

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Mark well the words of the Apostle. He does not write that men subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, or escaped the edge of the sword.

These courageous and miraculous acts he does not attribute to men. He attributes them to faith. Faith subdued Kingdoms. Faith worked righteousness. Faith obtained promises. Faith stopped the mouth of lions. Faith quenched the violence of fire. Faith escaped the edge of the sword.

And the list doesn't stop there. Impossible battles won, the dead raised, valiance in the face of overwhelming opposition. All by faith. But lest we fall into the fleshy trap of a theology of glory, the Apostle continues: they were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain by the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted and tormented. And they did so by the same faith that subdued kingdoms.

In this there is no contradiction. The same faith escapes the sword as is held by the man slain by the sword. Believing does not mean you will not suffer. Quite the contrary, as the Apostle demonstrates by his gory list. And that brings us to Sts. Cosmas and Damian. Scripture knows nothing of them by name.

Tradition holds that they were twins, born in the third century, born in Arabia. They grew up to be doctors. Moved by Christian faith, they worked in Cilicia serving the destitute,

who could not afford medical help. Since their patients could not pay, they were known as ἀναργύροι, “silverless”. Well able to become rich by treating the wealthy, faith compelled them to help the poor.

The Roman Emperor Diocletian mounted a bloody persecution against the Christians. It is counted as the last and most severe of the ten great persecutions of the Christian Church before Christianity was legalized. Lysias, prefect of Cilicia, had Cosmas and Damian arrested. They were horribly tortured, but did not recant the faith. At the last, they and their three brothers were beheaded.

And yet, if the tradition is true, by faith Cosmas and Damian escaped the edge of the sword. For although they were slain with the sword, it did not mean their end. The edge of that Roman blade simply nudged them into heaven. They believed.

And so that faith obtained the promise. It worked righteousness. And where there is righteousness, there is life. And while the earthly kingdom was against them, they were already citizens of the heavenly Kingdom, the Kingdom of God. And of such as these the Scripture says the world is not worthy.

That was a millennium and a half ago in Asia Minor, if the tradition is accurate. But there is hope in the story of Cosmas and Damian for you, here, today. For unlike tradition, the Scripture is always true. It is never wrong. And the Apostle writes that faith overcomes worldly tribulation and suffering.

Faith subdues kingdoms as your faith strengthens you to deny the lusts of the flesh and to prevail over the temptations of the kingdom of the evil prince of this world.

Faith works righteousness, because you are saved by God's grace through faith, by which faith, faith in Christ, you are declared righteous. Faith obtains promises, because there is an organic relationship between faith and promise – the promise works faith, faith that clings to the promise.

So the mouths of the lions of this world are stopped, the fire of hell is quenched, and the shield of faith stops the edge of the sword. In weakness faith makes you strong, even valiant in the battle against the world, your flesh, and the evil one. And faith turns to flight the army of temptations alien to holiness.

But the ultimate victory of faith is not of this world. That you be truly delivered, that you obtain a good testimony through faith, God Himself endured the cruel, buffeting blows of this sinful world. It is Christ who was truly destitute, afflicted and tormented. And it is He of whom the world was not worthy. And yet He suffered and died to sunder you from this dying world and bring you into His Kingdom of Life.

For the saints of the Old Testament Christ's coming was in the future. So the Apostle writes "all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise..." They believe in the One who was to come. But not so for you, dear Christian. For of you the Apostle writes "God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us." You have the promises of the Prophets. You have the accounts of the Old Testament. But you have the

first-hand accounts of the Apostles and Evangelists. You have the Promise clearly articulated, that you might believe.

To be perfect, as the Apostle writes, you must be sinless. And so it is in Christ. For believing in Him, He is made your sin, and you are made His righteousness. And that righteousness comes by the faith that subdues kingdoms, the faith that obtains the Promise.

It is unlikely that you will meet the earthly end of the martyrs the Epistle to the Hebrews names. But it is not impossible. Persecution may well come. Holy Martyrs may be added to those who find refuge under the heavenly altar, those who pray "How long, O Lord?" Of them the world was not worthy, they dwell in heaven for eternity.

And so it is with you, dear Christian. In the face of the tribulations of this world, as the world's swords draw their crimson marks on your flesh and soul, remember that you are safe. Christ has won the war. It is finished. You are the spoils, the King's Portion, the Holy Church.

And this day your Lord bids you eat and drink His Body and Blood, that you be nourished for the battle, that your sins be forgiven, and that your faith be made strong. For by faith, you will be among that gleaming throng of those raised to life again.

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