

# *The Price of Witnessing the Truth*

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Recently my office, Black Catholic and Ethnic Ministries, sponsored a “Lunch and Learn” event inviting the Pastoral Center staff to hear a guest speaker. May being an Asian Pacific Island Heritage Month, the guest speaker presented on the 17 Martyrs of Laos. To hear the heroic witnessing of the Gospel by European missionaries and indigenous catechists and a priest was fascinating, especially knowing how recent the martyrdom took place. The 17 Martyrs of Laos died in several years span of time, but they all were beatified together June 15, 2015 by Pope Francis.

The Church has been always adorned by cloud of witnesses, especially who suffer and die preaching the Gospel. Martyrdom is not limited to the first few centuries of the Church’s formative years, still is taking place and will continue drenching the seed of the Gospel to sprout and grow. Tertullian one of the early Fathers of the Church said, “Blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”

The scripture readings of this Sunday remind us of the heroic act of the first believers, who witnessed, suffered and died for the sake of Christ. Stephen the Deacon was the first martyr to be stoned to death and Paul was on the side of the killers. In the face of death, he could see the glory of God, surpassing the imminent danger, like Jesus, Stephen offers mercy and forgiveness to his killers saying, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” Though the conversion of Paul was spectacular, I wonder what effect the martyrdom of Stephen had had on him, especially his last words of forgiveness.

In the second reading the write of the Revelation of John affirms the rewards of those who withstand suffering and death saying, “Blessed are they who wash their robes so as to have the right to the tree of life and enter the city through its gates.” Believing that God is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,” can give us the courage to witness our faith, affirming the truth, “We must obey God rather than men.” Our Christian faith compels us to be counterculture, to be servants of the truth not followers of popular trends or socio-political agendas. To be counterculture is to be liable to ridicule, ostracization and sufferings, the price of telling the truth. Yet, these make us to be in the company of martyrs.

In the Gospel reading, Jesus’ prayer first was for the gift of faith, to believe that He is sent by the Father; second, for perseverance witnessing our faith, and third for unity in spirit, mind and heart. The moment of truth is that we are far from the spirit of unity Christ prayed for us. To the contrary, we are lacking courage to call evil with its name. We have become complacent to the death culture, from abortion, to death penalty and euthanasia. It is no wonder that our streets look like war zones and the racially motivated violence and killing on the upswing. We lack courage to speak truth to the root causes of such evil deeds; preferring convenience over consequences for speaking the truth.