

[con titolo per ogni pagina doppia: alla sinistra: PROPER OFFICES
alla destra: SAINTS A. VERSIGLIA AND C. CARAVARIO]

25 February

**Saints LOUIS VERSIGLIA bishop
and CALLISTUS CARAVARIO priest
Salesian Protomartyrs**

Feast

Louis Versiglia, born at Oliva Gessi, Pavia, 5 June 1873, entered the Valdocco Oratory at the age of 12 years, and there got to know Don Bosco. He was ordained priest in 1895 and for some years was Master of Novices at Genzano, Rome. In 1906 he led the first Salesian missionary expedition to China, fulfilling a repeated prophecy of Don Bosco. In 1918 the Salesians received from the Vicar Apostolic of Canton the mission of Shiu Chow. Fr Louis Versiglia was appointed Vicar Apostolic, and on 9 January 1921 was consecrated Bishop. He was a true pastor, totally dedicated to his flock. He gave the Vicariate a sound structure with a seminary, formation houses, planning himself various residences and homes for the elderly and those in need. He took particular care in the formation of catechists. He writes in his notes: "The missionary who is not united to God is a pipe detached from the fountain." "The missionary who prays a great deal will also do a great deal." Like Don Bosco he was a model of work and temperance.

Callistus Caravario was born at Cuorné, Turin, 8 June 1903. He was a pupil at the Oratory of Valdocco. In 1924, while still a cleric, he left for China as a missionary. He was sent to Macao, and then two years later to the island of Timor, edifying everyone with his kindness and apostolic zeal. On 18 May 1929, having returned to Shiu Chow, Bishop Versiglia ordained him a priest and entrusted to him the mission of Linchow. In a short time he visited all the families and gained the affection of the youngsters in the schools. Meanwhile, in China the politic situation was becoming very tense and especially for the Christians and the foreign missionaries. Persecutions began.

In February 1930, Bishop Versiglia and Fr Caravario travelled together on a pastoral visitation of the Linchow mission. On the journey, on 25 February, a group of communist pirates stopped the Bishop's boat, trying to seize the three catechists who were on the missionaries' boat. The Bishop and Fr Caravario opposed them with all their strength, in order to defend the safety and the virtue of the three young Christian women. They were forcefully beaten and shot at Li Thau Tseui, near the Lin Chow river. Paulo VI recognised their martyrdom in 1973. John Paul II numbered them among the Blessed on 15 May 1983 and canonised them on 1 October 2000.

Office of Readings

HYMN, antiphons and psalms from the Common of Martyrs.

FIRST READING

From the Letter of St Paul to the Romans

Rom. 8, 18-39

*Nothing can separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus*

Brothers, I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

As it is written: *“For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

RESPONSORY

Lk 6, 27; Mt 5, 44-45; 48

R/. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who persecute you, * to be sons of your heavenly Father.

V/. Be perfect as your Father is perfect,

R/. to be sons of your heavenly Father.

SECOND READING

From the “Stromati” of Clement of Alexandria

(IV, 4,13-15; PG 8, 1226-1227)

The joyful sacrifice of life in martyrdom

Without any doubt the martyr bears witness in the first place to himself that he has been sincerely faithful to God, then to the tempter that the latter has practised in vain his envy of those who remain faithful with love, and finally to the Lord for having been divinely permeated by the convincing strength of the true doctrine from which he will never turn aside, not even through fear of death. Moreover he confirms by his action the truth of the preaching, manifesting how powerful is the God to whom he aspires. You can truly admire the love of the martyr which is clearly shown when with gratitude he assimilates himself to God, living and dying for him alone. And not only this, but with his own 'precious blood' he makes the infidels blush red.

In virtue of the commandment of the Gospel the martyr refuses to let fear lead him to deny Christ, and thus he bears witness even in the face of fear. The martyr does not sell his faith for the illusion of receiving gifts in exchange, but for the love of the Lord leaves this life with great joy. Indeed he will be grateful both to the one who has provided the motive for his passage from this world and to the one who has concocted the plot against him. He will use the fact as a suitable though unsought occasion to show what he truly is: to the persecutor in patience, to the Lord in love. Precisely through this love he was already known to the Lord, who knew even from before his birth that he would freely choose martyrdom. The martyr therefore goes to meet his Lord with serene trust and confidence as towards a friend for whom he willingly gives his body and soul, as his judges expected. And so he will hear himself addressed by our Saviour in the words of the poet: "O my dear brother!" precisely because he made himself similar to Him in his life.

I say at once that we call martyrdom 'perfection', not because the martyr has reached the close of life like all others, but because he has accomplished a perfect work of love. If then martyrdom is a confession of faith in God, every soul who leads a pure life in the knowledge of God and obedience to his commandments, is a martyr through his life and word, whatever may be the manner of his bodily death. He pours out, in fact, like blood his faith during his whole life and even to the moment of his death.

RESPONSORY

Cf. Sir 45,9; 2 Tm 4,7-8

R/. The Lord has crowned you with justice, he has put a glorious robe upon you. * The Holy One of Israel has taken up his abode in you.

V/. You have fought the good fight, you have finished the race; the crown of righteousness has been prepared for you.

R/. The Holy One of Israel has taken up his abode in you.

Concluding prayer as at Morning Prayer.

Morning Prayer

* HYMN

From the Common of Martyrs, or another suitable hymn approved by ecclesiastical authority.

The martyrs living now with Christ
In suffering were tried,
their anguish overcome by love,
when on his cross they died.

Across the centuries they come,
in constancy unmoved,
their loving hearts make no complaint;
in silence they are proved.

No man has ever measured love,
or weighed it in his hand,
but God who knows the inmost heart,
gives them the promised land.

Praise Father, Son and Spirit blest
Who guide us through the night
In ways that reach beyond the stars
To everlasting light.

1 ant. When the martyrs of Christ were in torment
they fixed their minds in heavenly things, and said:
Lord, come to our help!

Psalms and canticle from Sunday, 1 week.

2 ant. Let the souls of the saints sing praise to God (alleluia).

3 ant. Choirs of martyrs,
praise the Lord in the highest.

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/. These were holy men * they will live for ever.

These were holy men they will live for ever.

V/. The Lord himself is their reward:

* they will live for ever.

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

These were holy men they will live for ever.

Ant. At the Ben. The blood of your martyrs, O Lord,
will be the fertile seed of Christians.

INTERCESSIONS

United in the liturgy of praise, let us invoke God the Father, who called our martyrs to associate themselves more closely with the Passover of Christ through their supreme testimony of love. Let us say:

Through your martyrs Lord, hear our prayer.

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

- grant that we may be ever more conformed to him who shed his blood for us and for all for the remission of sins.

Louis and Callistus faced death for the safety and salvation of the faithful entrusted to their care:

- grant that we may all persevere in our witness of Christian life.

The holy martyrs sealed by their death their work of evangelization:

- sustain all missionaries and catechists in their service of the proclamation of Christ's Gospel.

The two missionaries filled with their blood the chalice St John Bosco had foretold:

- help us to celebrate the liturgy of life by offering our body as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Following the example of St John Bosco, the holy martyrs record with their lives the daily exercise of charity for the good of others:

- help us to embrace with joy our daily crosses for the love of Christ and of our brothers and sisters.

Our Father.

PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God, you gave to your holy martyrs, Bishop Louis and Father Callistus, the strength to fight to the death to proclaim the Gospel and defend human dignity; grant that we, your loyal followers, may imitate their testimony with persevering faith and assiduous charity. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Prayer during the day

Hymn from the Ordinary. Antiphons and psalms of the feria.

Before noon

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Pt 5, 10-11

You will have to suffer only for a little while: the God of all grace who called you to eternal glory in Christ will see that all is well again; he will confirm, strengthen and support you. His power lasts for ever and ever Amen

V/. The saints trust in the Lord:

R/. They will have courage and will not falter.

Midday

SCRIPTURE READING

Cf. Heb 11, 33

These were men who through faith conquered kingdoms, did what is right and earned the promises in Christ Jesus our Lord.

V/. You have endured sorrow:
R/. But it will be turned to joy.

Afternoon

SCRIPTURE READING

Wisdom 3. 1-2a. 3b

The souls of the just are in God's hands, and no torment, in death itself, has power to reach them. Dead? Fools think so; but all is well with them.

V/. They will come back with songs of joy,
R/. They will carry home their sheaves.

The concluding prayer as at Morning Prayer.

Evening Prayer

HYMN

As at morning prayer.
Or another suitable hymn approved by ecclesiastical authority.

Antiphons, Psalms and canticle from the Common of several martyrs.

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/. Rejoice in the Lord: * Let the just shout for joy.

Rejoice in the Lord: Let the just shout for joy.

V/. Let the upright sing praise;

* Let the just shout for joy.

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

Rejoice in the Lord: Let the just shout for joy.

Ant. At the Magn. Blessed are you Louis and Callistus
who have shed your blood for the Lord;
honouring Christ by your lives,
you have imitated him also in death:
now you shine in the glory of heaven.

INTERCESSIONS

As we commemorate the evening sacrifice of Christ who offered himself for the salvation of the world, let us present to the Father our prayer of thanksgiving and supplication:

We bless you, O Lord.

The Salesian Protomartyrs bore witness to the faith by the sacrifice of their lives:

- do not allow violence and hatred to prevail against those who perform works of charity for their neighbour.

They gave their lives as a sign of their love for something greater:

- grant that we may all live with joy the strong demands of service freely given to our brothers and sisters.

The martyrdom of Saints Louis and Callistus acclaims the inestimable value of chastity for the kingdom of heaven:

- grant that we may willingly accept hardship and sacrifices to educate young people to a more balanced personality.

By their martyrdom the two missionaries have fully embodied the ideal of the good shepherd:

- grant that the service of bishops and priests may be inspired by the tenderness of your fatherly love.

We entrust to you, Father, all who have left this world:

- admit them to live in your abode of light and peace..

Our Father.

PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God, you gave to your blessed martyrs, Bishop Louis and Father Callistus, the strength to fight to the death to proclaim the Gospel and defend human dignity; grant that we, your loyal followers, may imitate their testimony with persevering faith and assiduous charity. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.