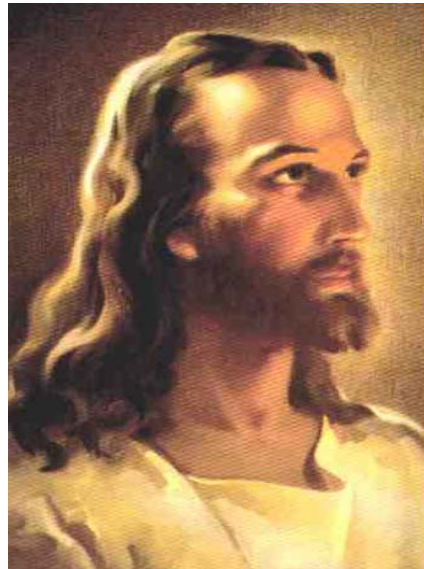




***“WHICH IS BETTER  
TO DIE OR TO LIVE FOR THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?”***

*His Grace Bishop Youssef  
Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States*

*“Beware of men, for they will deliver you up to councils... You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, and bear testimony before them and the gentiles... Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you will say... It will be given to you in that hour... You will be hated by all for My Name’s sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.” (Matthew 10:16)*



apostle Paul still classified them as “the saints,” belonging to the Church of God.

*“Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and Sosthenes our brother, to the Church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours,*

*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 1:1, 2)*

**T**he term “saint” clearly means those people who are set apart by God. Through baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ and being united with Him, the Church by His mercy is one with the faithful (the saints) everywhere. A saint is one who abounds in faith. A saint is one who has peace in recompense.

Tertullian (c.207) an Ante Nicene Father and apologist wrote, *“He exhorts those who are justified by faith in Christ, and not by the Law, to have peace with God.”*

So by justification do we classify saints as those of perfection? Is perfection what makes one a saint? Perhaps it was their “pursuit of perfection” that led others to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is clearly written...despite disorder, disunity, and incorrect judgment among the early Corinthian Christians the

So, are saints more distinguishable based upon martyrdom? During the first few centuries of Christianity, in particular, under the reign of the merciless Emperor Diocletian, martyrdom was rampant. It was often a daily fact of life for those who openly confessed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No one will dispute the necessity of the countless courageous martyrs whose bloodshed saturated the land of Egypt, in upholding the Christian faith.

Certainly everyone will readily agree that our martyred Christian ancestors are a “living” example for us today, of how to be a steadfast faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ’s teachings. Their courageousness against persecutions, against prejudice, against torture, against



suffering and death is never in question. But yet, every call upon a martyr to take a stand for Christ, represented a commitment that was worth their whole earthly life.

What obstacle did a martyr encounter worth overcoming by the forfeiture of their life?

What advancement was specifically gained for the cause of Christianity by the spillage of a martyr's blood? It is important not only to recognize the courageous finality in the act of martyrdom but the action that required a life as well. Yes, inspiration certainly comes from toil and troubled days, from blood shed, and life lost. But the lessons should not begin and end here.

The lessons should be celebrated, examined, and have thankfulness raised up to its ultimate representation of faithfulness. St. Clement of Alexander (c.195) said, "*Faith is the power for salvation and strength to eternal life.*"

The Lord Jesus Christ said "***If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples.***" (John 8:31). Hearing the Word of the Lord is not enough as the saints, both who lived out their earthly life and those who were martyred, demonstrated. Not only did they listen but they converted these words into a fruitful lifestyle. They both (martyred and non-martyred saints) exhibited the lifestyle required of them in their living conditions pertinent to their time spent on earth.

They renounced the world and its ways, for absolute, total dedication to the Lord, above friends, above relations. It was an ultimate commitment to God (Luke 14:26). They renounced material possessions, "***So likewise whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.***" (Luke 14:33) Therefore there was a cost for discipleship and those saints who were martyred and who lived their life out both counted the cost and paid. Each **carried their cross** as God intended with the true quality of discipleship.

It is written ..."***And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.***"

(Luke 14:27) Discipleship is a life of faithful ministry both types of saints shared, through evangelism, witnessing, written works, and serving God. The more invested the individual in his discipleship, the more successful and effective was his ministry. It was a way of life for the early Christian saints.

Saints who were not killed confessing the Lord Jesus Christ could possibly have desired death as an easier, much speedier access to Eternal Life. A life full of consternation, hardship, of endless persecution, of prejudice seemed to make the saints who lived out their lives only stronger. For those martyred the finality of earthly life was immediate but for those saints who were left to be evilly persecuted and tortured at will, the finality did not come suddenly.

A lesson both the martyred and the non-martyred saints taught us is that praising God should be the action behind the act of faithfulness exhibited by both types of saints. Let us give credence to the advancement of the principle requiring the life and the death of a Christian consumed with the love of God.

For all saints, certain death to the world around them is a pre-requisite and the worldly ways of life must be departed from. For the martyrs, death was not only to the worldly ways about them but departure from the world itself. Death comes to all saints; the only difference is the way of the death. But there is only ONE salvation.

St. Clement of Alexander writes, "*The covenant of salvation, reaching down to us from the foundation of the world, through different generations and times is one, although it is conceived as different in respect of the gift. For it follows that there is*



*one unchangeable gift of salvation given by one God, through one Lord, benefiting in many ways.”*

What set earthly life lived and martyred saints apart from others of their day? Perhaps their holy zeal, their attitude towards discipleship set these great saints apart. Holy zeal is what compels a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ to strive for the ministry of saving others and building up of the Kingdom of Heaven. It may have incorporated writing a Holy Gospel, leaving behind written sayings and thoughts, evangelism to foreign countries, or their death as an example of keeping the faith.

The zeal exhibited by many honored holy saints was contagious and full of fervor. The Lord Jesus Christ considered those zealous persons as working with Him. He said, **“He who does not gather with Me scatters.”** (Matthew 12:30). They put nothing, not a single excuse in the way of serving God.

St. Augustine in ‘His Confessions’ so eloquently and passionately writes, *“Everywhere, O Truth, you give hearing to all who consult you, and at one and the same time you make answer to them all, even as they ask about varied things. You answer clearly, but all men do not hear you clearly. All men ask counsel about what they wish, but they do not all hear what they wish. Your best servant is he who looks not so much to hear from you what he wants to hear, but rather to want what he hears from you.”*

So which is better, to live or die for Christ? Neither is better. Both are good. Each gives their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ dying to the ways of the world. Both bear witness. Martyrdom especially the Lord Jesus Christ’s passion and the martyrdom of Christians for the faith exact a certain courage given by the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, a saint is also a source for holiness and productive works. All Christians, martyrs included, are called upon to be saints, faithful, productive, and

truly holy. These are also Christians who have departed this earthly life and reached deification as worthy of the honor as saints or holy persons who serve as an example to us all.

For it can be said that we should pay homage to the life the honored saints lived *first and foremost* not the premature or natural manner in which they left this earthly world that kept our belief in the saints example’s fervent. The emphasis on their earthly life was that they gave light as shining examples of faith to others, not that their light was burnt out by the particular type of death they incurred.

May the lessons gleam from the early Christian saints and martyrs help us to proclaim as happily and willingly as they, our Christian faith to others without excuse.

### **WHO AM I?**

I WAS A FOURTH CENTURY SAINT  
AS A YOUTH I WAS STRONG, FIERCE,  
DISHONEST AND VIOLENT  
NOTHING IS KNOWN OF MY  
CONVERSION

I USED TO DEMAND AND ASK OF THE  
SUN, “IF YOU ARE THE GOD, LET ME  
KNOW. O, PLEASE GOD WHY DON’T  
YOU LEAD ME TO YOURSELF?”

I WAS DISCOVERED IN THE WESTERN  
DESERT AND AN ELDER LED ME TO ST  
MARCARIUS THE GREAT AT PETRA  
AS I CONFESSED AN ANGEL WIPED ALL  
MY SINS FROM A BLACK TABLET  
UNTIL THE TABLET BECAME WHITE  
AS A MONK I HAD MANY YEARS OF  
STRIFE AND STRUGGLE  
I WAS KILLED BY BARBARIANS AND  
AS I DIED SAID “WHO TAKES BY THE  
SWORD SHALL PERISH BY THE  
SWORD”

### **ST MOSES THE BLACK**