

Types of the Martyrs

There are three kinds of martyrs

1. Those who die for the sake of faith (these are the majority)
2. Those who die for the sake of purity
3. Those who die for the sake of dogma

1. For the sake of faith

These are the majority of our martyrs. We have the stories of their love for our Lord Jesus Christ and their courage in the face of evil. We will not talk about those martyrs but will go into the other two kinds of martyrs.

2. For the sake of purity

Martyrdom was distinguished in the first centuries by two clear and distinct features – a love for martyrdom and a love for purity because of the deep spirituality in which the early church lived. The believers hated anything materialistic and held on to everything that is pure. You will not find martyrdom and a spirit of immorality or enslavement to bodily desires. To the early Church believers, death was easier to bear than impurity.

The history of the martyrs is full of heroes of purity that preferred death than to be defiled, especially among the Christian women. Most of the judgments handed down against women believers were to force them into defiling their bodies. However, they showed courage in defending their virtues, equal to the courage of their men counterparts. To them being defiled was an evil worse than death.

There are numerous examples of such courageous women.

1. St. Putamnia, the pure virgin martyr who cried to the ruler, “By the head of your emperor do not let them remove my clothes and allow them to let me go to the tar pit with my clothes on. Then you will see the power to endure that Christ, whom you do not know, will give me.” A soldier named Basilidis defended her and was also martyred. She was of Origen’s disciples.

2. St. Theodora was a seventeen-year-old virgin martyr. She was martyred with Dydimus the soldier who saved her from the plot to shame her by the emperor’s decree to send her to a whorehouse.

3. St. Veronica the virgin martyr. In the year 749 the soldiers of Marwan the caliph entered a monastery for virgins close to Akhmim, a city in Egypt. They wanted to assault and rape her because she was very beautiful. But she deceived them, telling them that she had oil that would protect the body from any sword. To convince them she placed this oil on her neck and told them to test her words. One soldier took out his sword and swung at her neck and she was beheaded. This terrified the soldiers and they left the monastery.

3. For the sake of dogma

There were also many martyrs who died for the preservation of the true faith. Heresies began to appear after the era of persecution during the reign of King Constantine. However, divisions and heresies have been around since the Apostolic era as St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:18 *“For first of all, when you come together in church, I hear that there are divisions among and I partly believe it.”* It was during the Arian heresy that we witness an increase in the strength of the heresies as well as those who were martyred. **Among those who died are:**

1. The martyrdom of a priest from Barka, one of the five western cities mentioned in scriptures. He was tortured and beaten to death by the Arian bishop Gregory because he would not consent to the Arian teaching. He was a martyr for the true dogma.

2. During Pentecost there was a slaying in Alexandria arranged by the Arian bishops. Hundreds of martyrs were killed. St. Theodorous the martyr was tied to a horse and dragged through the streets until he died. This took place during the time when Pope Athanasius was exiled.

3. St. Makarous the bishop (one of the three Macari) refused to sign the Arian decree and so was repeatedly kicked by the Arian bishop until he died.

4. Riots in Alexandria were the consequence of the Chalcedon council where Pope Discorus was exiled and 30 thousand martyrs were killed. They shed their blood in defense of the true Christian faith.

5. Once more, the confessor obtained martyrdom after much torture and long hardships. The persecutors devised horrific and evil ways to torture the confessors who often became martyrs. Their evil ways included burning the martyrs while they were still alive; crucifixion; thrown to the wild beasts; beheading with the sword. They were often torture and then enslaved in the mines with heavy chains on their arms and legs. They were exiled, whipped with leather whips; throw them into frozen lakes; dragging through the streets and faced many other kinds of demonic tortures.

These tortures were mental, physical and emotional.

1. They were tortured mentally

They faced Insults, degrading, removal from positions, the removal of their wealth, had their houses robbed, they had no legal protection (legal support was issued only to those who raise incense to the pagan gods.)

2. They were tortured physically

The martyr Juliet, when she refused to offer incense to the pagan gods, confessing that she is the servant of Christ Jesus, the ruler judged that she should be burned. To encourage other women she said, 'Eve did not take just Adam's flesh but also his bone', indicating that woman was given the same strength as man to endure.

Our martyrs faced extreme torture. Prison atmosphere by itself was enough to kill many. The prisoners had their hands chained behind their backs and their feet fastened to the stocks (maktara). St. Paul himself was tortured this way (Acts 16:24). They would stay in the stocks for months and sometimes years.

They would put nails in their shoes and have them walk for long distances, they would remove their fingernails and many other harsh tortures.

3. Emotional

The emotional tortures for the virgins are too difficult to write about. Somehow, above human nature and comprehension and through the work of God's Holy Spirit, the tortures bought joy and the hardships peace "*As unknown and yet well known; as dying and behold we live; as chastened and not killed.*" (2 Corinthians 6:9). We see Stephen the martyr when he was being stoned asking for the

forgiveness of those who are stoning him and Scripture says, *"And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."* (Acts 6:15) This is because Of God's grace

"But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake. And it shall turn to you for a testimony. Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what you shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And you shall be betrayed both by parents and brothers, and kinfolk and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for My name's sake. But there shall not a hair on your head perish. In your patience possess you your souls." (Luke 21:12-19)

The compassion and the prayers of the church for them.

Their feeling of honor that they are partners in pain with the Savior.

Their visions of the heavenly glory given to them as messages from above.

They would see the great martyrs who went before them strengthening them saying, 'we are waiting for you.'

They would have dreams of angels, lights, glory, and beauty so that the prison and the tortures became the doors of heaven opening to a feast with the angels and the saints.

The Judgments of the Martyrs and their blessed answers

We see an amazing picture in front of us. Emperors, rulers and judges in injustice and cruelty were unable to overcome the innocent Christians who, without any weapons were able to withstand and overcome. The rulers, with their raised voices and beastly violence, went after those who opposed their doctrine. Yet the Christians, weak yet strong, peaceful but steadfast, with amazing patience, with wondrous endurance and in complete humility and strong faith stood up to them. They frustrated the kings and rulers after they failed to subdue them.

The courts were filled with fanatic pagans. We hear the unjust rulings without any defense (it was not allowed for any Christians to speak in his own defense, defending the truth.) The judgment is based on one question, 'Are you a Christian?' If the answer is 'yes, I am Christian,' then they have confessed to a crime and the spectators would shout, 'death to the Christian!'

So many of our martyrs had only one answer, which was 'I am Christian – I am a free man and a slave to Christ Jesus'. They hated the glory of this world, considering the shame of Christ of more value than all the treasures of the world. There are examples of mothers who loved Christ more than her children and all they had, we see children following the martyrs crying, 'I am a Christian' the way their mothers taught them from the time they could speak.

Our martyrs are so many; whom only God can count them. They began with the Apostles, and included princes, nobles, rulers, captains, soldiers, bishops, priests, deacons, monks, nuns, children, boys and girls, mothers, youth, farmers, slaves, philosophers, scientists, magicians, and pagans.

Evaluating Martyrdom

1. Desire

Martyrdom is not craziness, foolishness or suicide but a beloved desire. They would present themselves to the rulers proclaiming their Christianity without being arrested or called in for judgment. They were given numerous chances to escape but refused because of their love for Jesus Christ. *"Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they may obtain a better resurrection."* (Hebrews 11:35) Origen wrote, "You can see in every martyr God Himself being judged. There is no doubt that it was not a normal person that was thrown in jail but the Lord Jesus Christ whom they judged against in the form of that person. *"And he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'"* (Acts 9:4)

Saint Befam said while he was being martyred, "This is the day of my true wedding, the day of my joy and gladness to meet my Lord and King. Mother do not cry and don't feel sad but be happy it's my wedding day."

2. Courage

It was not foolishness but virtuous courage that the martyr Kibrianous the Bishop wrote, "Those who were tortured were more courageous than those who tortured them. The broken members of their bodies conquered the weapons used against them. The blood they shed quieted the waves of persecution, quenched the flames of hell and watered the seeds of the Christian faith. Steadfast and will not be shaken, unafraid, occupied in prayer and praises even while the tigers were eager to tear into their flesh. I don't know how but with a godly power that is incomprehensible, the beasts' mouths were shut. Their courage is a unique example and their language of love a new song to the ears of the world."

3. Evangelizing

The teacher Tertullian said, "The bloods of the martyrs are the seeds of the church. Continued in the torture, they increased in number more than those who were killed. *"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."* (John 12:24) The more severe the punishment, the more people were added to the Christian faith. Our Lord Jesus Christ sent out His apostles as sheep among wolves, did the Lord not care that those wolves will kill His sheep? No. What happened was the opposite. In devouring the sheep, the wolves became sheep." So the faith increased with the martyrdom of the saints much more than the preaching of the missionaries.

Martyrdom is practical proof of the validity of the Christian faith and the truth of her virtues.

No religion could have withstood all this enmity and hatred without fighting back using warfare as its weapon. But Christianity's only help was the Holy Power. It was fulfilling the words of the Lord of glory; *"Settle it therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what you shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And you shall be betrayed both by parents, and brothers and kinfolk and friends, and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for My name's sake."* (Luke 21:14-17) Many miracles happened to the suffering Christian: being made whole again after his members were mutilated, poisons losing its affect, wild beasts having their mouths shut, and the nature of fire changing to become like a nice breeze. *"And these signs shall follow them that believe; in My name shall they cast out devils."* (Mark 16:17)

Martyrdom proved the greatness of the Christian virtues

1. Steadfast and endurance
2. Meekness
3. Love towards their enemies and prayer on their behalf as St. Stephen prayed for his persecutors ('Lord do not hold this sin against them')
4. Purity and holiness
5. Abhorring the worldly material and influences
6. The desire for the heavenly

To the saints these virtues were witnessed in their actions, not just by what their words. Our martyrs were the greatest examples of Christian virtues and those around them witnessed it and recorded their words and actions. In so doing our martyrs offered the best witness to Christianity as a religion.