

On the evening of my ordination to the priesthood, I was lying on the sofa in a semi-conscious state. It had been quite a day. I was physically and emotionally exhausted. Then I became aware that my son was hovering over me. I opened my eyes to see him in a stance reminiscent of Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin.

And then, he spoke:

“Crikey. Would you look at that. In its native habit. A Fierce Wild Priest!”

My eyeroll came naturally enough. And, I couldn’t help but pleased that something from the hymns he’d heard growing up stuck in his head – even if it was a little twisted.

*One was a doctor and one was a queen and one was a shepherdess on the green.*

The writer of the lyrics to the hymn we just sang, Lesia Scott, had real saints in mind during her composition. The doctor was St. Luke. The queen was Margaret of Scotland. The shepherdess was Joan of Arc. They were patient, brave, and true. They toiled. They fought. Their lives are examples to us of how to follow Jesus.

*One was a soldier, one was a priest.*

The soldier was Martin of Tours. I love his story.

While Martin was a soldier in the Roman army and stationed in modern-day France. One day as he was approaching the gates of the city of Amiens, he met a scantily clad beggar. He impulsively cut his military cloak in half to share with the man. That night, Martin dreamed of Jesus wearing the half-cloak he had given away. He heard Jesus say to the angels: "Martin, who is still but a [catechumen](#), clothed me with this robe." In another version, when Martin woke, he found his cloak restored to wholeness. Martin was then baptized at the age of 18. He later became the bishop of Tours.

The priest doesn't have such a miraculous story, but he wrote great poetry! He was John Donne.

*You can see them in schools or in lanes, or at sea, in church, or in trains, or in shops, or at tea. For the saints of God are just folk like me and I want to be one too.*

For the most part, the saints were just folks like you and me. Many were scholars or teachers. Some were nurses. Many were religious – nuns or monks or deacons

or priests or bishops. They traveled town to town; they sailed the ocean. They were hostesses and hosts. They shared the love of Jesus with the people with whom they came in contact.

Saints are known as “Hallows”. Hence, the Feast of All Hallow’s Eve, or Halloween, on October 31<sup>st</sup>. The term originated in Christian tradition, but other faith traditions have developed their own ways to designate those persons who have a certain special holiness about them. For the Jews, it is tzadik; for the Muslims, wali (wall-eye). For the Hindu it is rishi; for the Sikh, guru. Buddhists have arhat or bodhisattva. It seems to be an interfaith phenomenon to honor persons who are exemplars of their beliefs.

It sounds great. I’d love to be an exemplar of faith, especially if it requires shopping and tea.

But, then we have the

*One who was killed by a fierce wild beast.*

Excuse me – all kidding by my son aside – I do not want to be killed by a fierce wild beast. I don't want to be killed. Period. Yet, if we take seriously the fact that the saints of God are just folks like us, some of us might end up as beast fodder. Not all saints are martyrs, but all martyrs are saints.

What makes this more serious is that the word “martyr” comes from the Greek word that means “witness”.

Of course, we think, it could never happen here. We're in a civilized place. Christians aren't being persecuted here like in the early days of Christianity. Ignatius of Antioch was the priest sent to his death by wild beasts. Perpetua and her companions were murdered by Romans. We're no longer pulling out teeth like what happened to St. Apollonia or being crucified upside down like St. Peter. When we read about the martyrs of Japan in 1597, it's ancient history. Yellow fever killed the martyrs of Memphis, Tennessee, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sometimes the wild beasts are germs!

Most often, sadly, the “wild beasts” are, like the people they kill, folks like you and me. Granted, at the time of their acts of violence, one could argue that their

mental state makes them NOT like you and me. However, we are all incredibly fragile human beings on a fragile earth. There, but for the grace of God, go you and I.

Over the past two decades, too many new saints have been created in our land. The martyrs of Pittsburgh. The martyrs of Charleston. The martyrs of Sandy Hook. The martyrs of Parkland and Orlando. And then there is Virginia Tech, Sutherland Springs, San Bernadino, Binghamton, Fort Hood, Aurora, the Washington Navy Yard, Red Lake, Umpqua, Las Vegas and Santa Fe.

They were just folks like you and me. At work. At school. In church. In lanes. Today, they are with Luke, Margaret, Joan, Martin, John, and Ignatius.

To proclaim one's faith is to risk everything we have. There is not one reason, not the least, that proves we could not experience such a tragedy. As a matter of fact, just after the shootings at Mother Immanuel Church in South Carolina, a young man came into the church and sat down with our EfM class one Wednesday morning. I knew him, of course, so I knew he wasn't a threat. But no

one else did. After he left, we realized that we were as vulnerable as those who invited a young man into their Bible study one night. There, but for the grace of God...

Friends, Christian discipleship isn't only about the exemplary people who loved Jesus and died old and in their beds. They are cool to read about and ponder how we can emulate them. It also is about those who embrace and commend their faith under most extreme circumstances. People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Nazi Germany. People like Rachel Joy Scott at Columbine.

God save us from such a day.

God help us remember those saints who are just like you and me. Each of us must do what we can to prevent such days. Each of us must remember to do unto others that which we would have done to ourselves. And, reversely, not do to others what we would not have done to ourselves. God help us remember the saints and martyrs who lived and died for or because of their faith.

*And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia. Alleluia.*