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## Session 2 – Questions



A JOURNEY THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY

### Persecution – Part I

#### A. Establish the Context

*"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you."*

– John 15:20

The Roman Empire was in chaos. Endless struggles over the imperial throne had created lasting instability within the government. From A.D. 192 to 284, a period of only ninety-two years, twenty-eight different emperors reigned, and of them, twenty-two were murdered. Conflict with the Persians in the East, as well as squabbles with barbarians and pirates on the fringes of the Empire, created an atmosphere of constant turbulence. Within this disorder, the Church was surviving.

The Church was a unique organization within the Roman Empire. As the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch (martyred in A.D. 115) testify, she was not some loose association of "all believers" who vaguely shared a few principles of faith but a highly organized and disciplined body with her own officers and doctrine.

During this time, the persecutions begun by Nero and Domitian continued but were interspersed with periods of indifference or tolerance, and during these lulls the Church grows. Pagans launch a propaganda campaign of lies and myths to slander Christians. Often calamities throughout the empire, like barbarian invasions or earthquakes, are blamed on Christians, who are consequently sent to their death in the savage public games. Brilliant minds, such as St. Justin Martyr and Tertullian, rise to the challenge, writing skillful defenses of the Faith, and thus the first Christian apologists are born. During this time, the Church also encounters enemies "within the gates," as heretics arise to mislead the faithful and corrupt the apostolic teaching. Champions such as St. Irenaeus rally to preserve the true Faith from any distortions.

The wisdom of  
St. Ignatius of Antioch:

*"God's wheat I am, and by  
the teeth of wild beasts I  
am to be ground that I may  
prove Christ's pure bread."*

*"Where the bishop appears,  
there let the people be,  
just as where Jesus Christ  
is, there is the Catholic  
Church."*

NOTES: Roman Empire persecute the Church? Do you think such persecution could happen in our modern world?

## B. Learn the Story

View Track 2, *Persecution*, of the *Epic: A Journey through Church History* 20-Week Study DVD (or listen to the audio CD). Follow the presentation by referring to your *Epic Church History Timeline Chart*.

### NOTES

Scripture gives us the story of the early Church. Important events are highlighted in the timeline.

*Peter and Paul.*

Remember the words that I said to you: I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Bellor, Hildre, Europe and the Faith. Rockford, IL: St. Ignace Press, 1997. This book is a history of how the Church spread and how Western civilization and the importance of the Church to Europe.

The Roman Empire was in decline. Endless struggles over the imperial throne had created a situation of instability within the empire. In 284, a period of only ninety-two years, twenty-eight emperors reigned, and of them, twenty-two were murdered. Conflicts within the Roman Empire, as well as political and economic conditions, led to the fall of the Roman Empire.

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## Persecution – Part II

### A. Establish the Context

*"The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians."*

– Tertullian

For more than 200 years, the Roman Empire has persecuted the Faith.

### C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering these questions will help you learn the story of the Church. If other questions come to mind, write them down to discuss in the group.

1. What was the Church in the Roman Empire? Give some of its characteristics.

Diocletian works hard to rebuild the crumbling empire and meets with temporary success. While he has no direct animosity towards Christians, at the behest of Galerius, his understudy, he begins what would become the worst of all Roman persecutions of the Church. An empire-wide campaign to annihilate Christians, the Church is pushed underground. It is upon thousands of Christians are imprisoned and killed or sent into exile.

2. What were some of the pagan myths used to slander the early Church? Are these myths still used today?

3. Why did the Roman Empire persecute the Church? Do you think such persecution could happen in our modern world?

4. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote seven letters on his way to be martyred in Rome. What are some of the important points made in these early Christian writings?

View Track 2, *Persecution of the Epic: A Journey Through Church History* 30-week Study DVD (or listen to the audio CD). Follow the presentation by clicking on the *Epic: 30-Week History Timeline Chart*.

## NOTES

5. During this time, heresies arose to attack the Church from within. What were some of the early heresies of the Church, and what were some of their mistaken beliefs?

Answering these questions will help you learn the story of the Church. If other questions come to mind, write them down to discuss in the group.

1. What was the Church in the Roman Empire? Give some of its characteristics.

### ***The Persecution of the Early Christians***

There were thousands and thousands of people, men with their wives and children, who despised temporal life according to the teaching of our Savior, suffered all kinds of death. Some after bearing the iron hooks, the racks, the whips and other torments innumerable and terrible to hear were finally consigned to the flames; others were drowned in the sea. Still others bravely offered their heads to the executioner, died under torture, or expired from hunger. Some were crucified in the manner used for criminals, and others even more cruelly were fixed to the cross with their head down and left to die of hunger.

— Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* VIII, 8

## **D. Application**

*This question asks you to think about how the lessons of history apply to today—either to the Church, to society, or to you. After meditating on this question, spend time with God in prayer.*

St. Justin Martyr wrote a defense of the Faith to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius. Many others rose up to fight the myths and lies being spread about the Christians by Roman society. What are some of the modern-day myths and lies told about the Church and her teachings? Share an experience in which you defended the Faith. What are some effective ways to counter the misrepresentation and misinformation of the Faith in our modern world?

Dear Lord ...



## Session 3 – Questions

### Persecution – Part II

# EPIC

A JOURNEY THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY

#### A. Establish the Context

*“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians.”*

– Tertullian

For more than 200 years, the Roman Empire has persecuted the Faith. The Church has not disappeared but rather, emboldened by the witness of the martyrs, has continued to grow. The persecutions continue under the selfish rule of several emperors. In the late third century, Diocletian becomes Emperor of Rome and establishes a new order of government. His Tetrarchy, consisting of two co-emperors (Augustuses) and their associated understudies (Caesars), divides the unwieldy empire into two halves (East and West) with more manageable regional portions.

Diocletian works hard to rebuild the crumbling empire and meets with temporary success. While he has no direct animosity towards Christians, at the behest of Galerius, his understudy, he begins what would become the worst of all Roman persecutions of the Church. An empire-wide campaign to completely eradicate the Church is undertaken. Thousands upon thousands of Christians are tortured and killed or sent to be slaves in the mines, a blood-drenched climax to this period of cruel torment and suffering.

Battered from without and sabotaged from within, the Church is sure to be torn apart and trampled into the dust of history. But Christ does not allow it. The persecutions end, and the Church rises from the ashes only to be faced with a serious question: how will she deal with those who gave in during the persecutions and do not maintain the Faith and are now seeking re-entry into the community? Should a strict policy of no re-admittance or one of mercy reign supreme?

Christian response  
to the persecution:

*Traditores*  
those who gave in

*Confessores*  
the faithful

*Lapsi*  
those who gave in but  
repented after persecution  
ended

#### NOTES

1. Tertullian was one of the great early Church Fathers who defended the Faith from pagan critics. His early work is even quoted in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Yet, despite his brilliance and devotion, he died a heretic. What lessons can we learn from Tertullian's tragic fall?



## B. Learn the Story

View Track 3, *Persecution – Part II*, of the *Epic: A Journey through Church History* 20-Week Study DVD (or listen to the audio CD). Follow the presentation by referring to your *Epic Church History Timeline Chart*.

## NOTES

Overall, there were twelve major persecutions under the Roman Empire. Some of the emperors who persecuted Christians were motivated by a desire to suppress the growth of Christianity, while others were motivated by a desire to maintain the traditional Roman religion. The persecution of Christians was often motivated by a desire to maintain the traditional Roman religion, which was the official religion of the empire. The persecution of Christians was often motivated by a desire to maintain the traditional Roman religion, which was the official religion of the empire. The persecution of Christians was often motivated by a desire to maintain the traditional Roman religion, which was the official religion of the empire.

The story of the early Church is filled with the sacrifices of great martyrs. What is his or her story and how did you find it? What is his or her story and how did you find it? What is his or her story and how did you find it?

## D. Application

This question asks you to think about how the lessons of history apply to today – either to the Church, society or to you. After meditating on this question, spend time with God in prayer.

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians," said Tertullian. Persecution was the ultimate test for the early Christians. Many martyrs, like St. Perpetua, went to their death while their close friends and families pleaded with them to turn away from their faith and save their lives. Often, the only thing asked of them was to offer one tiny pinch of incense to an idol, but they refused to compromise their faith. While the modern world, in most cases, does not openly persecute Christians, it does encourage us to make small

## C. Take a Deeper Look

Answering these questions will help you learn the story of the Church. If other questions come to mind, write them down to discuss in the group.

1. The early Church Fathers defended the Faith by explaining it to the Romans and fighting the errors of heretics. Who were some of these first apologists? Why are they important?

1. What is the color of this time period? How can you remember it?

2. What is the main theme of this period?

2. Tertullian was one of the great early Church Fathers who defended the Faith from pagan critics. His early work is even quoted in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Yet, despite his brilliance and devotion, he died a heretic. What lessons can we learn from Tertullian's tragic fall?

## F. Further Reading

For those who want to pursue outside readings, here is a list of good books that cover this time period where authors approach the subject of Church history and Western civilization from a Catholic worldview. This list is not exhaustive but is provided as a starting point. Happy reading!



3. Overall, there were twelve major persecutions under the Roman Empire. What were the names of some of the emperors who persecuted Christians during this time period? What were the dates and circumstances of these persecutions?
4. The story of the early Church is filled with the sacrifices of great martyrs. Is there a particular martyr of the early Church whom you admire or relate to? What is his or her story, and how did you first learn about this saint?
5. Christians presented no real threat to the Roman Empire, since they were, for the most part, tax-paying, law-abiding citizens, yet they were consistently persecuted. St. Justin Martyr explained why by saying, "The world suffers nothing from Christians but hates them because they reject its pleasures." What do you think he meant?
6. One of the great difficulties the early Church faced was how to deal with *lapsi*, or lapsed Catholics who fell away from the Faith during persecution. Why do you think this was such a difficult problem? Is this a problem in the Church today?

### St. Justin Martyr's Teaching on the Eucharist (A.D. 155)

We call this food Eucharist; and no one else is permitted to partake of it, except one who believes our teaching to be true and who has been washed in the washing which is for the remission of sins and for regeneration, and is thereby living as Christ has enjoined. For not as common bread nor common drink do we receive these; but since Jesus Christ our Savior was made incarnate by the word of God and had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so too, as we have been taught, the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by Him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus.

— *First Apology*, 65

## D. Application

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“The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians,” said Tertullian. Persecution was the ultimate test for the early Christians. Many martyrs, like St. Perpetua, went to their death while their close friends and families pleaded with them to turn away from their faith and save their lives. Often, the only thing asked of them was to offer one tiny pinch of incense to an idol, but they refused to compromise their faith. While the modern world, in most cases, does not openly persecute Christians, it does encourage us to make small compromises with our faith so as not to offend others. How are you called to suffer for the Faith in today's world? What can you do to foster a faith that will never compromise?

Dear Lord ...

## E. Wrap-up

Conclude your study of the Persecution period and remember the main events by doing the following:

1. What is the color of this time period? How can you remember it?
2. What is the main theme of this period?
3. Write a one- or two-sentence summary of the Persecution period in order to recall the main events of Church history during this time.

## F. Further Reading

For those who want to pursue outside readings, here is a list of good books that cover this time period whose authors approach the subject of Church history and Western civilization from a Catholic worldview. This list is not exhaustive but is provided as a starting point. Happy reading!

Carroll, Warren H. *The Founding of Christendom*. Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1985. Volume 1 of a planned six-volume work. This is a scholarly read with great detail and an excellent and well-documented work.

Newman, John Cardinal. *Callista*. Cosimo Classics, 2007. A work of historical fiction that focuses on the Roman persecutions in Northern Africa and seamlessly weaves fictional characters with true historical persons.

Riccotti, Giuseppe. *The Age of Martyrs*. Rockford, IL: TAN Books and Publishers, Inc., 1999. An easy-to-read and well-documented history of the great persecution under Diocletian. It gives a broad historical and political background, as well as specific details on the stories of individual martyrs.

## D. Application

This question asks you to think about how the lessons of history apply to today – either to the Church or to you. After meditating on this question spend time with God in prayer.

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians," said Tertullian. Persecution was the ultimate test for the early Christians. Many martyrs, like St. Perpetua, went to their death while their close friends and families pleaded with them to turn away from their faith and save their lives. Often the only thing asked of them was to offer one tiny pinch of incense to an idol, but they refused to compromise their faith. While the modern world in most cases does not openly persecute Christians, it does an equally as subtle thing: it convinces us that our faith is not so important. But the Lord called us to be faithful in today's world, and for that, we must be ready to give up everything. This is the true meaning of being a Christian. Our faith is not just a belief, it is a way of life. We must be willing to give up everything for Christ. Our faith is not just a belief, it is a way of life. We must be willing to give up everything for Christ. Our faith is not just a belief, it is a way of life. We must be willing to give up everything for Christ.

## E. Wrap-up

Conclude your study of the persecution period and remember the main events by doing the following:

1. What is the color of this time period? How can you remember it?
2. What is the main theme of this period?
3. What is the one or two sentence summary of the persecution period in your own words?
4. What is the one or two sentence summary of the persecution period in your own words?
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