

From Sinner to Saint

Today we celebrate the memory of St. Boniface of Rome. St. Boniface was a slave of a woman named Aglais. The relationship between the two was smitten with passion, as they were bound to carnal, sinful activity. Boniface enjoyed the favor of Aglais, living “riotously” and was especially drawn to revelry and imbibing, much like the spirit of the departed Prodigal Son (Luke 15:13).

Aglais, a Pagan like Boniface, knew about the prevailing persecutions of the Christians in neighboring Tarsus, and also heard about the mystical power of their relics. With a conscience that was not entirely deadened by her sins, she expressed an interest to Boniface of acquiring a relic, believing it would bring blessings upon her household. Boniface was thereafter charged with traveling to Tarsus to retrieve a relic for Aglais. Boniface responded in a humoring and somewhat sarcastic manner, “And what if they bring back my body as holy relics?”

When reaching Tarsus, Boniface witnessed the profound sight of Christians being tortured, dismembered and executed for their faith. Rather than being repulsed and horrified by the savagery and carnage, he beheld something quite extraordinary and unexpected: the radiant countenance of the Christians, who shone forth with a sweet, illuminating aura of “joyous suffering”. This sight penetrated and warmed his heart, and, pierced his soul. As darkness flees from light, so was his heart purged of the filth of his passions and he was drawn to the Grace-filled aura of the Christians. So strong was his attraction, and seeing that the Christians were confidently and courageously awaiting the passing into the glorious life-eternal, he renounced his prior life and, knowing full well what the next step would be, professed himself as a Christian! This attracted the inflamed wrath of the authorities and he too was subjected to horrible tortures, none of which harmed him. Thereafter he was beheaded and entered the eternal realm of the saints and celestial powers. His body was transported back to Aglais, who, seeing God’s hand in this, repented of her sins, and lived the remainder of her years in righteousness and repentance.

What is this powerful and magnificent force that so changed Boniface, emanating from the martyrs as they joyously approached their departure from the constraints and pollution of this life? As we read the many lives of God’s saints, we are presented with a multitude of similar examples in which true martyrs for Christ endured with great love and meekness the cruel inflictions and physical tortures, and their countenance and grace-filled humble disposition radiated Grace, converting the hearts of many executioners, torturers and witnesses to renounce their God-estranged ways and profess their new faith in Christ, (knowing well that the gates leading to their own tortures and martyrdom are opened).

This countenance, this aura, this Grace-filled force that attracts and cleanses, is a manifestation of the life-giving presence of the Holy Spirit. As the holy martyrs are preparing for the ultimate act of sacrificial love for Christ, they are infused and gifted with the abundant Grace of the Holy Spirit. Beneath the many layers of passions covering the heart of Boniface laid a hidden yearning for Truth and Purity. That yearning was aroused and satisfied when coming into the presence of human vessels of the Holy Spirit, who radiated the immense grace and power of God’s infinite love.

We too are called to become vessels of the Holy Spirit. According to St. Seraphim, this is our principle aim in life. Although we may not be called to be martyrs like the ones in Tarsus, we are nevertheless called to lead a martyric life, through the commandment of self-denial and carrying of one’s cross (Luke 9:23). As we truly deny ourselves, take up the cross that God assigns, and follow the commandments of

Christ, we, in proportion to the measure of our selfless efforts, through God's infinite love, are gifted with the Holy Spirit.

As we desire to move the hearts and souls of those around us who are darkened by passions and the cares of this world, let us endeavor to acquire the Holy Spirit through the example of a martyric life-in-Christ, laboring to acquire virtues and, by our faith, sacrificial love and good works, become lamps that radiate the light of Christ in this darkened and God-estranged world. Let your light so shine before men! (Matthew 5:16)

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

