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29 May

Blessed JOSEPH KOWALSKI, priest and martyr

Memorial

(For the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Volunteers of Don Bosco: *Optional Memorial*)

Joseph Kowalski was born on 19 March 1911 at Siedliska (Poland). From an early age he showed signs of a vocation to dedicating himself to God in a special way. In 1927, after having finished at the Salesian secondary school in Oswięcim, he was accepted in the Novitiate of the Salesian Congregation. Even as a cleric he had a spiritual desire, which he recorded in his notebook: ‘to suffer and to be despised for you, Lord.’ After having completed the various stages of formation, he was ordained priest in 1938 and immediately he was engaged in educative pastoral work in the Salesian house at Krakow.

On 23 May 1941, with other Salesians he was arrested by the Nazi and taken to the concentration camp at Oswięcim (Auschwitz). Also in this place he lived his life as a priest: through his ministry and personal witness he brought hope to his companions in suffering. He was martyred on 4 July 1942, a victim of hatred for religion and for the faith. The immediate cause for his martyrdom was his refusal to trample on his rosary beads.

Pope John Paul II beatified him on 13 June 1999 in Warsaw, with a group of 108 Polish martyrs, victims of the Nazi persecution during the second world war.

From the Common of martyrs: for one martyr; or from the Common of pastors. Psalms of the day as in the Ordinary

Office of Readings

SECOND READING

From the «Private Notes » (1930-1940) and from the «Letter to his parents » (1941) of Blessed Joseph Kowalski, priest

(Positio super martyrio, vol. III-2, Summarium, pp. 1679-1681, passim)

To suffer and to be despised for love of the Lord

I have to be a holy Salesian, holy as was my father Don Bosco. O my good Jesus, give me a will that is persevering, firm and strong so that I may persevere in my holy resolutions and I may reach the highest ideal, holiness, that I have set myself. I can and I have to be holy. «In Te Domine speravi, non confundar in aeternum». O my Jesus, help me with Thy holy grace, because without Thee I can do nothing, but with Thee strengthening me I can do everything [...]

Jesus, I thank Thee that in my proud heart Thou hast placed an ardent desire for suffering and contempt, so that I may be despised. From now on my watchword will be: “to live and suffer for Thee Jesus and to suffer and be despised.” Jesus, here then my voice which rises from the depth of my heart: “to suffer and to be despised for Thee, Lord” – may this voice reach Thy ears. Listen O Lord and open thy ears to the voice of my prayer and of my cry. Hear me O Lord, and grant me the strength necessary.

Jesus, to Thee I dedicate myself totally, to Thee I give my poor heart which desires ardently to love Thee, to give itself to Thee and consecrate itself to Thee. Jesus, grant that I may never separate myself from Thee and that even unto death I may be faithful to Thee and that I may faithfully keep

the oath I have made: “Rather death than to offend Thee by the smallest sin.” O God have mercy on me. Give me your love, and with that Thou wilt give me everything. O Lord let me be despised, forgotten, considered nothing, scorned. This goes against my inclination, but I see that it is necessary for me. O Lord, grant me this grace, to become mad for Thy love (*at this point in the diary there is a cross in the blood of the Blessed and beneath the cross the inscription: “To suffer and to be despised”*).

With full awareness and totally determined and ready to accept all the consequences I embrace the sweet cross of Christ’s call and I desire to carry it until the very end, until death. It will be my consolation, all my glory and my delight. “«Absit mihi gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri Jesu Christi, per quem mihi mundus crucifixus est et ego mundo». Without the cross, without suffering I gain nothing, without the cross I will will not become a saint. In this world everything comes and is born in suffering.

In the present political and war-threatening events when it seems that everything is conspiring against us and aimed at our total extinction and the last ray of hope has gone out, “God watches over everything, and nothing happens without his will.” This important thought ought to fill me with peace even when it will be necessary to give one’s life for thing worth while. This would really true happiness and a great gain.

Be at peace, I am in the hands of God [...].I want to assure that at every step I feel God’s strength. In spite of the present situation, I am happy and totally at peace; I am convinced that wherever I may find myself and whatever may happen, everything comes from the fatherly Providence of God who in the best way possible controls the fate of all nations and of all men.

RESPONSORY

2 Tm 4, 7-8; Phil 3, 8-10

R/. I have run the great race, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith, * and now the prize the garland of righteousness awaits me.

V/. I have been glad to lose everything, that I may learn to know Christ and what it means to share his sufferings, to be moulded in the pattern of his death:

R/. and now the prize the garland of righteousness awaits me.

Concluding prayer as at Morning Prayer.

Morning Prayer

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Cor 1, 3-5

Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father, the God from whom all help comes; he helps us in all our troubles, so that we are able to help those who have all kinds of troubles, using the same help that we ourselves have received from God. Just as we have a share in Christ’s many sufferings, so also through Christ we share in his great help.

SHORT RESPONSORY

R/. The Lord is my strength, * I will sing praise to him.

The Lord is my strength, I will sing praise to him

V/. He is my salvation:

* I will sing praise to him.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

The Lord is my strength, I will sing praise to him.

Ant. At the Ben. Anyone who hates his soul in the world will save it for the eternal life.

INTERCESSIONS

United in praise and thanksgiving to God the Father for the witness even unto martyrdom of
Blessed Joseph Kowalski, we pray to our Saviour:
You redeemed us with your precious blood O Lord

Through their martyrdom the first disciples followed Christ more closely as he offered himself for the salvation of the world:

- grant that we may conform ourselves more closely to Him who poured out his blood for us and for all, for the remission of sins.

Christ Our Lord, in Blessed Joseph Kowalski you aroused a great desire to suffer and to be despised for love of you:

- grant that we may accept and carry the crosses of everyday with perseverance and joy.

Christ Our Lord, you gave the martyr the strength to confess the faith to the shedding of his blood:

- grant to the young the courage and the perseverance to grow in faith amidst the seductions of the world.

Christ Our Lord, in spite of tribulations, with fidelity to his priestly ministry, Blessed Joseph Kowalski brought hope to his companions in suffering:

- grant that all of us may persevere in bearing witness to Christian life.

At the school of Saint John Bosco the Blessed martyr learned a great love for the Mother of God:

- grant us the grace to live as her children.

Our Father.

PRAYER

O God, who raised up in the priest Blessed Joseph,
the desire for holiness
and the readiness to offer his life for the love of Christ,
grant to us, through his intercession,
the grace to be faithful to our vocation
and to love the cross, which is the way of salvation.
Through Our Lord Jesus Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever.

Evening Prayer

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Pt 4, 13-14

My dear people, if you can have some share in the sufferings of Christ, be glad, because you will enjoy a much greater gladness when his glory is revealed. It is a blessing for you when they

insult you for bearing the name of Christ, because it means that you have the Spirit of glory, the Spirit of God resting on you.

SHORT RESPONSORY

R/. You have tested us God, * and you have brought us out into freedom again.

You have tested us God, and you have brought us out into freedom again.

V/. You have refined us like silver,

* and you have brought us out into freedom again..

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.

You have tested us God, and you have brought us out into freedom again.

Ant. At the Magn. The saints will dwell in the kingdom of heaven; their peace will last for ever.

INTERCESSIONS

The Lord Jesus Christ lifted up on the cross draws all men and women to himself. We raise to him our praise and petitions:

May the whole world love and adore you Lord.

Blessed Joseph Kowalski in his martyrdom bore witness to the one Shepherd who gave his life for his sheep:

– grant that the service of bishops and priests may be inspired by the tenderness of your Father's love.

May the legacy of the Cross lived in the light of Easter left us by the Blessed martyr:

– bear abundant fruit in our living the Gospel authentically, and in proclaiming to the men and women of today that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of mankind.

With the shedding of his blood the martyr became the imitator of the passion of Christ:

– through his intercession unite us with your passion, which continues in the oppressed, in the marginalised in all who suffer.

On the cross Lord you asked pardon for those who crucified you, and in the Blessed martyr you found someone who imitated you in praying for his executioners,

– help us too to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us.

Lord, the giver of life, remember our brothers and sisters whose lives were cut short by violence and war,

– grant them eternal life in your Kingdom.

Our Father.

PRAYER

O God, who raised up in the priest Blessed Joseph,
the desire for holiness
and the readiness to offer his life for the love of Christ,
grant to us, through his intercession,
the grace to be faithful to our vocation
and to love the cross, which is the way of salvation.
Through Our Lord Jesus Christ your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
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