz.

At Zdrojewski's suggestion, Sister Jeanne McGlone, principal at Good Shepherd, invited the Wilmington, Del. resident to speak to the students.

The rapt audience listened intently as Gorson told of the invasion of his hometown in Poland by Nazi soldiers and his arrival, at the age of 16, at the Auschwitz camp.

After witnessing the deaths of his parents and three sisters during the invasion, Gorson was thrown into a cattle car and sent to the death camp.

There, alone and afraid, he

was befriended by Rev. Kolbe whose hometown was not far from Gorson's own near Warsaw.

According to Gorson, "Kolbe was like a brother, father, and confessor to me."

Gorson told the students how he and nine others were made to stand at attention in the hot sun all day, moving not an inch,



Ziggy Gorson

following the escape of a fellow prisoner. They were threatened with horrible deaths should the prisoner not return.

Gorson related how one of the men begged for his life, and Kolbe stepped forward, an act itself punishable by death, and offered his life for the man.

Though spared at this time, the 10 were taken to a chamber

where they were tortured for more than a week.

In an emotional voice, Gorson told the students, "I remember . . . it's hard to tell this private part of my life . . . right now I can hear the screams, I am condemned to hear them (screams) the rest of my life."

As Gorson watched, his friend was taken outside on Aug. 14, 1941 and murdered.

According to Gorson, Kolbe "was a man of incomprehensible beauty and compassion who prayed for his tormentors."

He told of being held in the priest's arms and told not to hate. "Hate is a waste of time," Gorson said Kolbe told him. "You destroy only yourself."

The British Army liberated the prisoners at Auschwitz on April 15, 1945 and the camp was closed. Sadly many more died when they were compassionately overfed by their rescuers.

Today, Gorson still wonders why his life was spared.

He has traveled extensively to share his memories of St. Maximillian Kolbe. His experiences have been included in two books, "A Man for Others" by Patricia Treece and "Kolbe and the Commandant" by Retianda Beach.

Gorson is writing a book he titles "The Ashes of My People."

Maximillian Kolbe was beatified in Rome in 1972 and canonized a saint by Pope John Paul II.

According to Gorson, "he who saves one life saves an entire world . . . Kolbe saved an entire world."