

Rector's Letter

October, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Martyrdom is one of the most important ideas in Christianity, but perhaps hard for us to fully understand today.

“Martyr” literally means witness. To die for one’s faith in God is the most powerful witness possible. Above all, our Lord Jesus Christ is “the Faithful Witness [martyr]” (Revelation 1:5). Christ’s whole life, up through his life-giving death on the Cross, embodies his witness to the power of God’s love. The apostles’ preaching is nothing other than putting Christ’s witness into words. The apostles also put that witness into action, dying for the sake of Christ’s Gospel. We call St. Stephen the First Martyr (or “Protomartyr”) because he is the first of the apostles to be killed while preaching the Gospel (Acts 7).

After the apostles, the world was turned upside-down by the martyrs that followed, because they gladly suffered death rather than go along with the demands of the ungodly world around them. And their persecutors were frustrated again and again that the more they put Christians to death, the more compelling the witness of the Christian faith became.

We, however, should not be surprised by the power of this witness. As we heard just a couple of weeks ago from the Gospel, our Lord tells us:

“whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35). The martyrs follow this teaching at its most fundamental, literal level. Why fear death if we follow the One who overcame death and turned it into the doorway to everlasting life? Or, to put it the other way, why follow the Crucified Savior if we insist on fearing death?

Often we are content to be grateful for the martyrs at a distance, giving thanks that they died in some far-away land in a barely remembered era, while we worship in peace and safety today. But if our circumstances are different from the martyrs, our faith is not. In a real sense, every saint is a martyr — a witness — and every Christian is called to be: “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). All of us can do this much, to dedicate our hearts entirely to the Lord God, and to be a good witness to the hope that is in us.

We are not usually threatened with physical abuse for our faith, but our witness still costs us something. At the very least, our way of life will be perceived as a direct challenge by many around us. We will stand out, and perhaps suffer embarrassment or estrangement. Why? Because, as Saint Peter goes on to say, if we share the mind of Christ who suffered for our sake, then we will live not for human passions but to the will of God: “For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we

walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you” (1 Peter 4:3-4).

We can recognize in St. Peter’s description some of the destructive temptations of our own age. The powers of this world have erected altars to frenzied consumption, celebrity idolization, sexuality in the service of sales, and incessant grievances. These powers can still persecute those whose lives are a witness to the true God. But we need to have the courage to be witnesses: God has already won the victory, but our neighbors need to witness that reality reflected in our lives.

With love in Christ,



Around the Parish

Everyone soon should be receiving a **Stewardship Packet for 2021** in the mail. Please read it through carefully and consider how to faithfully respond. We rely on your support to carry out the work God has entrusted to us.

We are happy that as many as 50 people are able to enter the church for services. For those who have been holding back, **consider making a return to the church this October**, as Connecti-

cut continues to manage COVID extremely well. You can sign up at our website: <https://sspeter-paul.org/signup>

A reminder about seating at church: we have marked the pews with crosses to show where people are permitted to stand. Individuals or couples may stand at a spot marked with a cross. Families are welcome to use an entire pew.

Online Christian education series: “Exploring Our Faith.” Join us any time as we explore important aspects of the Orthodox Christian Faith, inviting your own questions each session. We have sessions planned for **Tuesdays, Oct. 6 and 20, at 7:00.** We continue to use GoToMeeting, with the “Praying Together” details shared above.

Children’s education this month: Sunday, Oct. 11, 11 AM in person outside church; Sunday, Oct. 25, 4:30 PM online—later time this month only!

On Sunday, Nov. 1, we will celebrate the annual **Endowment Fund Thanksgiving and Memorial Service** at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

We welcome your donations and pledges, which can be mailed to SS. Peter & Paul Orthodox Church, PO Box 334, Meriden CT 06450. We are grateful for your continued support of the work of our parish, which has continued even during the lockdown, and even has expanded into new areas, like our online ministries. Thank you!