

THE SEED OF THE CHURCH

An early Christian wrote: *'The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church'*. He meant that the bravery of Christians willing to face death for their faith made the Church stronger, not weaker. People who saw the brave martyrs die were impressed. Many would wish to know more about the faith that produced these martyrs.

Here are some stories about the bravery of those early Christians.

Perpetua's story

Perpetua was a young married woman with a little child. In AD 203 she was arrested for being a Christian. She wrote about her experiences ...

'My father arrived from the city. He said, "Daughter, pity my white hairs! Pity your father ... I have brought you up to this your prime of life; I have loved you more than your brothers ... Think of your mother and her sister. Think of your baby son, who cannot survive if you are gone ..."

'As my father spoke of his love for me, he kissed my hands and threw himself down at my feet ... The next day we were taken to the forum. The news soon spread and a vast crowd gathered ...

When it came my turn (to be questioned), my father appeared with my baby and pleaded, "Have pity on your child." The judge Hilarion joined my father and said, "Spare the tender years of your child. Offer a sacrifice for the prosperity of the Emperors."

I replied, "No."

"Are you a Christian?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

Then the judge passed sentence on us all and condemned us to the wild beasts. In great joy we returned to our prison.'

MARTYR - a witness for faith, usually by dying for that faith

Martyrs of Alexandria

In the Egyptian city of Alexandria there was a terrible outbreak of plague in AD 261. It seemed that every house was affected. The dead and the dying were thrown onto the streets. The stench of plague was all around. Then a wonderful thing happened. The Christians of the city, who had been forced to hide from persecution, came out into the open and began to care for the dying and bury the dead. They did this at very great risk to themselves. After nursing the sick and washing the dead for burial, some Christians caught the disease themselves. These Christians had laid down their lives for their neighbours.

To do

- 1 Imagine the scene where Perpetua is sentenced to death. Draw four thought bubbles and write in some thoughts.

What was the judge thinking?

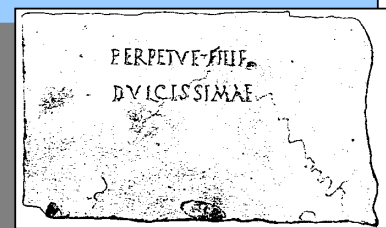
What was Perpetua's father thinking?

What was Perpetua thinking?

What were people in the crowd thinking?

- 2 Below is Perpetua's tomb stone with the inscription: *'Of Perpetua, Daughter Most Sweet'*.

Some would say she should have chosen to live and look after her baby. What's your opinion about this?

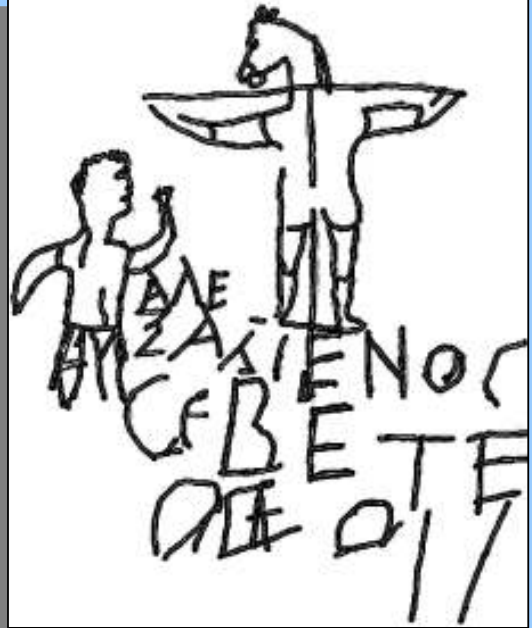


Extension

- 4 The Church spread because believers were willing to suffer for their Christian faith.

Beside is a picture of ancient graffiti from a Rome. It says: 'Alexamenos adores his god.' Someone wanted to belittle Alexamenos and his faith by making Jesus into a figure with a donkey's head.

- a) Do you think Christians in modern Britain have to suffer for their faith?
- b) For what would *you* be prepared to suffer? Explain your answer.



- 5 Persecution of Christians has continued through the centuries.

- a) Read the story of Charles Lwanga and the Uganda martyrs.

Do you think Charles and his companions were asking for trouble by not living in total fear of the King?

- b) Charles told his executioner,

"How happy I should be if you, too, would become a Christian."

The executioner laughed at this, but he did later ask to join the Church.

What do you think made him change his mind?

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"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Explain what you think this means.

Charles Lwanga & Companions

22 Martyrs of Uganda
Died 1885-1887
Canonised in 1964



The King of Buganda had invited Catholic Missionaries ('the praying ones') to return to his kingdom. When they did return, they found the work they'd done earlier had come to blossom. They found a Christian community that prayed together and supported each other just as in the early Church. Charles Lwanga and others had become Christians and were faithful to the Gospel in spite of hardship. A plague had struck the Kingdom and they had gone out to help the sick without worrying about themselves.

Unfortunately, the young King became much harsher. He wanted all in his kingdom to fear him. The peaceful Christians didn't seem to live in any fear. He changed his mind about Christians and began to threaten them. He was determined to kill 'those who pray' as he called the Christians. He rounded them up and put them to cruel deaths one by one. Charles was burned to death, praying for the man who was killing him. 21 Catholic Ugandans died in a similar way.