

In the Book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar summons Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He is upset that they have not bowed down and worshiped a false god. The three chose to remain faithful to God and will not renounce their faith. The king was furious and had them thrown into the fire. As the fire got hotter, they sang praises to God all the louder. “Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord, praise and exalt him above all forever” (3:57). Impressed by their faith and the inability of the fire to destroy them, Nebuchadnezzar has a change of heart and reversed his death sentence. “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego... they disobeyed the royal command and yielded their bodies rather than serve or worship any god except their own God... For there is no other God who can rescue like this” (95-96).

Today we celebrate the Feast of Cosmas and Damian. They were twins whose Christian faith was strong and vibrant. As physicians (perhaps one a doctor and the other a pharmacist) they were renowned for their healing skills. Being good stewards of the knowledge entrusted to them, they refused to charge for their services. In addition to healing the body, they also tended to the soul and shared their Christian faith freely. “Their charity and Christian witness won many converts to the faith and earned them a place of prominence in the Christian communities of Asia Minor.”ⁱ

Under the reign of Roman Emperor Diocletian, Cosmas and Damian were arrested by Governor Lysias of Celicia and ordered to deny their faith in Christ. They refused. According to one legend, they escaped drowning, burning at the stake and flogging.ⁱⁱ What is certain is that the brothers stayed true to their faith no matter the physical pressure for them to renounce it. With torture and other methods of persecution ineffective, Lysias ordered both to be beheaded. Their deaths only strengthened the faith of other Christians.

In death they continued their ministry of healing and witness to the faith. Many miracles were attributed to their intercession. “When the Emperor Justinian was sick, he prayed to Saints Cosmas and Damian for a cure. Out of gratitude for receiving this favor, he enlarged the city of Cyr and its church. Numerous other churches were erected for them at Constantinople and Rome.”ⁱⁱⁱ In Eucharistic Prayer I, their names are recited along with the Apostles and other martyrs whose memory we venerate.

The Book of Daniel from the Old Testament gave strength to those who were persecuted in the second century before Christ. Under the Diocletian Persecution of the 3rd and 4th century, Cosmas and Damian helped others to live by their convictions. Martyrdom of Christians continues to the present day. In Nigeria, where Boko Haram have killed more than 37,500 and displaced more than 2.5 million,^{iv} Christian witnesses are still willing to shed their blood rather than recant their faith. “People who live and die according to their convictions and faith give hope to the world long after their deaths.”^v Amidst your own trials and tribulations, remember their witness and honor it with a steadfast faith of your own.

As for the martyrs, the Lord assures us, “Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed, because God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them, and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself” (Wisdom 3:5-6).

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saints-cosmas-and-damian/

ⁱⁱ cosmas-and-damian.org/story.html

ⁱⁱⁱ loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/saints/saints-stories-for-all-ages/saints-cosmas-and-damian/

^{iv} voanews.com/africa/nigerian-military-leader-fatally-wounded-boko-haram-ambush-remembered-hero

^v Ibid, Loyola Press.