

February 5th: St. Agatha, virgin and martyr

Gospel text (Lk 9,23-26): Jesus also said to all the people, «If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me. For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it, and if you lose your life for my sake, you will save it. What does it profit you to gain the whole world while you destroy or damage yourself? If someone feels ashamed of me and of my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Glory and in the Glory of his Father with his holy angels».

«If you choose to save your life, you will lose it»

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Today, we celebrate the memory of St. Agatha, a virgin probably martyred during the Decian persecution. Our natural instincts impel us to seek our protection, to run away from the risk of pain and death. Except in odd cases, we strongly stick to our life. And by trying to save it the wrong way, more often than not we end up by losing it.

To truly save this life, we must -apparently- lose it. Many have died trying to save someone else. Many missionaries and volunteers have lost their life in an attempt to defend the values of justice and announce Jesus' message. But they have not lost their life; they have actually saved it!

This is the Christian's law. This is the consequence of being a disciple of Jesus. If we want to become his disciples, Jesus said it very clearly: «Deny yourself and take up your cross each day, and follow me» (Lk 9:23). It is not possible to be at the same time a good "Christian" and carry an easy and selfish life. The good father, the good mother, know that their responsibility is to "give their life" for the sake of their son: sleepless nights, sacrifices, efforts, work, patience... This is what to be a Christian means. We must be always willing to offer our life for Christ.

This is how St. Agatha, the saint born in Sicily in the 3rd Century, perceived it. It was not possible to marshal her total love for Jesus with the Roman prefect's amorous advances that were trying to force her to break his promise of virginity. Agatha, a young Christian girl, received the most terrible and cruel death threats. But she had already drunk from the Gospel fountain: «For if you choose to save your life, you will lose it» (Lk 9:24). And she begged the Lord for His strength in order not to fail Him.

It is not easy to resist the temptations of our society that call for a life of comfort, effortless and without any engagements. They promise us a "salvation" that will never reach us. They beguile us. As St. Agatha did, we are also to pray with the Psalm: «Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings from the violence of the wicked» (Ps 17:8-9).