

# SEAL #5 -- MARTYRS

## REV. 6:9-11

### SMYRNA

Martyrdom has always fascinated Christians. Hebrews uses them as models of faith.

Martyrdom of Polycarp is one of the better-known stories from the pages of early Christian history. We have no idea who the original author was, but we know Polycarp himself rather well. He was apparently a disciple of the apostle John who served as bishop (or pastor) of the Church at Smyrna, not far from Ephesus. We have a letter he wrote to the Philippian church, but over the years Christians have remembered him most often as the steadfast martyr who dared to defy the Roman authorities in the year 155 or 156.

When riots against Christians first broke out in Smyrna, Polycarp's friends urged him to withdraw to a farm outside the city. He did. But when members of his own household disclosed his hideout, police came to arrest him and delivered him to the proconsul at the city arena, which was crowded with spectators awaiting the execution of the notorious leader of the Christians.

#### AN ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE

And when finally he [Polycarp] was brought up, there was a great tumult on hearing that Polycarp had been arrested. Therefore, when he was brought before him, the proconsul asked him if he were Polycarp. And when he confessed that he was, he tried to persuade him to deny [the faith], saying, "Have respect to your age"--and other things that customarily follow this, such as, "Swear by the fortune of Caesar; change your mind; say, 'Away with the atheists!'"

But Polycarp looked with earnest face at the whole crowd of lawless heathen in the arena, and motioned to them with his hand. Then groaning and looking up to heaven, he said, "Away with the atheists!"

But the proconsul was insistent and said: "Take the oath, and I shall release you. Curse Christ."

Polycarp said: "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

The proconsul said, "Try to persuade the people."

But Polycarp said, "You, I should deem worthy of an account; for we have been taught to render honor, as is fitting, to rulers and authorities appointed by God so far as it does us no harm; but as for these, I do not consider them worthy that I should make a defense to them."

And when he had said these things and many besides he was inspired with courage and joy, and his face was full of grace, so that not only did it not fall with dismay at the things said to him, but on the contrary, the proconsul was astonished, and sent his own herald into the midst of the arena to proclaim three times: "Polycarp has confessed himself to be a Christian."

When this was said by the herald, the entire crowd of heathen and Jews who lived in Smyrna shouted with uncontrollable anger and a great cry: "This one is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the destroyer of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice nor to worship."

Then these things happened with such dispatch, quicker than can be told-- the crowds in so great a hurry to gather wood and faggots from the workshops and the baths, the Jews being especially zealous, as usual, to assist with this....

And with his hands put behind him and tied, like a noble ram out of the great flock ready for sacrifice, a burnt offering ready and acceptable to God, he looked up to heaven and said:

"Lord God Almighty, Father of the beloved and blessed Servant Jesus Christ, ...I bless thee, because thou hast deemed me worthy of this day and hour, to take part in the number of martyrs, in the cup of thy Christ, for 'resurrection to eternal life' of the soul and body in the immortality of the Holy Spirit; among whom may I be received in thy presence this day as a rich and acceptable sacrifice, just as thou has prepared and revealed beforehand and fulfilled, thou that art the true God without falsehood. For this and everything I praise thee, I bless thee, I glorify thee, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest, Jesus Christ, thy beloved Servant, through whom be glory to thee with him and the Holy Spirit both now and unto the ages to come. Amen." And when he had concluded the Amen and finished his prayer, the men attending to the fire light it....

So we later took up his bones, more precious than costly stones and more valuable than gold, and laid them away in a suitable place.

The terrible martyrdom of Rev. 6 are much clearer to us who have lived through or pondered the horrors of World War II.

- The atrocities of Nazi war criminals' discrimination -- ghettos concentration camps -- mass extermination
- In 10 years, 60% of Jews in Europe, 6 million, were butchered.
- G. M. Gilbert wrote in his history of the criminal trials of those criminals called the Nuremburg Diary:

"...the torture, the starvation, the mass murder, the diabolical experiments on live human guinea pigs. 'History,' he said, 'does not record a crime perpetuated against so many victims or ever carried out with such calculated cruelty.'

"When the evidence was all in, Sir Hartley Shawcross summed up for the British Delegation. He rehearsed the barbarous deeds which had been done. He told how lampshades had been made from tattooed human skin, how human hair had been baled for commercial purposes, how gold teeth had been extracted from victims and shipped in ingots to the Reichbank. 'Mass murder,' he said, 'was becoming a State industry, with byproducts.' That is only one page from the sordid story of modern persecution. There are many pages more. The world is getting ready for the breaking of this seal.

"The cry which ascends to God from the brazen altar is not a Christian cry. It is a cry for vengeance, a cry which will be quite appropriate once the age of grace is over and conditions revert back to a pre-Christian era. What is shown here, under the breaking of the fifth seal, is elaborated further in chapter seven, where the great tribulation is introduced. Here only a preview is given of the terrible persecutions which will engulf the globe in a coming day."

What leads to such faithfulness even to death? One thing:

### **Faithfulness to Christ in life.**

Jesus Christ calls all of us to walk in faithfulness to Him each day....

In fact, we are called to be in living crucifixion, Gal. 2:20, that equals:

Christ is the high priest and we are the priests (Heb. 8:1; Rev. 1:6). The church is a "holy" people (I Pet. 2:9). As priests its members have a fourfold service:

They offer:

- Their life is a sacrifice (Rom. 12:1; 15; 16; Darby);
- Their devotion a burnt offering (Mk. 12:33)
- Their service a drink offering (II Tim. 4:6, R. V. mgn; Phil. 2:17);
- Their deeds spiritual sacrifices (I Pet. 2:5; Heb. 13:16);
- Their prayers an incense offering (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3, 4);
- Their worship a praise offering (Heb. 13:15).

In short, the message of Seal #5/Rev. 6:9-11, is a message of total dedication. Listen to an actual letter:

Lest you think this is too severe, I close with an excerpt from an actual letter written by a young communist to his fiancée, breaking off their engagement. The girl's pastor sent the letter to Billy Graham, who published it a number of years ago. The communist wrote:

*We communists have a high casualty rate. We are the ones who get shot and hung and ridiculed and fired from our jobs and in every other way made as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the party every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us alive.*

*We communists do not have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes, or new cars. We have been described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor: the struggle for world communism. We communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money can buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty personal selves into a great movement of humanity; and if our personal lives seem hard or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind.*

*There is one thing which I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, and my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, looks, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad.*

That, my friend, is total dedication

William MacDonald, (1975) True Discipleship, Kansas City, Kansas, Walterick Publishers, 141. p. 33-In 1903, one man with seventeen followers began his attack on the world. His name was Lenin. We Communists have a high casualty rate. We're the ones who get shot and hung and lynched and tarred and feathered and jailed and slandered, and ridiculed and fired from our jobs, and in every other way make as uncomfortable as possible. A certain percentage of us get killed or imprisoned. We live in virtual poverty. We turn back to the part every penny we make above what is absolutely necessary to keep us live. We Communists don't have the time or the money for many movies, or concerts, or T-bone steaks, or decent homes and new cars. We've been

described as fanatics. We are fanatics. Our lives are dominated by one great overshadowing factor, the struggle for world communism. We Communists have a philosophy of life which no amount of money could buy. We have a cause to fight for, a definite purpose in life. We subordinate our petty, personal selves into a great movement of humanity, and if our personal lives seem hard, or our egos appear to suffer through subordination to the party, then we are adequately compensated by the thought that each of us in his small way is contributing to something new and true and better for mankind. There is one thing in which I am in dead earnest and that is the Communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife and mistress, my bread and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens as time goes on. Therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force which both drives and guides my life. I evaluate people, books, ideas and action according to how they affect the Communist cause and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideas and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad. If Communists can be as dedicated as this for their cause, how much more should Christians pour themselves out in loving, glad devotion for their glorious Lord. Surely if the Lord Jesus is worth anything, He is worth everything. "If the Christian faith is worth believing in at all, it is worth believing in heroically"-Findlay.

109-First is the worry that invariably accompanies wealth. Second is the sorrow of seeing one's children ruined spiritually by an over-abundance of material things. Then there is the bitterness of having riches fail when you need them most. The rich person never knows how many friends he has. Riches inevitable fail to satisfy the heart of man. Finally, wealth often has adverse effects on a person's character.