

“LET ME NOT ONLY BE CALLED A CHRISTIAN BUT PROVE TO BE ONE.”

From St Ignatius of Antioch’s letter to the Romans

You have never begrudged the martyrs their triumph but rather trained them for it. And so I am asking you to be consistent with the lessons you teach them. **Just beg for me the courage and endurance not only to speak but also to will what is right, so that I may not only be called a Christian, but prove to be one. For if I prove myself to be a Christian by martyrdom, then people will call me one, and my loyalty to Christ will be apparent when the world sees me no more.** Nothing you can see is truly good. For our Lord Jesus Christ, now that he has returned to his Father, has revealed himself more clearly. **Our task is not one of producing persuasive propaganda; Christianity shows its greatness when it is hated by the world.**

I am writing to all the churches to declare to them all that I am glad to die for God, provided you do not hinder me. I beg you not to show me a misplaced kindness. **Let me be the food of beasts that I may come to God. I am his wheat, and I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become Christ’s pure bread.**

I would rather that you coaxed the beasts to become my tomb and to leave no scrap of me behind; then when I have died I will be a burden to no one. **I shall be a true disciple of Christ when the world no longer sees my body. Pray to Christ for me that by these means I may become a sacrifice to God.** I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles, I am a condemned criminal; they were free, I am still a slave. **But if I suffer, I shall become the freedman of Jesus Christ and I shall rise again to freedom in him.**

Now as a prisoner I am learning to give up my own wishes. All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting wild beasts, by land and by sea, by day and by night, chained as I am to ten leopards, I mean the detachment of soldiers who guard me; the better you treat them, the worse they become. I am more and more trained in discipleship by their ill usage of me, *but I am not therefore justified*. How happy I will be with the beasts which are prepared for me! I hope that they will make short work of me. I shall even coax them to devour me quickly and not to be afraid of touching me, as sometimes happens; in fact, if they hold back, I shall force them to it. Bear with me, for I know what is good for me. **Now I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing visible or invisible rob me of my prize, which is Jesus Christ! The fire, the cross, packs of wild beasts, lacerations, rendings, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of the whole body, the horrible tortures of the devil – let all these things come upon me, if only I may gain Jesus Christ!**