September 16th: Memorial of Saints Cornelius, Pope, and Cyprian, Bishop, Martyrs

Gospel text (*Jn* 17,11b-19): Jesus looked up to heaven and prayed, «I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world whereas I am going to you. Holy Father, keep them in your Name that you have given me, so that they may be one, just as we are. When I was with them, I kept them safe in your Name, and not one was lost except the one who was already lost, and in this the Scripture was fulfilled.

»But now I am coming to you and I leave these my words in the world that my joy may be complete in them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world; just as I am not of the world. I do not ask you to remove them from the world but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world; consecrate them in the truth —your word is truth. I have sent them into the world as you sent me into the world, and for their sake, I go to the sacrifice by which I am consecrated, so that they too may be consecrated in truth».

«That they may be one, as we are one»

Fr. Josep Mª MANRESA Lamarca
(Valldoreix, Barcelona, Spain)

Today we celebrate the memory of two very important martyrs of the Church, of the third century. Although they suffered martyrdom in different years and places, they are celebrated in the same feast day because they both worked for the unity of the Church, a question which Jesus Christ had advocated for: «Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one» (Jn 17:11)

Cornelius was elected Pope in the year 251, during the strong persecutions of the Christians. He shined due to his humility, prudence and virtuousness. His pontificate was marked, above all, by the resolution of the problem of the "lapsi" (those who had apostatized in the face of martyrdom): before the harshness of the schism brought on by Novatian, the Church recommended the clemency that accepts the sinner. However, his pontificate was short-lived: in the second year, Cornelius was imprisoned by the emperor Gallus and exiled to Civitavecchia, where he died the following year. His body was taken to Rome and buried in the catacombs of St. Callixtus.

Cyprian was born in Carthage around the year 200, to a pagan family. Moved by the example and words of truth of a saintly priest named Caecilius, he became a Christian, was baptized and employed all his possessions to help the poor. Shortly afterwards, he was ordained priest, and in the year 248, was chosen Bishop of his town. Through very difficult times he managed to rule with wisdom his African Church and worked very hard for the unity of the Church. The "acts of his martyrdom" preserve, admirably documented, the judicial process, with his peaceful and brave confession as well as his martyrdom, forgiving and giving the executioner who beheaded him some 25 gold coins...

Let us ask God our Lord, who placed St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian at the forefront of the Church, as dedicated shepherds and courageous martyrs, that through their intercession, He may grant us to strengthen our faith and constancy, and to work without weakening for the unity of the Church.