

Blood of the Martyrs by Fr Bijo Panachamuttill



“I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.” (St Luke 12:4)

Church History says that almost all apostles of Christ were martyrs for their Master. James, the Lord’s brother was stoned to death (probably in A.D.62). The book of Acts closes with Paul in Prison at Rome (Acts 28:20). The second letter of Timothy was written while he was in prison and awaiting martyrdom during the persecution period of Emperor Nero. Tradition is strong to the effect that Peter as well as Paul fall victims to Nero’s cruelty and both suffered martyrdom at Rome. The death of John, which according to tradition occurred about A.D.100, marked the close of the apostolic age.

The First Martyr for Christ (Acts 7)

A martyr is one who is put to death for the sake of the gospel and Christ. Stephen, one among the seventy (Acts 6:1 – 8) was the first great apologist for Christianity and became the first martyr for Christ. He had the very spirit of love and forgiveness of Jesus and prayed for his enemies. Even in the storm of stones, he committed himself to Jesus. His martyrdom brought great results. For him, heaven was opened and he saw “Jesus standing on the right hand of God,” and Stephen knelt before Him in worship and called on Him in prayer. Why was the Lord “standing”, and not sitting? It was to denote God’s readiness to receive him unto Himself, and his indignation at his enemies. His martyrdom caused the scattering of early Christians and their witnessing resulted in the spreading of the Gospel. A man named Saul witnessed Stephen’s martyrdom and the same was the seed for his conversion. Later he became an excellent witness, the best soul winner and great writer of the Epistles. Finally he proclaimed, “For I am now ready to be offered, an offering acceptable unto God,” in whose sight the death of His saints is very precious.

The First Apostle, Martyred (Acts 12:1-2)

The Apostle James, brother of the Apostle John was the first among the apostles to be martyred. Christ told him that He was to drink of the cup that He was to drink of, and be baptized with the baptism that he was to be baptized with (Matt 20:23). The words of Christ were made good in him. “Herod the king put forth his hands to afflict certain of the church...he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:1-2). He finished his course and God was glorified by his martyrdom! Thus James fulfilled the prophecy of our Lord (Mk. 10:39). Antipas of the church of Pergamos, whom Christ himself described as “my witness, my faithful one” was also martyred (Rev 2:13). According to a legend he was burnt to death in a brazen bull. Thousands of Christians were slain during the persecution of Emperor Nero and again under Domitian. A long line of martyrs has followed. And unnumbered thousands more are to be added. Our Lord told us, though tyrants rage and are cruel, yet we must not fear God, who can condemn the soul to banishment. Church history is a continuation of the Acts of the Apostles. Church fathers Polycarp, Ignatius and Papias who were the connecting link with the apostolic age were added to the list of martyrs of Christ.

They were “Burnt Alive”

It happened in India! The Dawn of January 23, 1999 shocked the nation by the brutal news “Burnt Alive.” Graham Staines and his two children were burnt alive for being Christ’s and for serving the destitute and lepers of our nation. The incident and its scene were heart rendering! It happened at midnight while they were taking rest inside their parked vehicle. After toiling for the master, the father and the two kids were sleeping. The vehicle was set on fire with the Australian missionary Graham Staines and his loving kids Philip and Timothy inside it. As the vehicle was burning, the loving father took both his sons close to him, kissed them and flew to the Father God in heaven. They three became the heroic witnesses and martyrs for Christ in India. They poured out their lives as living sacrifices and fragrances for their Master. Yet they are still speaking. On that midnight, while the three human torches were burning alive, heaven would have opened for them and received the souls of Graham Staines and his two kids. They too would have had the same experience

and vision of Stephen, the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

Her Prayer for the Assassins!

Even at the critical time of unbearable grief and sorrow, the statements issuing from the mouth of Gladys Staines stunned her listeners all over the world: “I am completely broken. Only since my God permitted, it happened. I have no grievances against anybody! Jesus taught me to forgive my enemies. I sincerely pray that assassins of my dearest husband and sons should experience the love of Lord”. Her words were equal to the last words of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross: “Father! Forgive them....” (St Lk 23:34), and also Stephen: “Lord doesn’t hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60).

Jesus warned us that “if the world hates you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you...”

“If ye were of the world, the world would love his own but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hated you (Jn 15:18,19).

The souls of them that were slain are pleading justice (Rev 6:9-11). John, at Patmos, had the vision of souls under the altar, of them that were slain for the word of God and for testimony which they held. These are clearly the souls of Christians who had suffered martyrdom. They had died “for the word of God”. They were under the altar! Why are the souls of the martyrs under the altar? Since the temple is the typical of the church, the altar – the center of worship; points to the church and worship. The brazen altar stood at the door of the tabernacle and the blood of the slain animal was poured at its bottom. (Lev 4:7). The martyrs are thus viewed here as sacrifice; their own blood was poured out for Christ. Now there is a “time for them; martyrs are not to continue here always. The lamb was slain (Rev 5:6, 9, 12). These martyrs followed the example of their Lord. They commit their case to Him to whom vengeance belongs. In response to their vengeance, they were asked to wait until the full number of the righteous dead is completed. History has recorded events that fulfill this prophecy. The Lord assured, behold “I AM with you.” Yes our Lord is in power and in control of all. He takes care of His own. Beloved believers, be cheerful, be prepared to be His

witnesses and suffer for Christ! Yes He is at hand and the reward in heaven is waiting for you. “Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matt. 5:12).