

SARILING ATIN

In our times, words that were once of great significance to us Christians have gradually lost their savor. "Clarity" has been associated with lottery draws, asylums, or orphanages. "Redemption" is applied to centers where you exchange winning coupons for your prize. "Hope" is the name of a woman, or the family name of a comedian, or of a luxury cigarette. "Martyr" is the role played by the abandoned mother or jilted wife in our favorite soap opera. No wonder, if a guy comes to tell us that he is a martyr, we eye him with suspicion. Either he is a masochist or simply a dodo. We would not spare him even the peel of an onion.

The "Blessed," how about them? Oh, they are now commonly known as the *beatos* and the *beatas*, forever kneeling on their favorite church pews, sibilantly praying to their favorite saints. And the "saints"? They are the dolled up images and statues we wipe with our handkerchiefs as we bombard them with supplications which we, ourselves, hardly work far to realize.

There are other words, great Christian words, which have been dragged down from their places of respectability because of disuse, abuse, misuse, or plain ignorance on our part.

"Do you know what an 'ascetic' is?" I asked one of my friends the other day. "Oh, that" — he replied — "that sounds *sour*." He had in mind acetic acid, commonly known as vinegar. "How about a hermit?" "Gee", he beamed, "he surely stinks. He looks like a guru." Undaunted, I asked him another: "What about a monk?" He thought for a while, then innocently replied: "Is that short for monkey?" I gave up, words. Come February, a Filipino will be *beatified* by Pope John Paul II (no less) here in the Philippines. Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino *Martyr*, will henceforth be called *Blessed* and perhaps, in the near future, be called *Saint*.

Martyr, Blessed, Saint, Atbp.

The questions you would probably ask are: "What is meant by the word 'beatify'?" "What really is a martyr? a blessed? A saint?" For unless you know all these words in their truest meaning, Pope John Paul II shall have come and gone and all that is left to remember would be: "He paid a friendly visit."

So, what is Beatification?

Beatification comes from the Latin word *beatus*, which means *happy*, *blessed*, or *holy*. To *beatify*, then, means to make or declare *happy*, *blessed*, or *holy*.

In Church usage, beatification is the act by which the Church, through an official decree by the Pope, permits a certain region, nation, or religious institute to venerate publicly under the title *Blessed*, a dead person whose life is marked by holiness or heroic practice of the virtue.

By beatifying a person, the Church recognizes his holiness, and thereby proposes him to all Christians for veneration, as a model for Christian living, and as an intercessor before God.

It is not easy to be beatified. Nor is it easy for the Church to arrive at the verdict to beatify a person. First of all, it is not easy to be holy. Let us face it:

we do not want to be holy, or at least, not *now* when we are still enjoying life. "My God," a modern man prays, "Keep away from me the temptation of sanctity. It is not my work. Don't be mistaken, I am not of that sort that can." Or, perhaps we really desire holiness but confronted by its demands, we bargain like St. Augustine who prayed for conversion but adds: "But please Lord, not now!"

In truth, holiness is not the prerogative of a few. The invitation to holiness is offered to all — without exception. What are we called members of a *Holy Catholic Church*? "But I am not the sort of person who can become a saint," you complain. Now, who is the sort of person who can? The answer is: *everyone*.

Lorenzo Ruiz, for instance. Who could have thought that he was to become a martyr? His life did not depict the history of an exemplary Christian who followed a straight course, restful, placid, always focused on one goal which is heaven. He was, rather, just like any one of us: an ordinary person, lost in the crowd, lived a confused life, married, with three children, poor, involved in a crime, a fugitive. And yet, after more than 400 years of serious investigation, it was found out that he was not that ordinary, after all. He was a man apart. He was a man among men. And why? It was because when the invitation to holiness was extended to him (and such an invitation comes without warning), he accepted it willingly and responded generously.

In Lorenzo's example, we see that holiness is open for everyone. The only thing it takes to become a saint is the willingness to try. Of course, even this willingness is itself part of the invitation. God masterminds it all in His own loving, mysterious way.

So, come February, Lorenzo Ruiz, a Filipino, a "sariling atin" will be beatified. We know what it means to us! If Lorenzo was the first, he will not be the last. All of us, with God's grace, are capable to reach such heights.

How about the martyr?

The martyr, as mentioned above, has been consigned to soap operas. Originally, however, their place was the arena where, amidst the blood thirsty mob of unbelievers, they witnessed to their faith by dying. A martyr, in its original meaning, is simply a witness. Anyone, then, who witnesses to his faith by words, or by deeds, is a martyr. In this sense, all of us Christians are called to be martyrs because we are to witness to Christ in an infinity of possible ways.

Later, however, martyrdom has been restricted to witnessing to one's faith through death. This was partly dictated by history. Christianity, as we know, has not always been welcome among men. There had been times when to say openly "I am a Christian" is to court death. Thus, come the close connection between witnessing and dying. Death itself became an effective testimony of what one believes. A Christian martyr was one who shed his blood for Christ. "For Christ" are the crucial words. For a martyr never dies for an ideology (as the Marxist does) but for a person who is considered as Lord. Lorenzo's martyrdom is beautifully phrased by his own words:

"Had I many a thousand lives, I shall offer all for Him."

In so few a word, Lorenzo has acknowledged what Christ meant for him. And thus must have set his persecutors and observers asking: What is so attractive in Christ that this person is willing to give even his own life for Him? This question might have been choked back or stifled with superficial answers but if pursued, such a question might have led them to belief. For that is one of the purpose of martyrdom - to make men ask questions which will lead them ultimately to Christ. "The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians" are words that reveal the relevance of martyrdom, especially to unbelievers.

So, Lorenzo Ruiz will be beatified in February as the First Filipino martyr. Does this mean that we too have to go to Japan in imitation of

Him? Must we go to China or Russia and risk our lives? "

We need not. Although all of us are called to be martyrs (that is, witnesses to our faith), we are not all called to a bloody martyrdom. For all we know, God might not be asking us now to shed our blood but our complacency, and our indifference: He is asking us to shed our status as run-of-the-mill Christians. Indeed, we need not go to unbelievers and proclaim our faith to them. Around us are "believers" who are searching for Christ. Would it be too much to play the martyr and lead them to Him? Besides, what is more inspiring than to hear someone tell us: "I have found Christ when I found you!" This is worth all the dying we might go through.

And Finally, the Blessed and the Saints

Again, there is nothing like tracing a word from its roots. "Blessed" and

"Saints" are English equivalents for the Latin "Beatus" and "Sanctus" respectively. Beatus means (as mentioned earlier) holy, happy, or blessed. Sanctus means Sacred, sanctified, and also holy.

Before, beatus and sanctus are interchangeably used. A beatus is also a sanctus. A holy man is also a happy man. A saint is person who is blessed. Later, with the fixing of the juridical processes which precede the proclamation of a saint, beatus and sanctus became technical words: the Blessed being a title applied to a beatified while the Saint is a title reserved for the canonized.

Canonization, then, is the act, whereby the Church, through a papal decree finally and definitively (and therefore, infallibly) proclaims a person as a Saint. Beatification is nearly always a stage preceding it. In both cases, the same rigorous proofs of eminent virtues is demanded. ●

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