

WITNESS TO FREEDOM

LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR

"We simply cannot choose between our care for the elderly poor and our faith."



(CNS Photo/Courtesy of the Little Sisters of the Poor)

When a blind, paralyzed, elderly widow needed a place to live, Jeanne Jugan gave up her own bed so that the woman could have a comfortable place to sleep during her last years on earth.

What began as a small community of a few single women taking in poor strangers in rural France in the early 1800s became an order now known as the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The Little Sisters carry on the work of their founder, who was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009. The Little Sisters' mission is "to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself."

Continuing the tradition of St. Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters beg for all that they need to take care of the elderly poor, and they do not accept guaranteed forms of income.

The Little Sisters established roots in several countries, arriving in the United States in 1868. They now have 27 nursing homes across the U.S., where they take care of poor, elderly residents.

Unfortunately, a recent mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would force the Little Sisters to arrange for coverage of abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives, and sterilization in their employee health plans. If the Little Sisters do not arrange for coverage of these "services," then they face massive fines from the federal government, totaling approximately \$70 million per year.

The Little Sisters were forced to sue the federal government in order to stave off these potentially crushing fines on their ministry. Their case has recently been heard before the U.S. Supreme Court, which will decide whether to vindicate the Little Sisters' rights to free exercise of religion under federal law. The Little Sisters have argued that religious freedom exists not only for houses of worship but also for those who serve others, such as in ministry to the poor, which is part and parcel of the Catholic faith.

The Little Sisters have dedicated their lives to following Christ in service to the world. We pray that the Court will uphold their freedom to serve and that our government will respect the freedom of all people of faith to contribute to the common good.

Let us pray for the Little Sisters of the Poor!



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WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

STs. THOMAS MORE AND JOHN FISHER



(Our Lady of Victories, Kensington, London;
Photo by Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP)

*"I die the king's good servant,
but God's first."*

Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher were Renaissance men. Talented and energetic, they contributed to the humanist scholarship of early modern England. More wrote theological and philosophical treatises, while making a career as a lawyer and government official. Bishop John Fisher worked as an administrator at Cambridge, confronted the challenge Martin Luther presented to Christian Europe, and most importantly served as Bishop of Rochester. As a bishop, he is notable for his dedication to preaching at a time when bishops tended to focus on politics. These men were brilliant. They both corresponded with Erasmus, who helped Bishop Fisher learn Greek and Hebrew, and who also famously referred to More as a man *omnium horarium*, a man of all seasons.

Above all their accomplishments, these men bore witness to a deep faith in Christ and his Church. More considered joining religious life and was assiduous in his devotional practices. As a married man, he committed himself wholly to his vocation as a father. At the time, disciplinary practices with children tended to be severe, but More's children testify to his warmth, patience, and generosity.

St. John Fisher was a model shepherd and demonstrated remarkable humility. He remained in the small Diocese

of Rochester his entire episcopal ministry, devoting himself to his local church rather than seeking promotion to a larger, more powerful diocese.

More and Fisher are well-known for opposing King Henry's divorce. Ultimately, it was their refusal to sign an oath of supremacy that led them to be executed. King Henry VIII claimed to be the supreme head of the Church in England, asserting sovereign power over English Christians. Neither Fisher nor More could abide this claim, and their steadfastness to their consciences put them in conflict with the king. They were convicted of treason.

When More made his way to the gallows, he is said to have stated, "I die the King's good servant, but God's first." Both More and Fisher were patriots. They never rose up to incite rebellion or foment revolution. They were no traitors. But when the law of the king came into conflict with the law of Christ, they chose Christ. These men gave their lives for the freedom of the Church and for freedom of conscience. They bear witness to the truth that no government can make a claim on a person's soul.

**Sts. Thomas More and John Fisher,
pray that we too will be good servants to our country,
but God's first!**



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

COPTIC MARTYRS

"The blood of our Christian brothers is testimony that cries out."



On February 15, 2015, a shocking 5-minute video aired showing 21 men in orange jumpsuits being forced to the ground in Libya and then beheaded by ISIS-affiliated militants. Their only crime – they were Coptic Christians, “people of the cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian Church.” These men, like many others, were migrants from Egypt, working in Libya. Ostensibly, they were being killed to avenge the alleged kidnapping of Muslim women by the Egyptian Coptic Church, an outrageous charge, but then ISIS needs little excuse for its brutality.

Tensions between Coptic Christians and Muslims are not new, despite the fact that Copts make up about ten percent of Egypt’s population. Coptic Christians trace their origins back to the Apostle Mark, whom they believe came to Egypt around A.D. 42 and founded what became a thriving Christian community in Alexandria. By the third century, the Church in Alexandria was considered one of four Apostolic Sees and the oldest Christian church in Africa.

Under Muslim rule, Copts have often faced discrimination and have been required to pay special taxes. Since 2010, attacks against Copts seem to have increased. In 2011, a Coptic church was demolished, and when Coptic Christians took to the streets in Cairo to protest, they were met with tanks and riot police. At least 28 Copts were killed and hundreds injured. In 2013, following violence that left five Copts and one Muslim dead in a

northern town, security forces and local residents laid siege to St. Mark’s Cathedral in Cairo where hundreds of Copts attended the funeral for the slain Copts. This led to more injuries and protests that were indicative of the distrust between the Muslim Brotherhood government led by President Mohamed Morsi and the Coptic community.

But this persecution pales in comparison to the brutality inflicted by ISIS-affiliated militants who beheaded the 21 men in Libya. In publicizing this video, the militants wanted to send “A Message Signed in Blood to the Nation of the Cross” and warned that “we will fight you all together until the war lays down its burdens... The sea you’ve hidden Sheik Osama bin Laden’s body in, we swear to Allah we will mix it with your blood.”

Reaction to the beheadings came swiftly. The White House condemned the “wanton killing of innocents,” saying ISIS’s “barbarity knows no bounds.” United Nations Security Council members likewise denounced “the heinous and cowardly apparent murder” of the 21 Egyptians. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi declared a seven day period of national mourning, calling the 21 Egyptians “martyrs”. On February 21, 2015, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Pope Tawadros II, said the 21 would be commemorated as martyr saints. Pope Francis called the killings “barbaric,” lamenting, “They only said ‘Jesus help me...’ The blood of our Christian brothers is testimony that cries out. Be they Catholic, Orthodox, Lutherans, it doesn’t matter. They’re Christian.”

Coptic Martyrs, pray for all Christians who suffer persecution!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST



(National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC; photo by Fr. Lawrence Lew, OP)

*"He must increase;
I must decrease."*

On June 24, we celebrate the birth of the Forerunner, one of the great men in the story of Jesus.

As herald of the Christ, John the Baptist reveals what it means to be a witness. He was one of the greatest of the prophets, and his courageous truth-telling led to his martyrdom. Most importantly, his ministry opened the way for others to encounter Jesus.

John links the Old Testament to the New. He preaches a message of repentance, challenging complacency among the people of Israel. He is often thought of as the last of the old prophets. When he is approached by religious leaders who are failing in their role, he confronts them directly, calling them a brood of vipers. He also challenges the immorality of the political leaders, opposing Herod's marriage – a stance for which he was later beheaded.

By calling people to come to be dipped in the waters of the Jordan as an act of repentance, he reminds his fellow Judeans of the Exodus. The call to renewal is an act of remembrance. The action says, "Remember the God who delivered you!" At the same time, the ritual looks forward to the one who has been promised to bring true freedom to Israel.

John's renewal movement prepared the way of Jesus. John knew that God was moving in his people, even if he did not know what that would mean. When Jesus comes to be baptized, an act of his solidarity with sinners, John first begins to recognize Jesus as the one to come. Later in Jesus' ministry, John says to his own disciples, "He must increase; I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). He bears witness to the freedom that comes with true humility and openness to answering a call.

St. John the Baptist, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

VEN. HENRIETTE DELILLE



(CNS photo/Clarion Herald)

*"I believe in God.
I hope in God. I love.
I want to live and die for God."*

Servant of Slaves. Witness to the Poor. Declared Servant of God by Pope Benedict XVI on March 27, 2010.

Henriette Delille, a free woman of color, lived in New Orleans in the early 19th century. She affirmed the God-given dignity of persons of African descent during the era of slavery. With immense love and courage, she confronted the dehumanizing conditions that the Black population, slave and free, endured.

Descended of an enslaved African woman and white slave owner, Henriette was born into the precarious class of Creoles or free Blacks of mixed heritage. They lived resourcefully by purchasing property, working as entrepreneurs, and finding ways to creatively secure financial resources. For many women in this situation, such avenues included concubinage. Rejecting that option, Henriette promoted sacramental marriage.

A devout Catholic, Henriette worked to bring religious education and the sacraments of the Church to the many enslaved as well as free

persons of African descent. Consequently, Henriette served as the godmother, sponsor, and catechist for many infants, youth, and adults presented for Baptism, Holy Eucharist, and Holy Matrimony.

Using her meager personal resources, Henriette devoted her adult life to exercising Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. She enlisted the support of two other free women of color, Juliette Gaudin and Josephine Charles. Together, they sought and cared for orphans, the aged, disabled, infirm, and indigent in the community.

As honorable as these efforts were, Henriette confronted many obstacles. Most of the ruling class, including Church officials, opposed a Black religious association. There was never enough money. Further, Henriette suffered poor health. However, Henriette's efforts were supported by *zéloteurs* – lay men and women donors and associates, both free and enslaved. Named the Association of the Holy Family, the laypeople advanced a common mission: "to teach catechism to the poor and to prepare them for first Communion."

Henriette, Juliette, and Josephine did not wear an official habit, and they made no public vows. Nevertheless, their service, mercy, and love was the catalyst for founding of the Sisters of the Holy Family congregation, which continues to serve the people of God throughout Louisiana and neighboring states, as well as Washington, DC, California, and areas of Central America and West Africa.*

In the midst of struggle, Henriette persevered. She was determined to serve, and her persistence leaves a legacy for all Catholics who seek to overcome racial division in our country.

Venerable Henriette Delille, Servant of Slaves, pray for us!

*Cyprian Davis, *Henriette Delille: Servant of Slaves, Witness to the Poor* (Archives of the Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2004), p. ix, 51.



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

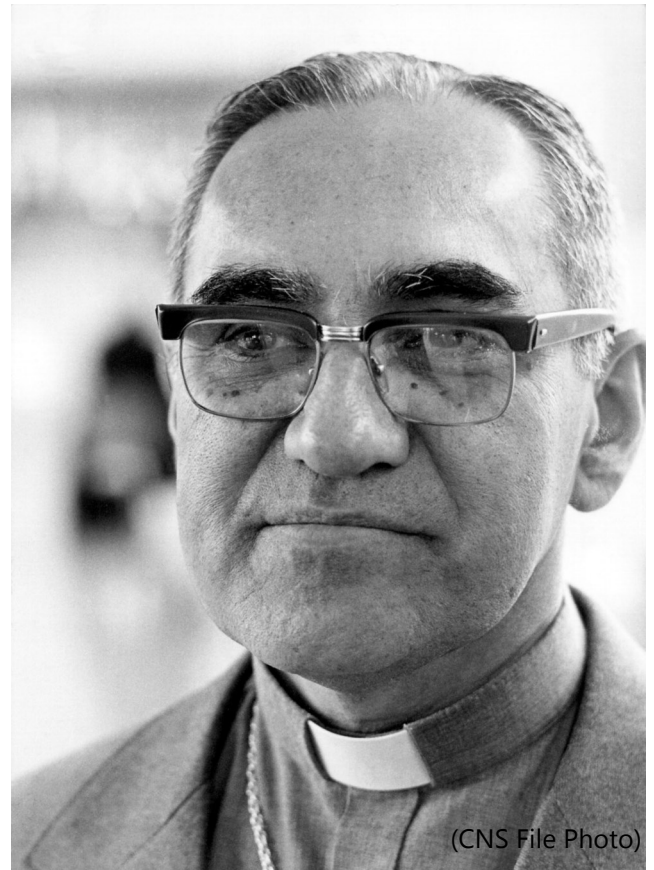
BL. OSCAR ROMERO

*"May my blood
be a seed of liberty."*

When Monsignor Oscar Romero was installed as Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador in February 1977, he was thrust into a tumultuous situation. A military coup in October 1979 led to a gruesome, twelve year civil war. These events were precipitated by the great disparity between a small number of powerful, wealthy families – who were backed by local politicians and the military – and the rest of El Salvador's citizens. Many people suffered extreme poverty. Laborers worked for minimal pay for wealthy landowners, yet they could not hope to obtain land for themselves. The military terrorized the people in order ensure that the families held onto land and money. The Catholic Church became a target when some clergy began to defend the poor. In response to these injustices, some Salvadorans took up arms and fought against the military.

While some Latin American clergy promoted violence as a response to injustice, Archbishop Romero advocated for a different weapon: **Christian love.**

Before becoming archbishop, Monsignor Romero was not aware that the government was responsible for the deaths of many civilians. Because of his quiet nature, some thought that he would be good for the position, assuming he would not meddle in controversial affairs. However, shortly after his installation, his close friend, Fr. Rutilio Grande, a priest who openly opposed the unjust practices of wealthy landowners, was assassinated by gunmen while traveling with two people to celebrate Mass. This experience awakened Archbishop Romero to the reality of the corruption in his country and prompted him to take a stand for his people's freedom.



(CNS File Photo)

Archbishop Romero preached many homilies that were broadcast throughout San Salvador. He persistently defended the rights of the people, calling government leaders to conversion and challenging them to uphold God's law. He reminded the people that they were loved by God and that fighting back with Christian charity was the way to victory. His vocal response to government violence against the poor led to difficulties with other clergy members and his religious superiors as well as death threats from government accomplices. In spite of these challenges, he continued to speak out on behalf of the poor.

On March 24, 1980, Archbishop Romero was shot to death while celebrating the Eucharist in the chapel of Divina Providencia hospital. Blessed Oscar Romero was beatified by Pope Francis in May 2015.

Bl. Oscar Romero, pray for us!



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WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

MARTYRS OF COMPIÈGNE

Veni, Sancte Spiritus

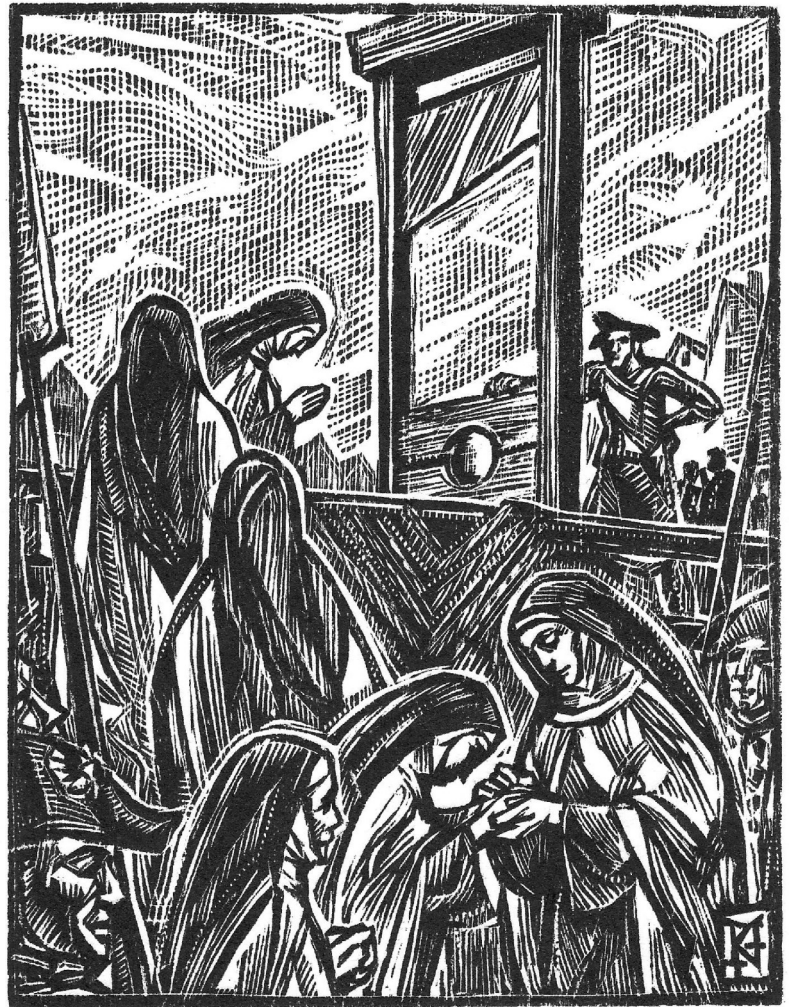
They offered their lives as a sacrifice to restore peace to France and to the Church. As the Revolution raged around them, boiling over to the Reign of Terror, their prayer came to a climax when sixteen sisters fell victim to the guillotine.

The Revolutionaries regarded the Catholic Church with scorn, because they saw the institution as too tied to the order they sought to upend. Contemplative orders, like the Carmelites, were targeted because they were not active. The Carmelites offered nothing useful to France, in the eyes of the Revolutionaries.

In 1792, the community of Carmelite nuns at Compiègne was split up, forced to abandon the habits they wore, and kept under watch. The sisters continued to meet and pray, and two years after their expulsion from the monastery, they were apprehended and jailed by the Revolutionaries.

On the day after a brief show trial, the sixteen Carmelite nuns were to be executed. They were paraded through the streets of Paris wearing their habits, because their secular clothes were being washed. As they approached the scaffold, they chanted the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* and other hymns. Each one ascended the stairs, renewed her vows before her prioress, Mother Teresa of St. Augustine, and then calmly placed her head in the guillotine.

With each fall of the blade, the singing diminished, voice by voice. After the sixteenth and final sister had died, there was silence. This was unusual. Typically, an execution was preceded by a drumroll, and following the beheading, the crowd erupted in cheers, paradoxically believing that they were cheering for values such as freedom, equality, and reason. This time, the mood was somber. There were no drums nor cheering. The crowd dispersed in silence.



(The 16 Carmelite martyrs of Compiègne; woodcut by Robert F. McGovern. Copyright by and used with permission of ICS Publications, Washington, DC)

The nuns offered their lives in the hopes that God would bring peace to their land. Ten days after their execution, the Terror ended.

From the beginning of the Church, Christians have loved the land of their birth, and offered their lives for their countries, even when facing persecution. These Carmelite sisters shared in Christ's sacrifice in a most perfect way. They show us how to live and love with grace and dignity in a time of upheaval.

May Teresa of St. Augustine and Companions, Blessed Martyrs of Compiègne, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

FR. JOHN BAPST, SJ



(Boston College University Libraries)

"...if John Bapst, S.J., be found again on Ellsworth soil we will provide for him, and try on an entire suit of new clothes, such as cannot be found at the shops of any tailor, and then when thus appareled he be presented with a free ticket to leave Ellsworth upon the first railroad operation that may go into effect."

Catholics in the United States have a history of challenging our country to a fuller embrace of religious freedom. In the 19th century, violence and persecution posed a significant challenge to newly arrived immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and other parts of Europe. Riots led by anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic nativist parties broke out in cities such as Louisville, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia. It was a time of serious testing for Catholics in this country.

Fr. John Bapst of the Society of Jesus did not want to be sent to the "New World." But his Jesuit superiors had other plans for him, and they sent him to Maine to evangelize the Native Americans. In the town of Ellsworth, where he set up a Catholic parish and school, Fr. Bapst became caught up in a controversy over public schools. During that time, students read aloud from the Bible in school. Fr. Bapst had suggested that Catholic students not be required to read from the King James Version of the Bible, because it was a Protestant translation. After this, Know Nothings attempted to destroy the parish and banned Bapst from Ellsworth.

Bapst was apprehended by a mob. According to some accounts, he was actually pulled out of the confessional. The mob tarred and feathered him, and attempted to set him on fire. He was rescued and eventually cleaned up and brought back to good health. He would go on to become the first president of Boston College. Even so, the event traumatized him, and he suffered flashbacks until the end of his life.

Fr. Bapst did not come to this country as rabble rouser. He is not known to have been a particularly great preacher or confessor or scholar. There is no cause for his canonization. He was a Jesuit priest who answered a call, and it thrust him into a whirlwind of hatred. Religious prejudice is not new. John Bapst, SJ, shows us the courage of an ordinary priest bearing witness to freedom in an extraordinary way.

May the example of Fr. John Bapst inspire each of us to answer our own call, even in the midst of misunderstanding and prejudice.



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WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

STS. PETER AND PAUL

"We are witnesses of these things."

Peter and Paul are often seen in the Church as a complementary pair. Peter represents the institutional church, while Paul represents the charismatic or spiritual church. Both are associated with the church in Rome. But what binds them together, above all, is that they were utterly seized by Jesus' message.



The New Testament often portrays Peter as rash and headstrong. One minute, he is a paragon of faith; the next, he has completely misunderstood what Jesus wants. He frequently does not seem to get what is going on, and he even denies Jesus when Jesus is about to be executed. And yet, despite his shortcomings and weaknesses, he has a heart for the Lord. He is the Prince of the Apostles, and as the first bishop of Rome, he holds a special place in the hearts of Catholic Christians.

Scripture introduces Paul as a violent persecutor of the first Christians. In fact, he oversees the execution of the man whom the Acts of the Apostles depicts as the first martyr, St. Stephen (Acts 7:58-8:1). He considers himself a late addition to the Jesus movement, referring to himself as "one untimely born" (1 Cor 15:8). However, following his encounter with Christ near Damascus, he became one of the greatest missionaries in the history of the Church. Like Peter, Paul has a heart for the Lord, and when his spiritual energy is directed to the glory of Jesus Christ, he is a powerful witness to the kingdom of God. His letters make up the bulk of the New Testament and continue to guide the Church today.

It is a beautiful testimony to the power of God that these two men, whose faults Scripture does not attempt to hide, are key figures in the story of Jesus and foundational in the development of the Church. Sts. Peter and Paul show us the work of the Holy Spirit, who renews hearts, builds the Church, and testifies to Christ. Peter died in Rome as martyr – on a cross, according to some accounts. Paul suffered for the cause of the gospel throughout his ministry, writing several letters from prison. He, like Peter, was martyred in Rome.

Imperfect men, seized by the Word of God and set on fire by the Holy Spirit. They are pillars of our Church and witnesses to freedom in Christ.

Sts. Peter and Paul, pray for us!



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WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

STS. FELICITY AND PERPETUA



(Courtesy of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, Washington, DC)

"For this cause we came willingly unto this, that our liberty might not be obscured; for this cause have we devoted our lives, that we may do no such thing."

Northern African Christians faced severe persecution during the third century. Even when it was not widespread, Roman governors made examples out of some Christians, particularly converts. St. Felicity was a catechumen, while St. Perpetua was a woman of noble birth, whose father was a pagan. They were killed in the amphitheater of Carthage in AD 203.

The story of their suffering amazes us because of these women's courage and boldness. They did not shrink back at all, telling the crowds who witnessed their executions that God would judge them. Wild animals were released upon them, and they contended with the beasts before being put to death by the swords of Roman soldiers.

Perhaps the most riveting aspect of the story is the role of family. Perpetua was a mother of a small child, and Felicity gave birth during

her imprisonment. We would sympathize with a mother who feigned allegiance to a governor, so that her children would not grow up without a mother. Furthermore, Perpetua's father visited her in prison, imploring her to sacrifice to the emperor so that he would not have to watch her die. At one point, the father himself was physically punished, merely because of his association with his daughter.

On the other hand, Felicity, Perpetua, and their companions supported one another. Their suffering strained the bonds of biological family, but it strengthened the bonds of spiritual family. When we are baptized, we are born into the family of God, and this is the family against which all others are measured.

Certainly, a supportive, Christian mother and father is ideal. Perpetua shows us a woman who contended with an unsupportive father. Both martyrs put loyalty to Christ above all other duties. In the face of adversity, Sts. Felicity and Perpetua clung to Jesus.

Let us remember that we are family, and we owe one another support. Let us pray in solidarity with Christians who suffer persecution so that, when persecutors tempt us to compromise, we can as one family of God say, "We may do no such thing."

Sts. Felicity and Perpetua, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

BL. MIGUEL PRO



"Viva Cristo Rey!"

As he faced a firing squad for serving the Catholic faithful in Mexico at a time when Catholicism was outlawed and severely persecuted, Fr. Miguel Pro of the Society of Jesus made a request. He asked to have a moment to pray on his knees, then he stood up, stretched out his arms in the imitation of Christ on the cross and submitted himself to his martyrdom, shouting "Viva Christo Rey!"

This moment was photographed, and so we can look into the face of a martyr at the moment of his execution. What is astonishing about the images is the serenity with which Blessed Miguel submits himself to the state. He does not respond with violent resistance, because he is at peace with God. From that place of peace, the martyr triumphs over tyranny. Government cannot take away his inner freedom, the freedom that belongs to any person who submits himself totally to God.

Due in part to Blessed Miguel's witness, the Mexican government was shamed and an uprising gained the strength to stand up to religious persecution, as well as other injustices. He did not know it at the time, but his death inspired a larger defense of political and religious freedom that has since permitted the Church to live more publicly her call to holiness.

Freedom through surrender is a paradox that is hard to understand and at times harder to live. Nonetheless, we are all called, like Blessed Miguel, to live in the freedom that only comes through an imitation of Christ's faithful obedience.

Blessed Miguel's life and death remains a witness to complete surrender to Christ in a way to which we might struggle to relate. Yet, we are all called to order our lives to Christ. We may not be asked to die for our faith, but we are asked to give each moment of the day to the Lord. This capacity requires freedom from sin, freedom from selfishness, freedom from all those things that stand between us and God.

Blessed Miguel Pro reminds us that even in extreme circumstances, we find true freedom when we live first for Christ. That witness, when adopted in our lives, may even inspire others to similar acts of love.

Blessed Miguel Pro, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

"No one in the world can change Truth. What we can do and should do is to seek truth and to serve it when we have found it."

The 20th century has been called the Century of Martyrs. Some historians estimate that more people died for their faith in the 20th century than the previous nineteen centuries combined. The 20th century saw a massive amount of bloodshed from people who died because of their faith. One of the most dramatic examples of these martyrs is Saint Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest who offered his life in the Auschwitz death camp in exchange for the life of another man, a husband and father.

Maximilian Kolbe saw the evil of both the Nazi fascism invading Poland from the west and communism invading Poland from the east. The squeezing of the Polish people was partly a military effort, but perhaps more profoundly, it was an attempt to drain Poland of its culture, which was decidedly Catholic. Totalitarian regimes cannot tolerate an authoritative voice other than the state.

In response to the attack on the very life of the Polish faithful, Maximilian Kolbe invested his time and energy into creating a counter voice through print media and the formation of priests. The saint knew that what faced Poland and the western world was first and foremost a spiritual battle and thus needed a spiritual response. In establishing various newspapers and houses of formation, Maximilian Kolbe heroically and courageously stood up to the secular powers of his time. His work showed that the political powers may gain control of civil institutions, but they would never and could never gain control of the human spirit.

This great priest must have known he risked his life, but it was a risk he was willing to take in order to witness to the true dignity of the human person. In the end, he did give up his life when he offered to take the place of a father and husband who was to be executed at Auschwitz. In his life and death, Fr. Kolbe achieved victory over the lies of the totalitarian movements that tried to redefine God's created order. Totalitarian ideologies may appear strong temporarily, but the martyr reveals that the human spirit, strengthened by God's grace, is stronger.



St. Maximilian Kolbe, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

ST. TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS

*"Those who seek the truth
are seeking God,
whether they know it or not."*

Convert. Philosopher. Martyr. Edith Stein – or, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross – embodies catholicity in the fullest sense. She sought the truth, spoke up against anti-Semitism, and achieved success as a philosopher despite the setbacks she faced as a Jewish woman. She is witness to freedom in many ways.

Stein was raised in a Jewish household by her devout mother. Her father died when she was young. As she grew older, she drifted away from Jewish practice and eventually came to consider herself an atheist.

As one of the exceptional students who surrounded Edmund Husserl, the great phenomenologist, Stein was at the vanguard of philosophy. Her work touches on metaphysics, political philosophy, and psychology. Her devotion to reason, wherever reason might lead, helped keep her open to religion and the truth of God. Indeed, Pope St. John Paul II identifies her as an exemplary philosopher in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. Stein found the truth in St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography, and she went on to join the Discalced Carmelites. After her conversion, she worked to bring phenomenology into dialogue with the scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas.

During the rise of Nazism, Stein spoke up. She wrote to Pope Pius XI asking the Church to speak up on behalf of persecuted Jews, and she wrote her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*, "as a way to combat racial hatred." The Nazis captured Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross in 1942 and took her to Auschwitz, where she died in the gas chamber shortly after arrival.



Edith Stein at age 40 (1931); photo from the Archivum Carmelitanum
Edith Stein, Cologne, Germany; published with permission of ICS
Publications, Washington, D.C.

Stein was captured primarily because she was Jewish, and the Catholic Church considers her a Christian martyr, because she bore witness to her faith in Jesus before her executioners. She reminds us that we stand in solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism and all racist ideologies, for they are utterly opposed to the truth that there is one humanity, which comes from one God and is ordered to communion with that one God. And she inspires us to honor the intellectual vocation to seek the truth with love and devotion.

St. Edith Stein, Patroness of Europe, pray for us!



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WITNESS TO FREEDOM

ST. KATERI TEKAKWITHA



*"I have deliberated enough.
For a long time my decision on
what I will do has been made."*

Kateri Tekakwitha is revered today as the first Native American saint. Only 24 when she died, Kateri is an example of purity, prayer, and most especially endurance in faith. Born in 1656, in a Mohawk village in what is now upstate New York, she was an outsider. Her mother was an Algonquin who was catechized and baptized Roman Catholic by French missionaries in Trois-Rivières, east of Montreal. Her mother was captured by the Mohawks in a raid and was taken to be the wife of the Mohawk chief Kenneronkwa near present-day Auriesville, New York.

At an early age, Kateri's village suffered a severe smallpox epidemic, which killed her parents and left her scarred and her vision impaired. Her name, "Tekakwitha", means "she who bumps into things." She was adopted by her Mohawk relatives who survived the epidemic, and the survivors of the plague moved to the new village of Caughnawaga.

Like her mother, Tekakwitha sought out instruction from Catholic missionaries that led to her eventual baptism at the age of 19 and her taking the name "Kateri" after St. Catherine of Siena on Easter Sunday 1676.

Kateri faced severe obstacles from the Mohawk tribal leaders, as well as from her adopted family. On Holy Days, Kateri received no food, since she prayed rather than work in the fields. When she walked to chapel, she was cursed and pelted with stones. Nevertheless, she persevered. She refused to marry despite pressure from her tribe. According to Fr. Pierre Cholenec, a Jesuit priest who was a mentor, Kateri said, "I have deliberated enough. For a long time my decision on what I will do has been made. I have consecrated myself entirely to Jesus, son of Mary, I have chosen Him for husband and He alone will take me for wife."

The French missionaries encouraged her to leave her hostile environment and travel to Canada to the St. Francois Xavier mission. Her uncle opposed this move, because he was suspicious of the French and feared it was a ruse to depopulate the village. Even so, Kateri prevailed and traveled the 200 miles by foot and canoe to Canada, where she lived a devout and exemplary life. Called the "Lily of the Mohawks," she is a symbol of chastity and purity as she sought to do penance to commit her life to God. When she died due to failing health, witnesses noted that her face was miraculously transformed so that all her smallpox scars disappeared. Over the years, people have asked Kateri for divine intercession when suffering from serious illnesses, and their prayers have been answered. Her legacy of healing continues. St. Kateri Tekakwitha was canonized on October 21, 2012.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Lily of the Mohawks, pray for us!



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