



Blessed Karl Leisner

"Christ, You Are My Passion!"



"From the very beginning, Schoenstatt has been about sanctity, and the longing and conviction of Schoenstatt's founding generation and every generation since then, has been that the little shrine of the Mother Thrice Admirable in Schoenstatt be a true 'cradle of sanctity'. Now the Church has officially recognized the sanctity of one of those **transformed** in the 'shadow of the shrine.'"

Karl was born on February 28, 1915 as the first of five children to Wilhelm and Amalie Leisner in Rees/Niederrhein, Germany.

On March 3, he was baptized in St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Rees. Among other names, he was given the middle name of "Maria", as his parents had a deep devotion to the Mother of God.

It is simply wonderful...in this family I am secure, at home...



We pray for each other. Oh, such a grace - this genuine love - this being there for each other.

December 4, 1937

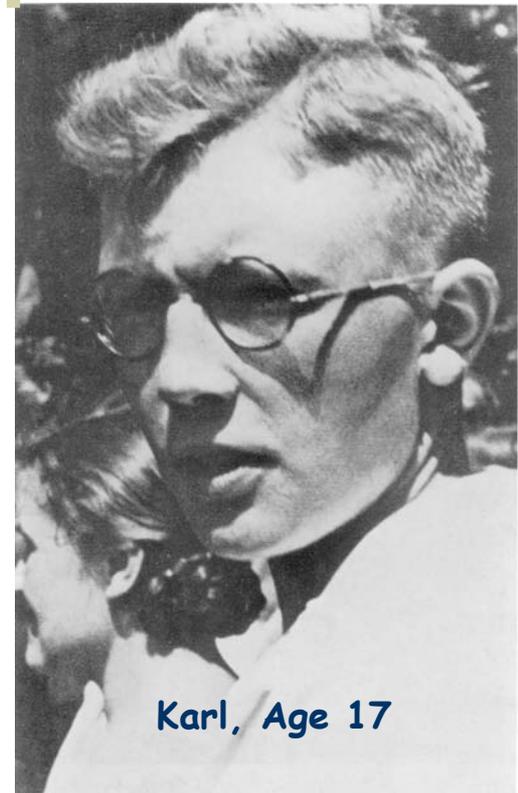


Karl received the sacrament of Confirmation on July 20, 1927. He began keeping a diary in which the entries speak of a great urge in his soul:
Love for Christ!



My whole life must be more deeply bound to God, connected with God, given to God; it does not have to be, but I want it to be so; humbly I ask, seek, make efforts and thereafter strive for it.

June 27, 1933



Karl, Age 17

At the invitation of a classmate, Karl made his first visit to the Marian Pilgrimage Place of Schoenstatt from April 5 - 10, 1933 to participate in an Easter Workshop and Retreat.



*I want
to immerse myself
ever more deeply
into
Schoenstatt's world
of ideas and work
on the notes
[from the Retreat]
in my
"Book of
Life" [diary].*



June 27, 1933

Original Shrine in Schoenstatt-Vallendar, Germany

Karl took a leadership role in the Catholic Youth Organization in his area. He especially enjoyed the outdoors. He liked to take hikes to be surrounded by God's beauty in nature.



Karl leading his boys group on a hike.

At a Catholic Boys' Tent Camp, 1934



Throughout high school, Karl had a strong interest in becoming a priest. Karl completed his exams and graduated from High School in 1934. He began his immediate preparation for the priesthood by joining the seminary in Münster.

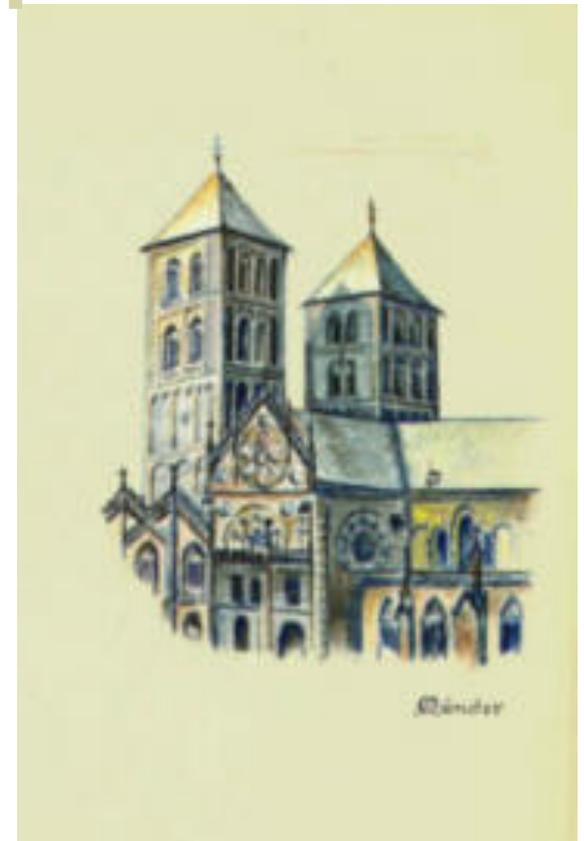


*I thought to myself,
it's beautiful to
become a priest, but
difficult, almost too
difficult, and only
those who are called
by God's great grace
should become one...*

August 7, 1933

*The beauty of family life -- of having and raising
my own children; such thoughts touch me deeply
during my evening reflections... But also the great
heroism of the priesthood sets me aglow! Remain
calm! I am secure in God's hand; come what may.*

August 1, 1937



In the course of his seminary studies, Karl encountered a difficult vocation crisis. He returned to the shrine in Schoenstatt for help and strength:



Those two days of silence in the first blossoming of spring... in quiet prayer in the shrine of the picture of grace of the Mother Thrice Admirable,... all of it sank deeply into my soul. All the priestly and knightly ideals which had faded and were slumbering were profoundly and powerfully awakened and enkindled.

July 1, 1938



On March 25, 1939, Karl was ordained a deacon in the Cathedral in Münster.

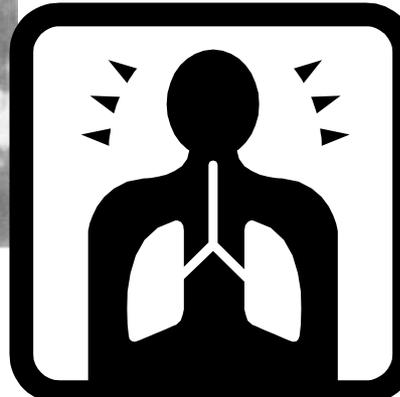


In June of 1939, tuberculosis was diagnosed just weeks before Karl's ordination. After a short visit to the Shrine in Schoenstatt, he was taken to a Lung Sanatorium in St. Blasien in the Black Forest.



Heavenly Mother, I place everything into your hands! If you know that I will be a good priest, then help me regain my health and reach my goal. If you see that I will be a bad priest, then let me die before I reach the goal.

March 25, 1939



St. Blasien

Since 1936, the Nazi “secret police” had been keeping an eye on Karl on the grounds that he might be a source of opposition. On November 9, 1939, he was arrested after being accused of speaking against Hitler.



Fellow patients accused me whereupon the "Gestapo" took me under protective custody. After they brought me from St. Blaisen to here, I now exist as your absent, ailing and imprisoned brother...

December 15, 1939



Karl was sentenced to three months in the prison in Freiburg.

He was transferred for three weeks to a prison in Mannheim and then moved to the concentration camp in Sachsenhausen , near Berlin.

God, I thank you for the days of this burdensome disease, and yet again for the days spent unfree and imprisoned. Everything has its meaning. You only want what is extremely good for me. With my whole heart, I pray for all who are not well disposed toward me and ask you to forgive them.



Entrance to Sachsenhausen



November 11, 1939

The days of exterior captivity are magnificent days of becoming interiorly free for God, who alone is the shelter and stronghold of freedom...

November 17, 1939

On December 13, 1940, Karl was moved once again. This time to the concentration camp northwest of Munich - Dachau. The majority of the priests arrested by the Nazis as political prisoners were imprisoned there.



German Translation:
Work makes
(you) free



*Christ, I give you my life
without reservation. What
you do with it, you alone
should determine. Fiat!*

November 22, 1939

Despite his unjust imprisonment and the relapse of his tuberculosis, Karl was able to keep his cheerful attitude through prayer and total trust in God and Mary, the Mother Thrice Admirable. His actions inspired hope in those around him:

Fr. Heinz Dresbach relates: When I recall Karl, his joyful, radiant face appears before my mind's eye. This joy wasn't 'put on'; no, it came right from the heart.

Fr. Hermann Richarz shares:

I first got to know him in Dachau and that was when he was already gravely ill. I admired Karl because despite his double portion of suffering, he nevertheless was always so cheerful and had a rock-solid trust in God.

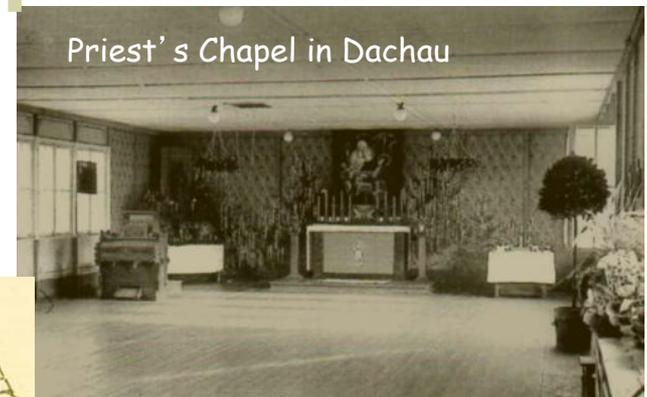


Karl (right) with fellow prisoner, Fr. Otto Pies, S.J.



VICTOR IN VINCULIS - A VICTOR IN CHAINS!

Through the efforts of the Vatican, the “prisoner priests” were permitted to have a chapel that contained a wooden altar made by the priests themselves. In this chapel, on December 17, 1944, under great secrecy, a French Bishop ordained Karl Leisner a PRIEST!



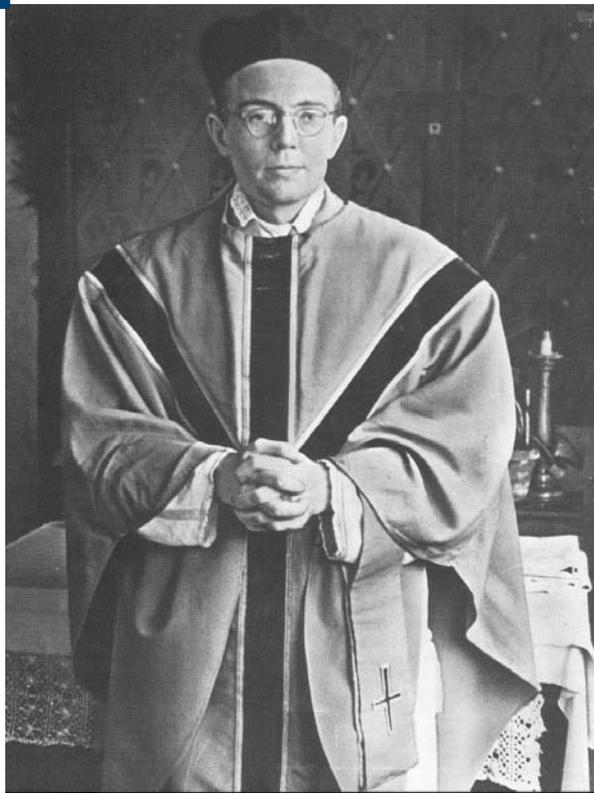
Priest's Chapel in Dachau

Bishop Gabriel Piquet of Clermont-Ferrand , France

From a letter to the Bishop of Münster dated September 23, 1944 :

It is now over 5 years since I became a deacon. My longing and prayers grasp after priesthood. It is not certain whether or when I may be ordained by your hand, as I would like to be. There is at the moment, the possibility that I could be ordained here. For this, I would like to have your permission.

His whole life had been planned by God to celebrate *one single Holy Mass* which he offered on December 26, the feast of St. Stephen the Martyr.



On the feast of St. Stephen, I celebrated my First Holy Mass. For the first time, I offered the Holy Sacrifice for everyone on the altar in our Chapel here. You were all with me in spirit...

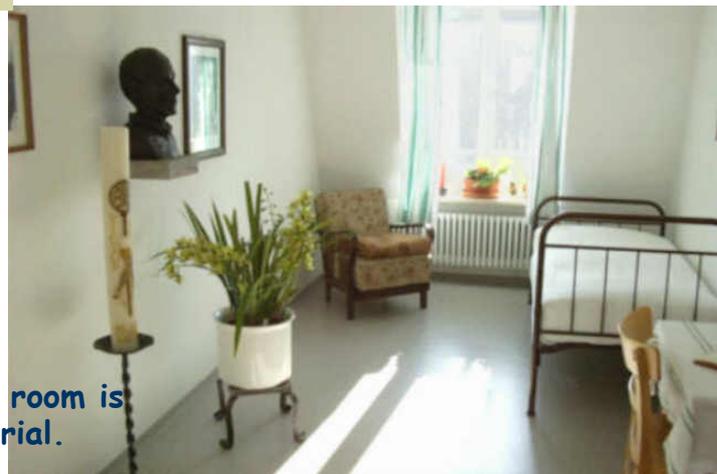
December 30, 1944



US Military troops liberated the Concentration Camp of Dachau on April 29, 1945. On May 4, Karl was taken to a Hospital near Munich.



How infinitely good God is! When need is the greatest, He helps! He only desires a total dedication beforehand... The gloomy images of Dachau slowly fade from the soul. I am a free man, alleluia!



His hospital room is now a memorial.

I recommend everything to Our Lady, my beloved Mother. M.h.c! [Latin: Mother takes care!] Often I pray to her with tears in my eyes.

May 5, 1945

He died four months later on August 12, 1945, surrounded by friends and family. He is buried in the Cathedral in Xanten, Germany.

His last diary entry reads:

*Good night
eternal, holy God,
dear Mother
Thrice Admirable...
Bless, too, my
enemies, O Lord!!*

July 25, 1945



Karl Leisner

The Beatification of Karl Leisner took place in Berlin, Germany on June 23, 1996 by Pope John Paul II. His feast is celebrated on August 12th.



“...Even before Karl was imprisoned in Dachau he developed a deep Marian devotion, to which he was directed by Fr. Joseph Kentenich and the Schoenstatt movement.

The courage of his faith and his enthusiasm for Christ should be an incentive and example especially for the young people who are living in an environment greatly marked by unbelief and indifference.

Mater habebit curam, [which in Latin means] our heavenly Mother will take care! With these hopeful words of Karl Leisner, I commend you to the intercession of Mary...”

Pope John Paul II
From the Homily at the
Beatification Mass of Karl Leisner

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SPECIAL THANKS

to the resources adapted for use in this Power Point Presentation:

Gerbert, Hermann, *Geschichte einer Berufung Karl Leisner (1915-1945)*. Patris Verlag, Schoenstatt-Vallendar, 2001.

Klein, Joseph Maria, *Karl Leisner - For Christ and For Youth*. Manuscript translated and edited by Fr. Jonathan Niehaus, Waukesha, WI USA 1995.

Lejeune, René, *Wie Gold im Feuer geläutert Karl Leisner 1915-1945*. Parvis Verlag, Hauteville/Schweiz, 1991.

Niehaus, Fr. Jonathan. *Karl Leisner Power Point Presentation*, 1990's

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