

Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the students should be able to

- identify martyrs as people who have suffered and died for the Christian faith.
- explain that we, too, are called to witness to Christ.

For the Catechist

Bearing witness to the Good News of Christ is every Christian's call, but Christ warns His followers that bearing witness to Him is dangerous: "Before all this happens, however, they will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name" (Luke 21:12). Yet, Jesus Christ invites us to rejoice at this for it assures us of a special place in His Kingdom.

Throughout the ages to the present time, Christians have been called to bear witness to Christ with their bodies, even with their lives. The early Church called these sufferers for Christ *martyrs*, a word which means witnesses, because martyrs gave the ultimate witness to their Lord—they gave up their life for Him. Martyrs have suffered and have been killed by people from other religions, by atheists, and by other Christians who disagree with doctrinal or political ideas. Most recently, many Christian people were killed for their professed faith during the Communist era.

This lesson introduces the students to the martyrs from the early Church and from the 20th century. The students are asked to work together as they present an understanding of the lives of some martyrs. At the end of the student lesson is the introduction to the project activity that is part of this unit. Help the students learn the stories about people who defended their faith. Help the students accept these "Heroes of Eastern Christianity" as role models who show them how to live for Jesus Christ.

Materials Needed

Opening and Closing Prayers: Student Book

Review: Paper and pencils

Introduction: Icons of Saints Peter and Paul, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint George (*Come Bless the Lord* icon packet)

The Message: New Testament, note cards, pen or pencils

Application: Construction paper, pens or pencils

Icons and Pictures

Come Bless the Lord: Saints Peter and Paul, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint George

For Next Week's Lesson:

Find a picture of your bishop and your priest. Look in your Church newspaper or a diocesan or parish website. If possible find pictures of all the hierarchy in your Church.

Connections

1. Opening Prayer (2 minutes)

Have the students gather before the icon and stand silently for a few seconds. Then make the sign of the cross before praying

- Troparion to the Martyrs (page 71 in student book)

2. Review (*Saints*) (2 minutes)

Ask the students to list all the saints they can think of in one minute. Then discuss what all these people have in common—they lived a holy life on earth in union with God, and after death have been united to Him in heaven.

3. Introduction (3 minutes)

Materials: Icons of Saints Peter and Paul, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint George {*Come Bless the Lord* icon packet)

Have the icons on the front desk. Tell the students to stand by the icon they recognize and to be prepared to tell us about the saint. Let them look on the back of the icon for more details.

Ask: *Does anyone know how these saints died?*
(All of them were killed for believing in Jesus Christ.)

Connect this idea to the point of the lesson—a truly faithful believer would rather die than betray Christ.

Alternate: Have the students look at their prayer plan from the last class. Ask them to share if they were successful. Congratulate the students who were able to keep to the plan and tell them that this week we are going to learn about people who kept to God's plan even when it meant they would die for their faith.

Notes for the lesson:

(Use this space to write helpful hints to use each year)

The Message

4. Courageous Followers of Christ (2 minutes)

a) Have the students read the first two paragraphs.

Ask:

- *What does the word persecute mean?* (Punish, torture)
- *Why would people harm Christians?* (They were frightened by the power of Jesus; they wanted to destroy the good that Jesus brought into the world.)

b) Complete the reading on this page. Ask: *Why do you think the "blood of martyrs" helps our Church grow?* (We look to the martyrs to learn how to believe completely in Jesus Christ. We learn how our faith can help other people join the Church.)

Supplementary Activity:

Write the question for this lesson on the board or on a poster board: *What do the martyrs tell us about being faithful?* Write the following answers when you read them in the text:.

1. Sometimes it means we will suffer and even die for Christ.
2. A truly faithful believer would rather die than betray Christ.

13

Those Who Gave Their Life for Christ

What do the martyrs tell us about being faithful?



Courageous Followers of Christ

Jesus warned His followers that His enemies would try to kill them. He told them that people will think that by killing Christians they are serving God.

Jesus was right! The first followers of Jesus were put to death for Him; and ever since, the enemies of the Gospel have persecuted and killed Christians because they believed in Christ. These sufferers for Christ are called *martyrs*.

Martyrs have never been sad when they are called to die for Christ. They are happy for themselves because they will be going to Christ. They are happy for the Church, too,

because they know that "the blood of martyrs is for the Church what water is for a garden," as Saint John Chrysostom, one of our Church Fathers, tells us. He says that the blood of martyrs makes the Church grow and strengthens its life. How do you think that happens?

One way is that other Christians see the martyr's courage and are encouraged to be as brave for Christ. Also, unbelievers come to know Christ through the courage of the martyrs. The martyrs know that their prayers and sufferings work for the good of the Church, and they are glad for that.

70 *We Are God's People* Grade 5 Unit 3: Many Gifts, One Giver

Background Reading:

(Martyrs and Death)

"The stories of the early martyrs became another source for early Christians seeking to learn how to die in the Lord. St. Ignatius of Antioch, being taken from Asia Minor to Rome for trial, visited with the local Churches he passed on the journey to console them and ask their prayers. Arriving in Rome he wrote to others he had not seen on his journey, 'because love does not allow me to be silent' (Letter to the Ephesians). His attitude in the face of death was as witness of faith to those who might follow him to the arena. His love for the world, he wrote to the Roman Church, '. . . has been crucified and there is no fire of material longing within me, but only that living water welling up and saying within me, 'Come to the Father'(7). Ignatius had detached himself for the concerns of this life and focused on his relationship with the Spirit within him—the 'living water' of Jn 4:10—and the heavenly Father" (*ID* 145).

4. Courageous (*continued*) (3 minutes)

c) Write the words *relic*, *Antimension*, and *reliquary* on the front board. Read the paragraphs and have a student write the definition next to the word after the reading.

Supplementary Activity:
Have the students write the words and the definition on note cards to use as a review.

5. How Could They Do It? (2 minutes)

a) Read the first paragraph aloud. Ask: *Why are people willing to suffer pain for a reason?* (They are working for an award or recognition; they love what they do.)

b) Read the quotations from Saint Jonah and Saint Ignatius of Antioch aloud as a group. Divide into two groups and have the students discuss what the words mean. Have one person share the group's thoughts with the entire class.

Background Reading:
(Relics)

"The first saints to be honored and venerated were those who gave up their lives physically as a witness to faith in Christ. They were called martyrs (from the Greek for 'witness'). Chapels and altars were constructed at the site of their burial, for their death in faith and in hope of the resurrection was a special act of heroism to be honored by all Christians. This custom grew into the present practice of always celebrating the Divine Liturgy over the relics of saint. The relics are now sewn in a special cloth called the antimension, which is consecrated by the patriarch or bishop and given to his churches to be placed upon the altar for the celebration of the Liturgy" (LLII 47).

6. Let's remember that... (2 minutes)

Ask for volunteers to read each word and the definition.

Supplementary Activity:
Have the students write note cards to review the words.

7. Troparion to the Martyrs (1 minute)

Remind the students that they prayed this as the opening prayer. Tell them to think about the sacrifice of the martyrs as they pray.

8. From the Beatitudes (1 minute)

Have the students read aloud this Beatitude. Ask them to remain silent as they think about the reward in heaven—being with God forever.

The Church honors the saints, especially the martyrs, by honoring their icons and relics. A relic is a fragment of the saint's body which is preserved in memory of his or her witness. Lesser relics may be bits of the clothing worn by the martyrs or even bits of things that belonged to them.

Today we honor the martyrs in a special way by placing their relics in the Holy Table or in the Antimension, a cloth placed on the Holy Table. This practice is very old and comes from the time in the early Church when the Liturgy was celebrated on the tombs of the martyrs. We also venerate relics which sometimes are put into a special holder called a reliquary or are attached to icons.

How Could They Do It?
Nobody likes pain. Athletes put up with pain to get stronger. Dancers push themselves to kick higher even though it hurts. They accept pain for a reason. Martyrs have a reason for what they do. How did these martyrs look at their suffering?

"Life is like seed. If you scatter it about, trusting in Christ, you will reap a rich harvest when He comes again in glory."
Saint Jonah

"I consider myself God's wheat and I must be ground up by the teeth of wild beasts to become Christ's pure bread."
Saint Ignatius of Antioch

Let us remember that . . .
Martyrs are people who have suffered and died for the Christian faith. The number of martyrs for Christ during the history of the Church is very large, for there are always people seeking to destroy the Church.

Relics are the remains of holy persons, either parts of their bodies, of their clothing, or of their possessions. Relics are honored and venerated just as icons are. Healings are often associated with relics of saints.



Troparion to the Martyrs
Your martyrs, O Lord, received the crown of immortality from You, O our God, on account of their struggles. Armed with Your strength, they have vanquished their persecutors and crushed the powerless arrogance of demons. Through their supplications, O Christ God, save our souls.

~ From the Beatitudes ~

"Blessed are you when men reproach you and persecute you and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven."

71

9. Blessed are they...

(Father Walter Ciszek)

(6 minutes)

a) Read the story as a group or silently. Also, consider reading the story to the students as they follow—children are never too old to hear a story being read to them.

b) What do you think?

Have the students write the answers to the questions. Tell them to choose one of their answers to share with the class.

A Reminder

This unit will include stories about people from the 20th and 21st centuries to help the children realize that people are living the way Jesus told us to live in the Sermon on the Mount. The stories will help the children realize that all things are possible with God.

Supplementary Activity:

This lesson is the first one to include stories about saints also. Activities including projects are part of the 'Action Plan' section. The following are some other suggestions on ways to help the saints come alive for the students!

1. Have a world map in the room to find where the saint lived.
2. Paste a long strip of paper on a wall to create a timeline for the saints. Place the birth of Jesus marked as the first entry on the left, and place the name and date for the saint at the appropriate place on the extended line.

Blessed are they . . .

Father Walter Ciszek, a Byzantine Catholic priest, spent 23 years at hard labor in Russian prisons because he was a priest. During the 80 years that Communists ruled Russia, Christians had to meet in secret to worship and often risked punishment. Still they gathered in many parts of Russia! This is Father Ciszek's story about one of the "underground churches."

"About 200 yards from the boulevard was a jumble of shacks and shanties made of old boards and packing crates, built one onto the other like a series of dominoes.... Eventually I found Father Viktor's *bolok* (hut), a tumble-down shack in the middle of one of these rabbit warrens. He was living with another priest, Father Neron... They had two beds in a one-room shack, separated by an altar; this little room, 10 by 10 feet, served as their chapel as well...

"As soon as we would get up in the morning we cleared out the beds and prepared to celebrate the Liturgy. By 6:30 there were ten or twelve people in that little room for the Liturgy. On Sundays the people jammed not only this room but the corridor beyond the open door

"On Easter I couldn't get anywhere near the chapel. Even the corridors were jammed; crowds of people were swarming around outside in the midnight cold. The militia (police) were there too, but I ignored them. There was barely room to move anywhere, but by twelve o'clock I was vested — I couldn't lift my arms, so someone had to pull the vestments over my head and then I

was ready for the Liturgy...

"As I began the solemn intonation of the Easter Liturgy, I thought the chapel would explode with sound. The Easter Liturgy is a joyous one to begin with, but the enthusiasm of the people that night, I shall never forget... The services ended at 3 a.m., but at 9 o'clock the next morning I was still distributing Communion to a constant stream of people. I could hear the crowds outside, going through the Easter dawn shouting the traditional Easter greeting, "*Christos Voskresel* (Christ is Risen!)", and the joyous answer, "*Voistinu Voskresel* (Indeed He is Risen)." 'And all this,' was the thought that kept flashing through my mind, 'all this took place in Russia, in Norilsk.'"

After living three more years under guard in Russia, Father Ciszek was allowed to return home to the United States of America. He died in 1984.

What do you think?

Why did the people react so enthusiastically at the Easter Liturgy that Father Ciszek described?

Should all of us react this enthusiastically at our Easter Liturgy? Why?



Application

10. Heroes of Eastern Christianity (15 minutes)

This section includes stories about many courageous Christians. The student book has two of the stories, and the teacher's manual has other stories. Photocopy the additional stories if you need them.

The information from these pages may be used for the Action Plan page. Also, the details may be used to create a presentation to be shown at the end of the class or during a final project that is part of Lesson 22.

First, have the students read one story. If there are enough students, have all the stories read by someone or by groups. The following are suggestions on ways to present the information:

1. Have the students present a summary of the details while another student displays the icon of the saint.
2. Have the students complete a biographical sketch of the saint and read that to the students.
3. Act out a short skit that shows one aspect of the saint's life.
4. Write a newspaper article that reports one story about the saint.
5. Write a television newscast story complete with details about the scenes and dialogue.
6. Have the students keep a journal of saints. After they have read the information, let them write answers for the following in the journal (one student can write all the answers or it can be passed around the group for responses):
 - For what do you think this saint would want to be remembered?
 - What would you ask him or her if you had the chance? What do you think would be the answer?
 - If you could join this saint for a few years, what part of his or her life would you pick? Why did you make that choice?

[At the end of this lesson is the questionnaire that could be used for this journal of saints. It is included in this lesson only, but it can be photocopied for all the lessons.]

Optional Activities

Have the students read all the saints' information. Have them work in groups and write a script for a "Who Am I?" program. Present the program at the end of this lesson or the end of the unit.

or

List four facts about one saint and write them on a note card. Write the name of the saint on the other side. Complete cards for all the saints in this lesson. Collect these cards to be used as review for future lessons.

Heroes of Eastern Christianity

Saint Barbara, the Great Martyr
Today, in our country, it is not difficult to go to church. We can worship freely. In other countries, even today, it is not so easy. Many people suffer and even die to profess their belief in Christ. Saint Barbara was one of these Martyrs.

Barbara was a young girl from a well-to-do family. She lived in the third century. In those days, the rich people looked down on Christians who were poor. The rich were prejudiced against them in many ways. Today are people still prejudiced against them? Why or why not?

At first, the hidden from the Disciples, pagan gods, the army. by what she the Gospel. "He who is Me is not a When that his military his daughter was famous girl because intelligent, Disciples and his first well by his Christians.

Blessed New-martyr Theodore Roman
Persecution of Christians in the 20th century was mainly conducted by atheists—those who accept no god of any kind. Chief among the atheist persecutors of the Church had been the Communists whose power had made itself felt over most of Eastern Europe and Asia from 1917 to the late 1980s. Whenever they took control, the Communists persecuted the Churches and believers and took away their properties and goods.

Bishop Theodore Roman was one of many bishops who suffered under Communist rule. He became the Byzantine Catholic Bishop of Minsk, Czechoslovakia in 1944. This was the time of World War II, and at the end of the war in 1945, the Communists were in charge of the country. They made life difficult for the Christians: demanding heavy taxes on Church property, closing schools and churches, and forbidding religious education. Bishop Roman fought against these actions and earned the respect of all the Christians in the area.

One day he was returning from visiting a village and his horse-drawn carriage was run down by a truck driven by Communist soldiers. The soldiers stepped their truck, got out, and physically attacked the bishop and his priests.

Some people found them and took them to a nearby hospital. The bishop had been hurt but was expected to recover. Two days later the Communists forced the nuns in charge of the hospital to leave and then sent in their own nurses. The next day, Bishop Theodore suddenly died! Many Christians have lived by the thought spoken years earlier by Bishop Theodore:

"I would rather suffer and die than betray the Church."
His feast day is November 1.

For Your Information...
Communism is a political system chiefly based on the idea that the state, not private individuals, own all property and goods. It is also deeply atheistic, that is, it rejects all beliefs in God and seeks the downfall of all religion because it does not serve the state.

In those countries where Communists controlled the government (for example: Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, etc.), Christians had been severely persecuted, and restricted from freely practicing their faith. Churches had been taken away from them, priests and monks and nuns had been forced to leave their communities, and adults were forbidden to teach religion to their children. Many Christians, especially Church leaders, had been killed or imprisoned.

74

11. Action Plan

Materials: pencils
(15 minutes)

a) Have the students complete the section on martyrs. Remember that there are two additional pages of information about martyrs at the end of this lesson in the teacher's manual.

b) Use the remaining time to work on the final group project. Have the students organize in groups of three. Refer to page 69 in the Student Book, "Heroes of Christianity," and decide on the person. Refer to the suggestions listed on page 75 in the Student Book, the Action Plan page, and have them decide on their style of presentation.

12. Summary (4 minutes)

a) Ask the students to write their definition of martyr at the top of a piece of construction paper. Tell them to write a letter to all the martyrs to thank them for their sacrifice.

13. Closing Prayer

(2 minutes)

Troparion to the Martyrs (page 71 in student book)

or

Have the students read their thank-you letters to the martyrs.

Action Plan

Heroes of Eastern Christianity

Read the life story of one of the martyrs, and complete the outline on this page. As you write the details about this courageous Christian, think about his or her choices that show us how to live our life for Jesus Christ.

_____, Martyr for Christ

A. He or she lived in the _____ century.

B. Three important facts about his or her life:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

C. The way he or she died: _____

D. This martyr is best known for _____

You can learn even more about the person by working on a class project. These projects can be presented during a special session for parents and other members of the church to help them learn more about the Heroes of Eastern Christianity. Last week you were asked to choose one hero for the final project. Consider working in a group as you look for information and brainstorm ideas. By the end of today's class, decide, with your group members, on the person you will study, and possible ideas for your presentation.

Some ideas that you might want to consider for your visual presentation:

1. Make a drawing, icon, mosaic, or stained-glass window of the person.	5. Make a visual representation of something concerning his or her life, work, or death.
2. Draw a map of the place where he or she lived.	6. Make a model of some aspect of his or her life.
3. Make a title banner, which should include his or her name.	7. Write a poem, song, riddle, or news story about him or her.
4. Letter one or two of his or her sayings on colored paper.	8. Create a play that acts out some action from the person's life.

75

For Next Week's Lesson:

Find a picture of your bishop and your priest. Look in your Church newspaper or a diocesan or parish website. If possible find pictures of all the hierarchy in your Church.

Heroes of Eastern Christianity (Part 2)

St. Stephen the New

During the eighth and ninth centuries the Eastern Churches were troubled by a movement called Iconoclasm. Iconoclasts were Christians who did not believe that icons should be painted of Christ or of saints, and that people should not kiss or honor them. The Church said the iconoclasts were wrong, but these people refused to listen. For over one hundred years they fought the teaching of the Church and in this space of time many people were killed or injured. It was a sad example of Christians fighting against Christians each thinking that he was fighting "for God."

Stephen was a monk well known for his love of icons. He taught the people who came to him to give honor to icons. The Byzantine Emperor, Constantine the Fifth, an iconoclast, tried to get Stephen to change his views, but Stephen refused. The emperor then tried several times to dishonor Stephen so that no one would want to follow his advice any more. But the emperor's devious plan failed so Stephen was exiled for three years.

Then in the year 765, Stephen was brought to the emperor for questioning. Stephen took out a gold coin with the emperor's image on it. He asked whether or not it would be wrong to treat this coin with disrespect. When everyone there said it would be an insult to the emperor, Stephen threw the coin on the floor and stamped on it. The people were enraged and wanted to kill Stephen at once; but he said, "All right, but how much more deserving of punishment is the man who dishonors an image of Christ or His holy Mother!"



Even so, Stephen was put in prison, where he stayed for the rest of that year. Finally, some officers dragged him from prison and beat him until he died. They dragged his body through the streets and threw it into an open ditch.

Stephen's feast day is commemorated on November 28th, the anniversary of his death.

Kontakion of Saint Stephen

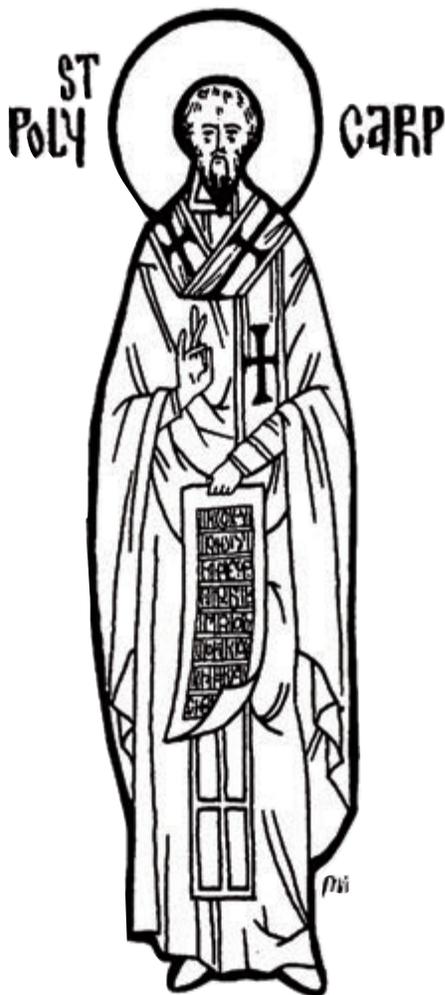
Come, you faithful, who love to celebrate. Let us praise by song the holy Stephen, the faithful servant of the Holy Trinity; for he has honored the Icon of the Lord and of His Blessed Mother. Let us all sing together: "Joy to you, O Father, worthy of all praise!"

Saint Polycarp of Smyrna

For the first 300 years of Christian history, Christians were persecuted almost everywhere in the Roman Empire. Christians were not allowed to meet together or to build churches. Often, simply worshipping Christ was enough to condemn a person. If a person was thought to be a Christian, the pagan Romans would insist that he curse Christ and worship the Roman gods and goddesses, or even the emperor. If the Christian refused, he was tortured and killed.

Many times, Christians were tortured in an arena before an audience of bloodthirsty pagans who were eager to see bloodshed. Often the Christians would be burned alive or be forced to fight the fiercest soldiers of the army for their lives. The worst torture was to be fed to wild animals which had been starved until they were hungry enough to attack people.

Polycarp was Bishop of Smyrna, in present-day Turkey, from the year 105 until 156. In that year, the Roman Governor renewed the search for Christians. Bishop Polycarp was persuaded to leave the city and hide on a farm near-by. One of the farmworkers betrayed him and Polycarp was arrested. It was about supper time when they came to arrest him, but the bishop insisted that his captors first be fed in Christ's name. For two hours, while they ate, he thanked God for the blessings he had received. He was



then taken before the governor and a large crowd of people in the stadium. The governor urged him, "Curse Christ, worship the emperor, and I will set you free." The aged bishop answered, "I have served Him for eighty-six years and He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and Savior?"

The people shouted that Polycarp should be burned alive, and some people came out of the crowd carrying torches. Polycarp stepped onto the pile of wood, thanking God for allowing him to share in the sufferings of Christ. When he ended his prayer, the fire was lit, but it did not touch Polycarp. Instead, it formed an arch around his body and gave off a sweet scent like incense. The executioner was then ordered to stab Polycarp with a spear. His dead body was then burned, but other Christians were able to collect his ashes and put them in a fitting burial place. The Church commemorates him on February 23rd.

Kontakion of Saint Polycarp

Wise Hierarch Polycarp, you offered spiritual fruits to God, and became worthy of Him because of your virtues. Wherefore, we, who have been enlightened by your teachings, honor your memory and glorify the Lord.

