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Martyrdom

Our Coptic Church lives by the work of the Holy Spirit inside of her. Her page of martyrdom comes from the fruits of the Spirit. We are amazed how our fathers and our martyrs withstood their sufferings; how they were unshaken, how they conquered, and how their honored blood, which was shed, destroyed the weapons of the evil kings and rulers.

Martyrdom is the story of Christianity from its inception. It is a story of spreading the Holy Gospel all over the world. The witness of the martyr's blood was greater than any teaching or preaching. Martyrdom is a deep philosophy founded on strong spiritual principles for which Christians from all social levels, cultures and throughout the ages have been attached to.

Who is a Christian?

As the soul is to the body, so is a Christian to the world. The soul lives in the body but it is not part of the body. Likewise, while the body has enmity against the soul and fights against it, the soul loves the body. The soul is eternal in a body that dies and the Christian is a stranger in a temporary world looking forward to his eternal home in heaven.

Understanding Pain

Christianity is a religion of sacrificial love because her God is Love. We who follow her believe that if you do not know love you do not know God. *"He that loves not knows not God; for God is love."* (1 John 4:8) For her, suffering takes on a new understanding. Her attitude towards pain changed because her pride is the Holy Cross. The suffering Cross has become a symbol of conquering and victory. Whenever there is the Cross there is love. Love does not care for pain or ridicule because:

Pain is fellowship with the suffering Lord

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with [Him] that we may be also glorified together." (Romans 8:17)

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." (Phil 3:10)

It is a spiritual pleasure that transforms death into a sweet cup to drink from where the Christian, in prayer and with all effort and haste, rushes to drink.

The believer's attitude changed with the understanding that this life is short and his journey in this world is temporary. *"To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you."* (1 Peter 1:4)

The believer's vision was sanctified and he saw in his giving and death the climax of love. His banner became *"Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13)

Persecution and Christianity walk a parallel path. Those who wish to live their lives in our Lord Jesus Christ will confront persecution throughout all ages. *"Yes and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (2 Timothy 3:12) *"For he said, because the Lord has sworn that*

the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation." (Exodus 17:16) When persecution reaches its utmost, which is death, it is expressed in the word *martyrdom*.

The word ***martyr*** is derived from the word *witness*. It was first used for the apostles who witnessed to the new Christian faith. Afterward, it was used to describe the confessors who suffered for their belief in our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally it was used for those who were killed for the sake of their faith.

Martyrdom started with Jesus Christ Himself, and then His followers. In the midst of evil hatred we witness forbearance, purity and forgiveness. It was a must that the Church be baptized by blood. It started with the persecution of the Jews to the Christians *"Who both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us; and they please not God and are contrary to all men. Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins always; for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost."* (1 Thessalonians 2:15-16) It was St. Paul the apostle who wrote these words, he who was once known as Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the Church.

Afterward, pagan Rome became the greatest enemy to the new Christian faith. They fought with all its might to destroy Christianity. But the 'gates of hell will not prevail against it.' It started with Nero and ended with King Constantine. Therefore, the seed of the Church is the blood of her martyrs.

Motives for Martyrdom in Christianity

Neither humanity nor history experienced death the way it witnessed the death of the Christian martyrdom. Our martyrs went to their death with joy, calmness and meekness that caused their persecutors to wonder. What were their motives? To the believer,

The world is limited as compared to eternity

"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (2 Corinthians 4:17)

"And the world passes away, and the lust thereof; but he that does the will of God abides forever." (1 John 2:17)

Christians are strangers to this world

"And if you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judges according to every man's work, pass the time of your journey here in fear." (1 Peter 1:17)

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them and embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." (Hebrews 11:13)

"Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (for we walk by faith, not by sight.) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

This world is evil and in life there will be tribulations

"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in wickedness." (1 John 5:19)

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev 21:4)

Death will lead to glory

"Verily, verily I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abides alone but if it die, it brings forth much fruit. He that loves his life shall lose it and he that hates his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." (John 12:24-25)

"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:17-18)

"It is a faithful saying: for if we were dead with Him, we shall also live with Him." (2 Timothy 2:11)

Therefore they became unconcerned for anything materialistic or worldly.

"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21) "For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content." (1 Timothy 6:7-8) "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; and poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing all things." (2 Corinthians 6:10)

It became so that they desired for the soul to be released from the body *"For I am in a straight between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." (Philippians 1:23)*
"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:2).