

“Tü, en cambio, como hombre de Dios,...lleva una vida de rectitude, piedad, fe, amor, paciencia, y mansedumbre. Lucha en el noble combate de la fe, conquista la vida eterna, a la que has sido llamado y de a que hiciste tan admirable profesión ante numerosos testigos.”

“But you, man of God,...pursue righteousness, devotion, faith, love, patience, and gentleness. Compete well for the faith. Lay hold of eternal life, to which you were called when you made the noble confession of faith in the presence of many witnesses.”

Today we commemorate Blessed Juan María de la Cruz, SCJ, one of the 233 who were martyred during the years of civil strife in Spain and beatified by Pope St. John Paul II in September 2010. The general superior of the Priests of the Sacred Heart remarked on this occasion: “This moment can revitalize, in the whole Dehonian Family, the awareness of the universal call to holiness and the importance of placing in the center of our life that strong and solid spirituality which characterizes the Dehonian vocation.”

¿Qué significa ser mártir? ¿Cuál es el costo? What does it mean to become a martyr? The martyr is called, in the words of Bishop Richard Sklba, “to offer a counter-cultural critique, a cultural “revolution” of values from within, not by violence from without.” This witness will perplex many and make them uncomfortable. The first letter to Timothy reminds us to truly live faith, love, patience, and compassion demands that we be poor of spirit and acknowledge that everything we have and are is a gift of God.

Fr. Juan García Méndez who took the religious name, Juan María de la Cruz because of his devotion to the Blessed Virgin and St. John of the Cross, a native of his own city of Ávila. He was a Priest of the Sacred Heart and a martyr long before he was executed for the crime of being a priest. From 1931-36, the Catholic Church in Spain suffered one of the most difficult persecutions in its history. With the support of the Communist government in Catalonia, churches, seminaries, rectories, monasteries, and convents were sacked and

destroyed. 13 bishops, 4, 184 priests, 2,365 religious brothers, 282 nuns and thousands of lay Catholics were murdered.

Fr. Juan was a person who trusted not so much in his own strength but rather in the strength of the Lord, a strength he discovered as a child growing up in a simple family deeply rooted in their faith. His deep and trusting love of the Sacred Heart led him to the Congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart. His devotion to the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration nourished his life of faith. On July 23, 1936, Fr. Juan witnessed men desecrating the Iglesia de los Juanes in the center of the city of Valencia. He shouted in protest. When the men heard his shouting, they said to each other, "he is a reactionary." He responded, "No. I am a priest." He was taken to the Modelo Jail in Valencia and subsequently, on August 23, 1936, together with nine other prisoners, was taken south of Valencia to be executed.

Fr. Juan's life and those many who were martyred with him challenge each of us as did the witness of Jesus and the women disciples in today's gospel to rethink our baptismal call in radically different terms. Martyrs are ordinary men and women like us who are so convinced and deeply moved by the message of the gospel that they are willing to put their lives on the line. They are the ones who challenge us to reexamine our values in light of the gospel. They are the ones willing to risk their reputations and public opinion to speak and live the truth. Los encontramos en todas partes; aquellos que nos desafían a reexaminar nuestros valores en relación al evangelio, aquellos que no tienen miedo arriesgar su reputación hablando y viviendo la verdad. Their lives challenge us to examine the fears within us that hold us captive and prevent us from witnessing to the truth of the gospel wherever we find ourselves. We may rationalize our fears, convincing ourselves that it might not be prudent, it might make things worse, never realizing the great price we pay for our fear. No nos damos cuenta que el miedo nos esclaviza y no nos permite vivir y proclamar la verdad. We know we cannot do this alone but only through the grace of the one God. We are reminded in the first reading this morning, that

material wealth, political power, social status, can only blind us to this vital truth.

Hoy la Palabra de Dios se une con el ejemplo del Beato Juan María de la Cruz y nos recuerda que todos somos llamados a ser testigos de la verdad con nuestras vidas , sea con la sangre o con el testimonio de nuestro vivir cotidiano, lo que proclamamos en cada celebración eucarística: “Anunciamos tu muerte, proclamamos tu resurrección. ¡Ven Señor Jesús!” Today the Word of God together with the life of Blessed Juan María de la Cruz remind us we are called to be martyrs, who, although we may never shed our blood, will daily be challenged to witness to the truth by our faith, devotion, love, patience, and compassion what we proclaim at every Mass: “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection, until you come again.”