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August 10: Saint Lawrence, Deacon and Martyr

Gospel for August 10th, feast of Saint Lawrence, and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 12:24-26)

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there shall my servant be also; if any

one serves me, the Father will honor him.

Commentary

Pope Sixtus II was beheaded in 258 during the persecution by the emperor Valerian. One of his deacons, Lawrence, was temporarily saved because he was in charge of the Church's material possessions. He was given four days to hand them over, but Lawrence distributed these goods to the poor instead. Once the deadline had passed, he appeared before the magistrate accompanied by poor and sick people. "These are the riches of the Church," he is supposed to have said. The poor and the sick are a treasure, with a mysterious presence of God in their sufferings. They are associated with the Cross of Jesus in a special way.

Lawrence was condemned to the torment of fire on a grill. A Christian does not seek martyrdom. There is no need to rush events; but someone consistent with their faith is willing to give their life for Christ. The grain of wheat must die to bear fruit (cf. *Jn* 12:24). When Saint Augustine recalls the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence, he compares the Church with a garden of the Lord containing all kinds of flowers: “it includes not only the roses of martyrs but also the lilies of virgins, and the ivy of married people, and the violets of widows” (*Sermo 304, 1-4*). We are each called to give our lives as God asks, showing Him our love. Often this is done in a discreet and hidden way, in the daily offering of work that is well done, in caring for one’s family, in fidelity to one’s friends, in concern for the poor and sick. There is no need to seek after the martyrdom of blood when we can transform the world from within with a life anchored in God

and dedicated to the service of others.

Saint Lawrence's martyrdom was marked by his sense of humor with those torturing him. "God loves a cheerful giver" (cf. *2 Cor* 9:7). A sense of humor shows humility and the ability to rise above the world that is passing, but that we want to love and lead back to God. By striving to sanctify our daily work, we help to redeem all creation. As the solemnity of August 15th approaches, let us ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of hope, to help us carry out our daily work with good humor, with a firm and trusting heart (cf. *Ps* 112:7-8).

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