

In the original inspired text of the Acts of the Apostles, Jesus promised the disciples that they would be “my martyrs.” If there was ever an age in Christian history when the followers of Christ would need the strength of martyrdom, it is today.

Our Lord could not have been more clear. He told us, “If you wish to be my disciples, take up your daily cross and follow me.” The source of strength to suffer for Christ comes finally from the Holy Spirit. In the language of the New Testament, this power is the same kind of power by which miracles are performed.

Christ’s promise of the Holy Spirit was the assurance that we would witness to Him before the world in which we live. The essence of being a martyr is to be a witness. And we know what a witness does. He gives testimony publicly that something he saw or heard is true. He has experience of a fact or an event, and as a witness he declares that what he says or signs his name to, is so. He gives evidence to others that what he testifies to should be believed. Why? Because he personally knows.

We are liable to miss the preceding adjective “my” in the clause, “You shall be my, martyrs.” This prefix is crucial. Those who are martyrs are witnesses to Christ. They testify, if need be with their blood, that what they believe is true because they have known Christ. The implication is that in order to be a witness, even to martyrdom, one must have experienced Christ, in a way comparable to what Peter told the early Christians: “You did not see Him, yet you love Him. And still without seeing Him, you are already filled with joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe” (1 Pet. 1:8).

So it was in the apostolic age, and so it is in ours. In order to witness to Christ we must believe in Him so strongly that we are filled with His joy. This joy which comes from the Holy Spirit is not devoid of pain.

But the joy is genuine and unmistakable. It is also profoundly communicable. In fact, one of the paradoxes of martyrdom is the positive happiness that a strongly committed follower of Christ has in suffering for Christ.

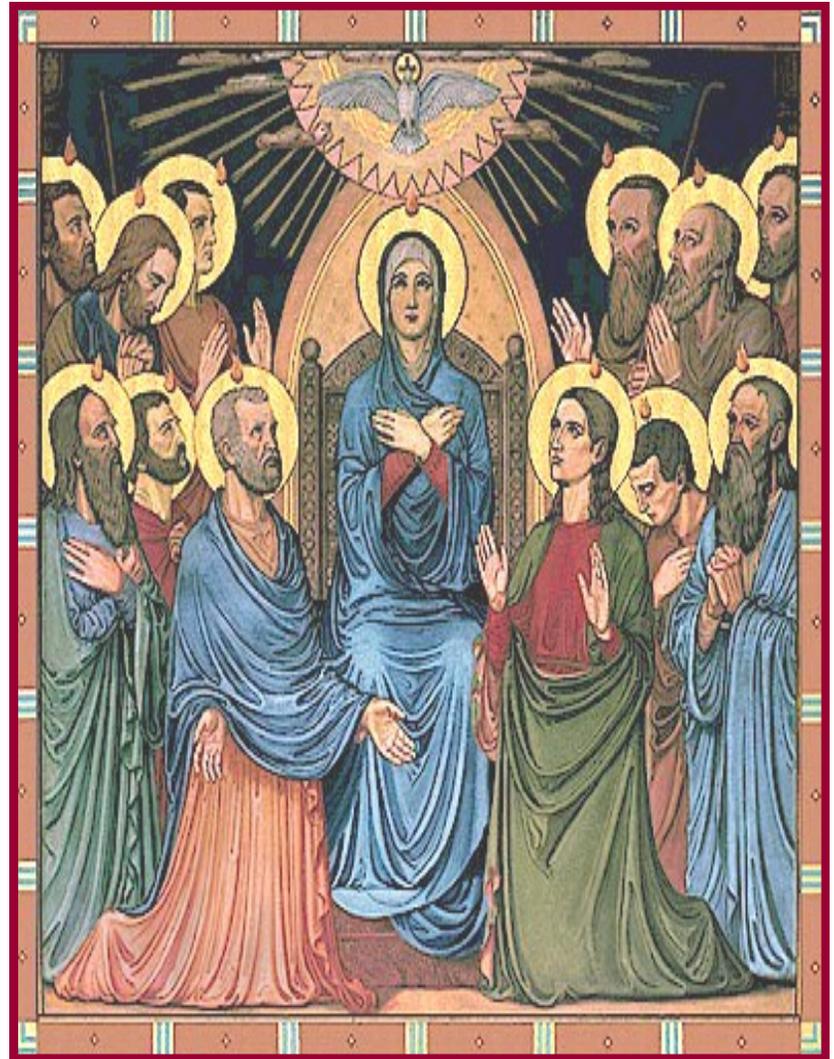
Most Catholics know that at Baptism, we receive the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. What many do not know is that these fruits are the twelve joys which the Holy Spirit gives us, already here on earth, a foretaste of the joys of heaven. Every time we cooperate with the will of God, He rewards us with a happiness of spirit in the measure that we are faithful to His grace. What an apparent contradiction! The more painful our cooperation with the Divine Will, the more joy we receive from the Holy Spirit.

*(excerpted from: www.therealpresence.org)



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Pentecost



*"Come Holy Ghost, Creator Blest
and in thy hearts take up thy rest;
Come with thy grace and heav'nly aid
to fill the hearts which thou hast made,
to fill the hearts which thou hast made."*

The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in the World

by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

Martyrdom of Opposition

Not all the faithful who suffer for Christ also die for Christ. Opposition to the Christian faith and way of life does not always end in violent death for the persecuted victims.

Consequently, it is well to distinguish between what may be called martyrdom of blood and martyrdom of opposition, which is bloodless indeed, but no less and sometimes more painful to endure.

Not all the victims of persecution die at the hands of a godless government. Millions more are ostensibly free to walk the streets and live in a home. Yet they are, in effect, deprived of every human liberty to practice their religion and to serve Christ according to their faith. If they teach their children catechism, the parents are prevented from enjoying such privileges as decent living quarters or any kind of skilled job. If they are seen attending church, they are first warned, then threatened, and finally penalized even to the loss of their possessions.

So the sorry tale goes on, and has been going on for years, in spite of the conspiracy of silence in our American press.

But that is not the whole picture. We need to shake ourselves into awareness that our country is going through persecution. It is no less real for being subtle, and no less painful for being perpetrated in the name of democracy.

What do I mean? I mean that any priest or religious, any married or single person in America who wishes to sincerely and fully live up to his Catholic commitment, finds countless obstacles in his way and experiences innumerable difficulties that accumulatively demand heroic fortitude to overcome and withstand.

All we have to do is place the eight beatitudes in one column and the eight corresponding attitudes of our culture in another column, and compare the two. Where Christ advocates poverty, the world despises the poor and canonizes the rich. Where Christ praises gentleness, the world belittles meekness and extols those who succeed by crushing anyone who stands in their way. Where Christ encourages mourning and sorrow for sin, the world revels in pleasure and noise of empty laughter. Where Christ promised joy only to those who seek justice and holiness, the world offers satisfaction in the enjoyment of sin. Where Christ bids us forgive and show mercy to those who have offended us, the world seeks vengeance and its law courts are filled with demands for

retribution. Where Christ blesses those who are pure of heart, the world scoffs at chastity and makes a god of sex. Where Christ tells the peaceful that they shall be rewarded, the world teaches just the opposite in constant rebellion and violence and massive preparation for war. And where Christ teaches the incredible doctrine of accepting persecution with patience and resignation to God's will, the world dreads nothing more than criticism and rejection; and human respect which means acceptance by society, is the moral norm. On the bloody side, our century has had more Christians who were martyred for Christ than in all the centuries from Calvary to nineteen hundred included. I should know because not a few of my own relatives behind the iron curtain have shed their blood for Christ rather than deny their Catholic faith.

To this day, innumerable Catholics are dying for their faith at the hands of Muslims who are told by the Koran to either convert Christians from their idolatry of adoring the man Jesus as though He were God, or put them to death.

But my focus here is on our country. Call it an unbloody martyrdom, But have no doubt that to live an authentic Catholic life in America today is to live a martyr's life. That is why the sacrament of confirmation cannot be more clearly identified than to call it the sacrament of martyrdom. Only the Holy Spirit whom we received on our Pentecost Sunday can sustain us in our witness to Jesus Christ.

After fifty years in the priesthood, I can testify to every syllable of the following sentence: Only heroic bishops and heroic priests, heroic religious, heroic fathers and mothers, heroic faithful, will survive the massive persecution of the Catholic Church in our country today. We call ourselves the Land of Liberty. But the only liberty that is given freedom is the liberty to do your own will. Pro-choice is not just a clever phrase. It is the hallmark of a culture in which millions have chosen to do what they want and make life humanly impossible for those who choose to do what God wants.

Christ's Promise of the Holy Spirit

On the way to His Ascension, Christ promised to send the Holy Spirit on His followers. He told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to "wait there for what the Father had promised." He reminded them: "It is what you have heard me speak about. John baptized with water, but you, not many days from now, will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Then still more clearly, He predicted what the Holy Spirit would do in their lives. "You will receive power," Christ assured them, "when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and then you will be my witnesses, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout Judea and Samaria and indeed to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:4-5, 8).