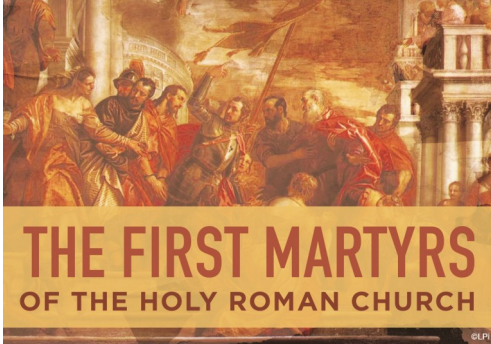


## FROM FR. JASON



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

On June 30 the Church celebrates the memory of the First Martyrs of the Holy Roman Church. This feast is a powerful proclamation of the victory of the Resurrection in the midst of the greatest darkness. These brothers and sisters, put to death with unspeakable cruelty under Nero after the fire of Rome in the year 64, were the first fruits of the Church's witness in the heart of the pagan empire.

The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians. These first martyrs did not die as fanatics or as victims of a tragic fate. They died because they had encountered the Risen Lord and could not deny Him. Like the early communities to whom St. Peter and St. Paul wrote, they shared in the Paschal Mystery: "Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

In the darkness of the amphitheaters, in the gardens of Nero where they were burned as living torches, these martyrs became luminous signs of the true Light that the darkness cannot overcome. Their witness was not planned or organized by human strength. It was the work of the Holy Spirit, who gave them the courage to confess Christ even unto death. In them the Church was born, not from worldly power, but from the weakness and love of the crucified and risen Lord.

Are we walking this path of rediscovery of the primitive Church? Have we seen how the Lord calls us out of our tombs of sin and fear, just as He called these first martyrs? Today's world is not so different from Nero's Rome: it is filled with new idols, new persecutions (sometimes hidden, sometimes open), and a great indifference to the Gospel. In the midst of this new "pagan empire," the Lord asks us to be witnesses, living martyrs, which means "witnesses," who do not fear to lose their lives for the sake of the Kingdom.

The First Martyrs teach us that the true victory does not consist in avoiding the cross, but in carrying it with Christ. Their blood continues to cry out today: "Christ is risen! He is truly risen!" Their sacrifice purifies and renews the Church in every age. It calls us to a radical conversion, to a faith that is not mere habit but a living adherence to the Person of Jesus.

Let us ask the Lord, through the intercession of these holy martyrs, for the grace of a strong and joyful faith in our parish. May families become domestic churches that resist the spirit of this world. May our community be a place where the Gospel is announced without fear. And may each one of us receive the courage to give witness to Christ in our daily life, even when it costs us something.

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." May their example set us on fire with the same love that consumed them. May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Martyrs, who stood at the foot of the Cross, sustain us and obtain for us the grace of perseverance until the end.

Please continue to pray for Fr. Michael and I! We are in Italy for what is hopefully a very fruitful gathering of priests.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Jason". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.