

JANUARY 19
EUROPEAN MARTYRS
OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS
OPTIONAL MEMORIAL

Today we commemorate the Blessed Martyrs of the Society of Jesus who were killed for the Catholic Faith after the Reformation. They are: James Salès and William Saltemouche (d. February 7, 1593, in France, beatified 1926 by Pius XI); Ignatius de Azevedo (d. July 15, 1570) and thirty-nine companions (d. July 15 and 16, 1570), who were martyred while sailing for Brazil and were beatified by Pius IX in 1854. Also commemorated are those who died for the faith in France during the Revolution, namely James Bonnaud (d. September 2, 1792) and twenty-two companions (d. September 2-5, 1792); they were beatified by Pius XI in 1926.

From the Common of Several Martyrs, or of Pastors.

THE OFFICE OF READINGS

Second Reading

(From the Homilies of Pope Paul VI. Homily delivered on the occasion of the solemn canonization of the forty Martyrs of England and Wales, October 25, 1970. [A.A.S., 62 {1970}, pp. 747-748. English translation from *Letters and Notices*, 76 {1971}, pp. 7-8, slightly adapted].)

The Church continues to grow and develop through the heroic love shown by the martyrs.

Our times need Saints, and particularly the example of those who gave the supreme testimony of their love for Christ and his Church. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (Jn. 15:13).

These words of the Divine Master, which refer in the first instance to the sacrifice that he himself made on the cross, offering himself for the salvation of the whole of mankind, can also be applied to the great and glorious host of martyrs of all times, from the first persecution of the newborn Church to the persecution of our days, perhaps less overt but equally cruel.

The Church of Christ was born from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and she continues to grow and develop in virtue of the heroic love of her most authentic sons and daughters. "The seed is the blood of Christians" (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 50). Like the shedding of Christ's blood, so the martyrs' offering of their lives becomes in virtue of their union with Christ's sacrifice a source of life and spiritual fertility for the Church and for the whole world. The Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (n. 42) states the reason very concisely: "By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his master, who freely accepted death on behalf of the world's salvation; he perfects that image even to the shedding of blood. The Church, therefore, considers martyrdom as an exceptional gift and as the highest proof of love."

Responsory

R. While we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

V. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Concluding Prayer

Lord God, you honored these brothers of ours by making them one with your Son, Jesus, in the shedding of their blood. Hear their prayers, and gather into perfect unity all who believe in him. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.