

SAINT MAURICE

Objectives:

General: Confess your faith before the whole world.

Specific:

1. Witness by confessing your believe whenever you have chance to do so.
2. Witness by your showing your Christian character and values everywhere.
3. Witness by your good deeds even to your enemies.

Instructions:

1. Explain that the only way for a person to give yourself up is to believe that the eternal life is more important than this life.
2. Give the students other examples for martyrs (men & women)

Bible Verse:

*“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it:
but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”*

(Luke 9:24)

Lesson:

SAINT MAURICE AND THE THEBAN LEGION

Introduction

A traveler, on the highway that leads from Geneva to Rome, will notice a small and very old Swiss town called Saint Maurice. This town was known in Roman times as Aguanum, an important communication centre. It was there that a Coptic officer named Maurice and 6600 of his fellow soldiers died for the sake of Christ at the hands of the impious Emperor Maximian (285-305 AD).

Who are They?

Under Maximian, who was an Emperor of the Roman Commonwealth, with Diocletian as his colleague, an uprising forced Maximian to war using an army of which one unit was the Theban Legion. This unit had been recruited from Upper Egypt and consisted entirely of Christians. They were good men and excellent soldiers who, even under arms, did not forget to render to God the things of God, and to Caesar the things of Caesar.

Celebrating the Victory

After the revolt was quelled, the Emperor Maximian issued an order that the whole army should join in offering sacrifices to the gods for the success of their mission. The order included killing Christians.

Only the Theban Legion dared to refuse to comply with these orders. The legion withdrew itself, encamped near Aguanum and refused to take part in these rites.

Testing their Faith

Maximian was then resting in a near-by place called Octudurum. When the news came to him, he repeatedly commanded them to obey his orders, and upon their constant and unanimous refusals, sentenced them to be decimated. Accordingly, every tenth man was put to death. A second decimation was ordered unless the men obeyed the order given, but there was a great shout through the camp: they all declared that they would never allow themselves to carry out such a sacrilegious order. They had always had a horror of idolatry, they had been brought up as Christians and were instructed in the One Eternal God and were ready to suffer extreme penalties rather than do anything contrary to their religion. When Maximian heard this he got angrier than ever. Like a savage beast he ordered the second decimation to be carried out, intending that the remainder should be compelled to do what they had hitherto refused. Yet they still maintained their beliefs. After the second decimation, Maximian warned the remainder that it was of no use for them to trust in their number, for if they persisted in their disobedience, not a man among them would escape death.

The greatest mainstay of their faith in this crisis was undoubtedly their captain Maurice, with his lieutenants Candid, the first commanding officer, and Exuperius the "campidoctor". He fired the hearts of the soldiers with fervour by his encouragement. Maurice, calling attention to the example of their faithful fellow soldiers, already martyrs, persuaded them all to be ready to die in their turn for the sake of their baptismal vow (the promise one makes at his baptism to renounce Satan and his abominable service and to worship only God). He reminded them of their comrades who had gone to heaven before them. At his words, a glorious eagerness for martyrdom burned in the hearts of those most blessed men.

Loyalty to God first

Fired thus by the lead of their officers, the Thebans sent to Maximian who was still enraged, a reply as loyal as it was brave: "Emperor, we are your soldiers but also the soldiers of the True God. We owe you military service and obedience, but we cannot renounce Him who is our Creator and Master, and also yours even though you reject Him. In all things which are not against His law, we most willingly obey you, as we have done hitherto. We readily oppose your enemies whoever they are, but we cannot stain our hands with the blood of innocent people (Christians). We have taken an oath to God before we took one to you, you cannot place any confidence in our second oath if we violate the first. You commanded us to execute Christians, behold we are such. We confess God the Father, Creator of all things and His Son, Jesus Christ, God. We have seen our comrades slain with the sword, we do not weep for them but rather rejoice at their honour. Neither this, nor any other provocation has tempted us to revolt. Behold, we have arms in our hands, but we do not resist, because we would rather die innocent than live by any sin.

Their Martydom

When Maximian heard this, he realized that these men were obstinately determined to remain in their Christian faith. He therefore ordered, that they should be rounded up, and the slaughter completed. The troops sent to execute this order came to the blessed legion and drew their swords upon those holy men who, for love of God, did not refuse to die. They were all slain with the sword. They never resisted in any way. Putting aside their weapons, they offered their necks to the executioners. Neither their numbers, nor the strength of arms tempted them to uphold the justice of their cause by force. They kept

just one thing in their minds, that they were bearing witness to Him who was lead to death without protest, and Who, like a lamb, opened not his mouth. Thus, by the savage cruelty of this tyrant, that fellowship of the saints was perfected. For they despised things present in hope of things to come. So was slain that truly angelic legion of men who, we trust, now praise the Lord God of Hosts, together with the legions of Angels, in heaven forever.

During their martyrdom, numerous miracles happened, which undoubtedly largely contributed to the massive conversion of the inhabitants of these regions to Christianity.

Discovery of their Bodies

About a hundred years after the martyrdom, the bodies of the martyrs were discovered and identified by Saint Theodore the Bishop of Octudurm. He built a Basilica in their honour at Aguanum, the remains of which are visible even now. This later became the centre of a monastery built about the year 515 AD on land donated by King Sigismund of Burgundy.

Conclusion:

1. Witness your faith in Christ before everyone.
2. Do not sacrifice your Christian morals, no matter the situation.
3. Have the courage to follow church traditions and dogma even when among non-Copts or non-Christian.