

Martyrs of the Twentieth Century

In the twentieth century more Christians suffered for this reason than at any other time in the Church's history — there are the three million Armenian Christians who died under Turkish brutality during the first World War; the million Orthodox who perished in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and 30's; the unknown number of Albanians who disappeared in their government's efforts to suppress Christianity; the hundreds of Germans, both Protestants and Catholics, who died because they resisted Hitler and his Nazi regime; the Burmese Christians who were killed simply because they believed in Christ; the hundreds of African Christians who suffered because they condemned the terrorism of colonial authorities and black nationalists alike; and the many who were killed because their Christian witness made them oppose racism or social and economic injustices. If we are not careful, the sheer number of martyrs might stagger our efforts to remember them, and why and how they died. So, a celebration memorializing these twentieth century martyrs on April 24 each year is meant to be a small act of resistance, a refusal to be silent in the face of terror and injustice.

An extract from "For all the Saints"

Conclusion

With death being viewed as an avenue to life, one can appreciate why Martyrdom was seen by Christians as a path that a believer must take if asked to deny Jesus as their Lord. In Matthew 10:32–33, Jesus in teaching his disciples said, "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father in heaven." This is a reminder to them and all the followers of Jesus of the need to always be faithful to Jesus in spite of the persecution that they face from others. The commitment of martyrs to die for the faith caused the Church to increase both numerically and spiritually, as others outside Christianity saw the faithfulness and dedication that they had in standing up for what they believe in.

References

- Heward-Mills, D. (2011). *Evangelism and Missions*. Xulon Press, USA.
- Hunt, F. (2016). *10 Most Violent ways that future saints were martyred*. Retrieved from <http://www.toptenz.net/top-10-most-violent-ways-that-future-saints-were-martyred.php>.

An Introduction to Martyrs of the Church

- Part 1



THE BLOOD OF THE
MARTYRS IS THE SEED
OF THE CHURCH

Who is a Martyr?

“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.” This ancient myth is one of the hallmarks that defines the contribution of saints who were willing to die for what they believe in, in spite of the murderous threats that were being issued against them by the authorities. Their integrity as Christians was very important to them, and so to compromise or deny their belief in God would be deemed blasphemous.

This willingness to stand up and die for what they believed in, actually drew others to Christ, as people, outside the faith, were impressed at the seriousness with which these Christians took their faith. In fact, Reynolds (2007) states that “Martyrs are Christians who have been put to death because they chose to remain faithful to the gospel and counted ‘the truth as it is in Jesus’, dearer than life itself.” So, even amidst the persecution, the murderous threats, and the modes of torture, they never gave in to the pressures. One Martyr who was about to be killed was told to deny Christ and spare his life, however, he responded to them and said, “Eighty and four years have I served the Lord. Why should I deny my Lord at this time. What evil has he done to me?”

The martyrs of the Church therefore had an extraordinary love for Christ. They knew themselves and exactly what they stood for. Their commitment and zeal to follow Jesus is what was important, even if it meant taking the path of death, which their Lord had also taken. For the martyrs,

death was not the end, but rather the beginning of a new life with God.

The Quality of lives of a martyr Martyrdom as an expression of worship to God

Martyrs are saints who are committed to the service of God. The life that they live therefore is one which displays a sense of readiness to leave this earth and live eternally with their maker. So even when the Church was being persecuted in the mid first century, Christians hid and worshipped God, by going underground. Romans 12:1, is one such text which alludes to what Christians should do under such a circumstance. Here Paul states, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” It is no wonder Howard-Mills (2011) suggests “...this type of sacrifice is an undying sacrifice, something that goes on and on.”

Martyrdom was therefore a part of worship, as it symbolized the very act of giving one's self to God, because even though their earthly life had ended, they continued to live on with God in the afterlife. Consequently, Christians were willing to die for the faith, as what was important for them was that they did not deny Christ or compromise who they were as believ-

ers in Jesus. So even this was seen as part of their worship to God.

Question: In what way(s) do we deny Christ in our everyday lives?

Methods by which Christians were Martyred

- **Stoned to death.** Example: Stephen
- **Tied to the stake and burnt.** Example: Cranmer
- **They were Crucified:** Example: St. Andrew who was crucified on an X-shaped cross and St. Peter who was crucified upside down.
- **Using a Brazen Bull:** A hollow metal bull in which the person to be killed was locked inside with a huge fire underneath. The person was then left to be baked alive. Example: St. Eustace was martyred via this method.
- **Impalement:** The person being martyred is pierced with a long sharp object such as a stake or spear. Example: St. Thomas the Apostle was killed by the natives of India.
- **Beaten to death:** This is the oldest form of punishment, and is normally done with a hard/blunt object. Example: James the Just, Jesus Brother was initially being stoned to death but was stopped by someone. Afterwards however, someone finished killing him by beating him to death.
- **Beheaded:** Example: St. Catherine of Alexandria
- **By hanging:** St. Luke the Evangelist
- **Eaten by Lions:** Saint Ignatius of Antioch
- **Flaying:** “The practice of actually flaying a human being is very rare though, and almost always done to scare and to intimidate your enemies. Nothing