

Memorial of St. Justin, Martyr

Homily of Bishop Barres

St. Agnes Cathedral

June 1, 2021

June is the month of the **Most Sacred Heart of Jesus** and we look forward to celebrating that Solemnity on Friday, June 11th.

In a moment of history when the nature of love is so often misunderstood and distorted, strong devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus strengthens us and grounds us in the Catholic Church's moral teaching.

June is also a month when we celebrate the witness of great Catholic martyrs. We celebrate the martyr philosopher and apologist St. Justin today June 1st, St. Charles Lwanga and Companions from Uganda on June 3rd, St. Boniface, the "Apostle of Germany" on June 5th, the great English martyrs, St. John Fisher and St. Thomas More, the patron of statesmen, politicians and lawyers on June 22nd, the Nativity of St. John the Baptist on June 24th, St. Irenaeus from Smyrna on June 28th and finally the Solemnity of the great martyrs Sts. Peter and Paul on June 29th.

Martyrs of every age struggle to heed Christ's words in Mark 12 and to render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to render to God what belongs to God.

Their lives and deaths often reflect the words of St. Thomas More in *A Man for All Seasons*: "I remain the King's good servant but God's first."

In his encyclical on the moral life *The Splendor of Truth*, Pope Saint John Paul II describes the relationship between the martyrs and their courageous witness in history to moral truth.

He writes: "By their eloquent and attractive example of a life completely transfigured by the splendor of moral truth, the martyrs, and, in general, all the Church's Saints, light up every period of history by reawakening its moral sense."
(93)

We are called to follow in the footsteps of these martyrs in both our commitment to holiness and our commitment to reawakening society and the common good to objective and liberating truth.

As we know through our experience of history, the dictatorship of moral relativism enslaves. Objective moral truth liberates.

To be consecrated in truth makes us joyful and makes us one in Christ and one in communion and mission with the Church that Christ founded.

St. Justin, the martyr we celebrate today, lived from 100AD to 165AD.

He was born near ancient Sichem. In his studies he consulted various philosophies – Stoic, Peripatetic, Pythagorean and Platonic – but at Ephesus he met a wise man who directed him to study the Old Testament.

He was told: “You are a lover of beautiful speech but you are certainly not a friend of action or of truth.” He converted to Christianity around the year 130 and went to Rome, where he opened a school. Many of the early Christians were uneducated, but Justin believed that if Christian teachings were properly explained, many more would embrace the faith. “It is our duty,” he said, “to make known our doctrine.”¹

St. Justin was an apologist for the Catholic Faith. As an apologist, he lived and meditated on 1 Peter 3:15: “Always be ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you.”

From St. Justin to Pope Francis, apologetics has always had an important place in the mission of the Church.

Pope Francis is a contemporary champion of what he calls “creative apologetics.”

For instance, in *Evangelium Gaudium* 132, Pope Francis writes:

“Proclaiming the Gospel message to different cultures also involves proclaiming it to professional, scientific and academic circles. This means an encounter between faith, reason and the sciences with a view to developing new approaches and arguments on the issue of credibility, a **creative apologetics** which would encourage greater openness to the Gospel on the part of all. When certain categories of reason and the sciences are taken up into the proclamation of the message, these categories then become tools of evangelization; water is changed into wine. Whatever is taken

¹ Cf. Enzo Lodi, *Saints of the Roman Calendar*, (New York: Alba House, 1992), 135.

up is not just redeemed, but becomes an instrument of the Spirit for enlightening and renewing the world.”

Similarly in his discussion of the role of the Catholic University in his Apostolic Constitution *Veritatis Gaudium* 5, Pope Francis writes: “It is to research conducted in ecclesiastical universities, faculties and institutes that I primarily entrust the task of developing that ‘**creative apologetics**’ which I called for in *Evangelium Gaudium*... (132)”

As we celebrate today the memorial of the philosopher, apologist and martyr St. Justin, we stand with the apologists of every century in proclaiming with joy, compassion, mercy and freedom the truths of the Sacred Scripture, the truths of the Creed, the truths of the Sacraments, and the truths of our Catholic moral teaching.

We rejoice in giving a reason for the hope that is within us.