# On the Glory of Martyrdom

Pseudo-Cyprian (3rd century and later)

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**Authorship.** These four short works were handed down with Cyprian's writings but are not by him; they come from various unknown authors, mostly of the third century.

# On the Glory of Martyrdom

Argument.-The Glory of Martyrdom,-Namely, What Martyrdom Is, How Great It Is, and of What Advantage It is. By Similitudes, and by Argument Deduced from the Daily Deaths, the Author Exhorts to a Joyous Submission to Death for Christ's Sake. Among the Benefits of Martyrdom He Maintains that Without Experience of the Universal Suffering that Prevails, the Propitiation of Christ Crowns Martyrs in Such a Way that His Saying About the Very Last Farthing is Not Applicable to Them.

1. Although, beloved brethren, it is unfitting, while my speaking to you receives this indulgence, to profess any trepidation, and it very little becomes me to diminish the glory of so great a devotion by the confession of an incipient doubt; yet at the same time I say that my mind is divided by that very deliberation, being influenced by the desire of describing the glory, and restrained from speaking by the magnitude of the virtue (to be described); since it is either not becoming to be silent, or it is perilous to say too little, save that to one who is tossing in doubt this consideration alone is helpful, that it would appear easy for him to be pardoned who has not feared to dare. Wherefore, beloved brethren, although my mental capacity is burdened by the importance of the subject in such a way, that in proportion as it puts itself forth in declaring the dignity of martyrdom, in that degree it is overwhelmed by the very weight of the glory, and by its estimation of all those things concerning which, when it speaks most, it fails, by its address being weakened, and broken, and self-entangled, and does not with free and loosened reins display the might of such glory in the liberal eloquence of discourse; yet, if I am not mistaken, some power there will be in my utterance, which, when fortified by the appeal of the work itself, may here and there pour forth what the unequal consciousness of my ability withheld from my words.

Since, therefore, beloved brethren, involved as we are in affairs so many and important, we are endeavouring with all eagerness and labour to confirm the excellent and most beautiful issues of salvation, I do not fear being so deterred by any slothful dread as to be withheld or rendered powerless; since, if any one should desire to look into that of which we are considering, the hope of devotion being taken into account, and the very magnitude of the thing being weighed, he would rather wonder that I could have dared at all, in a matter wherein both the vastness of the subject oppressed me, and the earnestness of its own desire drove my mind, confused with its joy, into mental difficulties. For who is there whom such

a subject would not alarm? who is there whom it would not overthrow with the fear of its own wonder!

2. For there is indeed, unless I am mistaken, even in the very power of conscience, a marvellous fear which at once disturbs and inflames us; whose power, the more closely you look into, the more the dreadful sense of its obligation is gathered from its very aspect of venerable majesty. For assuredly you ought to consider what glory there is in expiating any kind of defilement of life, and the foulness of a polluted body, and the contagions gathered from the long putrefaction of vices, and the worldly guilt incurred by so great a lapse of time, by the remedial agency of one stroke, whereby both reward may be increased, and guilt may be excluded. Whence every perfection and condition of life is included in martyrdom. This is the foundation of life and faith, this is the safeguard of salvation, this is the bond of liberty and honour; and although there are also other means whereby the light may be attained, yet we more easily arrive at nearness to the promised reward, by help of these punishments, which sustain us.

3. For consider what glory it is to set aside the lusts of this life, and to oppose a mind withdrawn from all commerce with nature and the world, to all the opposition of the adversary, and to have no dread of the cruelty of the torturer; that a man should be animated by the suffering whereby he might be believed to be destroyed, and should take to himself, as an enhancement of his strength, that which the punisher thinks will aggravate his torments. For although the hook, springing forth from the stiffening ribs, is put back again into the wound, and with the repeated strokes of the whip the returning lash is drawn away with the rent portions of the flesh; still he stands immoveable, the stronger for his sufferings, revolving only this in his mind, that in that brutality of the executioners Christ Himself is suffering more in proportion to what he suffers. For since, if he should deny the Lord, he would incur guilt on His behalf for whom he ought to have overcome, it is essential that He should be seen to bear all things to whom the victory is due, even in the suffering.

4. Therefore, since martyrdom is the chief thing, there are three points arising out of it on which we have proposed to ourselves to speak: What it is, how great it is, and of what advantage it is. What, then, is martyrdom? It is the end of sins, the limit of dangers, the guide of salvation, the teacher of patience, the home of life, on the journey to which those things moreover befall which in the coming crisis might be considered torments. By this also testimony is borne to the Name, and the majesty of the Name is greatly enhanced: not that in itself that majesty can be diminished, or its magnitude detracted from, by the guilt of one who denies it; but that it redounds to the increase of its glory, when the terror of the populace that howls around is giving to suffering, fearless minds, and by the threats of snarling hatred is adding to the title whereby Christ has desired to crown the man, that in proportion as he has thought that he conquered, in that proportion his courage has grown in the struggle. It is then, therefore, that all the vigour of faith is brought to bear, then facility of belief is approved, when you encounter the speeches and the reproaches of the rabble, and when you strengthen yourself by a religious mind against those madnesses

of the people,-overcoming, that is, and repelling whatever their blasphemous speech may have uttered to wrong Christ in your person; as when the resisting breakwater repels the adverse sea, although the waves dash and the rolling water again and again beats upon it, yet its immoveable strength abides firm, and does not yield even when covered over by the waves that foam around, until its force is scattered over the rocks and loses itself, and the conquered billow lying upon the rocks retires forth into the open spaces of the shore.

5. For what is there in these speeches other than empty discourse, and senseless talk, and a depraved pleasure in meaningless words? As it is written: "They have eyes, and they see not; ears have they, and they hear not." "Their foolish heart is made sluggish, lest at any time they should be converted, and I should heal them." For there is no doubt but that He said this of all whose hardened mind and obstinate brutality of heart is always driven away and repugnates from a vital devotion, folly leading them, madness dragging them, in fine, every kind of ferocity enraging them, whereby they are instigated as well as carried away, so that in their case their own deeds would be sufficient for their punishment, their guilt would burden the very penalty of the persecution inflicted.

6. The whole of this tends to the praise of martyrdom, the whole illuminates the glory of suffering wherein the hope of time future is beheld, wherein Christ Himself is engaged, of whom are given the examples that we seek, and whose is the strength by which we resist. And that in this behalf something is supplied to us to present, is surely a lofty and marvellous condescension, and such as we are able neither mentally to conceive nor fully to express in words. For what could He with His liberal affection bestow upon us more, than that He should be the first to show forth in Himself what He would reward with a crown in others? He became mortal that we might be immortal, and He underwent the issue of human destiny, by whom things human are governed; and that He might appear to have given to us the benefit of His having suffered, He gave us confession. He suggested martyrdoms; finally, He, by the merits of His nativity, imputed all those things whereby the light (of life) may be quenched, to a saving remedy, by His excellent humility, by His divine strength. Whoever have deserved to be worthy of this have been without death, have overcome all the foulest stains of the world, having subdued the condition of death.

7. For there is no doubt how much they obtain from the Lord, who have preferred God's name to their own safety, so that in that judgment-day their blood-shedding would make them better, and the blood spill would show them to be spotless. Because death makes life more complete, death rather leads to glory. Thus, whenever on the rejoicing wheat-stalks the ears of corn distended by rains grow full, the abundant harvests are forced by the summer; thus, as often as the vine is pruned by the knife from the tendrils that break forth upon it, the bunch of grapes is more liberally clothed. For whatever is of advantage by its injury turns out for the increase of the time to come; just as it has often been of avail to the fields to let loose the flames, that by the heat of the wandering conflagration the blind breathing-holes of the earth might be relaxed. It has been useful to parch the light stalks with the crackling fire, that the pregnant corn-field might raise itself higher, and a more

abundant grain might flourish on the breeding stems. Therefore such also is first of all the calamity, and by and by the fruit of martyrdom, that it so contemns death, that it may preserve life in death.

8. For what is so illustrious and sublime, as by a robust devotion to preserve all the vigour of faith in the midst of so many weapons of executioners? What so Meat and honourable, as in the midst of so many swords of the surrounding guards, again and again to profess in repeated words the Lord of one's liberty and the author of one's salvation?-and especially if you set before your eyes that there is nothing more detestable than dishonour, nothing baser than slavery, that now you ought to seek nothing else, to ask for nothing else, than that you should be snatched from the slaughters of the world, be delivered from the ills of the world, and be engaged only as an alien from the contagion of earth, among the ruins of a globe that is speedily to perish? For what have you to do with this light, if you have the promise of an eternal light? What interest have you in this commerce of life and nature, if the amplitude of heaven is awaiting you? Doubtless let that lust of life keep hold, but let it be of those whom for unatoned sin the raging fire will torture with eternal vengeance for their crimes. Let that lust of life keep hold, but let it be of those to whom it is both a punishment to die, and a torment to endure (after death).

But to you both the world itself is subjected, and the earth yields, if, when all are dying, yon are reserved for this fate of being a martyr. Do we not behold daily dyings? We behold new kinds of death of the body long worn out with raging diseases, the miserable re-suits of some plague hitherto unexperienced; and we behold the destruction of wasted cities, and hence we may acknowledge how great is to be considered the dignity of martyrdom, to the attainment of the glory of which even the pestilence is beginning to compel us.

9. Moreover, beloved brethren, regard, I beseech you, this consideration more fully; for in it both salvation is involved, and sublimity accounted of, although I am not unaware that you abundantly know that we are supported by the judgments of all who stand fast, and that you are not ignorant that this is the teaching handed down to us, that we should maintain the power of so great a Name without any dread of the warfare; because we whom once the desire of an everlasting remembrance has withheld from the longing for this light, and whom the anticipations of the future have wrenched away, and whom the society of Christ so longed for has kept aloof from all wickedness, shrink from offering our soul to death except it be in the way of yielding to a mischief, and that those benefits of God must no longer be retained and clung to by us, since beyond the burning up of these things the reward is so great as that human infirmity can hardly attain sufficiently to speak of it. Heaven lies open to our blood; the dwelling-place of Gehenna gives way to our blood; and among all the attainments of glory, the title of blood is sealed as the fairest, and its crown is designated as most complete.

10. Thus, whenever the soldier returns from the enemy laden with triumphant spoils, he rejoices in his wounds. Thus, whenever the sailor, long harassed with tempests, arrives at safe shores, he reckons his happiness by the dangers that he has suffered. For, unless

I am mistaken, that is assuredly a joyous labour whereby safety is found. Therefore all things must be suffered, all things must be endured; nor should we desire the means of rejoicing for a brief period, and being punished with a perpetual burning. For you ought to remember that you are bound, as it were, by a certain federal paction, out of which arises the just condition either of obtaining salvation, or the merited fearfulness of punishment. You stand equally among adverse things and prosperous, in the midst of arms and darts; and on the one hand, worldly ambition, on the other heavenly greatness, incites you.

11. If you fear to lose salvation, know that you can die; and, moreover, death should be contemned by you, for whom Christ was slain. Let the examples of the Lords passion, I beseech you, pass before your eyes; let the offerings, and the rewards, and the distinctions prepared come together before you, and look carefully at both events, how great a difficulty they have between them. For you will not be able to confess unless you know what a great mischief you do if you deny. Martyrs rejoice in heaven; the fire will consume those who are enemies of the truth. The paradise of God blooms for the witnesses; Gehenna will enfold the deniers, and eternal fire will burn them up. And, to say nothing of other matters, this assuredly ought rather to urge us, that the confession of one word is maintained by the everlasting confession of Christ; as it is written, ”Whosoever shall confess me on earth before men, him also will I confess before my Father, and before His angels.” To this are added, by way of an enhancement of glory, the adornments of virtue; for He says, ”The righteous shall shine as sparks that run to and fro among the stubble; they shall judge the nations, and shall have dominion over the peoples.”

12. For it is a great glory, beloved brethren, to adorn the life of eternal salvation with the dignity of suffering: it is a great sublimity before the face of the Lord, and under the gaze of Christ, to contemn without a shudder the torments inflicted by human power. Thus Daniel, by the constancy of his faith, overcame the threats of the king and the fury of raging lions, in that he believed that none else than God was to be adored. Thus, when the young men were thrown into the furnace, the fire raged against itself. because, being righteous, they endured the flames, and guarded against those of Gehenna, by believing in God, whence also they received things worthy of them: they were not delayed to a future time: they were not reserved for the reward of eternal salvation. God saw their faith; that what they had promised to themselves to see after their death, they merited to see in their body. For how great a reward was given them in the present tribulation could not be estimated. If there was cruelty, it gave way; if there was flame, it stood still. For there was one mind to all of them, which neither violence could break down nor wrath could subvert; nor could the fear of death restrain them from the obedience of devotion. Whence by the Lord’s grace it happened, that in this manner the king himself appeared rather to be punished in those men (who were slain), whilst they escape whom he had thought to slay.

13. And now, beloved brethren, I shall come to that point whence I shall very easily be able to show you how highly the virtue of martyrdom is esteemed, which, although it is well known to all, and is to be desired on account of the insignia of its inborn glory, yet in

the desire of its enjoyment has received more enhancement from the necessity of the times. Because if any one be crowned at that season in which he supposes himself to be crowned, if perchance he should die, he is greatly rewarded. Therefore, sublime and illustrious as martyrdom is, it is the more needful now, when the world itself is turned upside down, and, while the globe is partially shattered, failing nature is giving evidence of the tokens of its final destruction. For the rain-cloud hangs over us in the sky, and the very air stretches forth the mournful rain (curtain); and as often as the black tempest threatens the raging sea, the glittering lightning-flashes glow terribly in the midst of the opening darkness of the clouds. Moreover, when the deep is lashed into immense billows, by degrees the wave is lifted up, and by degrees the foam whitens, until at length you behold it rush in such a manner, that on those rocks on which it is hurled, it throws its foam higher than the wave that was vomited forth by the swelling sea. You read that it is written, that we must pay even the uttermost farthing. But the martyrs alone are relieved of this obligation; because they who trust to their desires for eternal salvation, and have overcome their longings for this life, have been made by the Lord's precepts free from the universal suffering. Therefore from this especially, beloved brethren, we shall be able to set forth what great things the virtue of martyrdom is able to fulfil.

14. And, to pass over everything else, we ought to remember what a glory it is to come immaculate to Christ-to be a sharer in His suffering, and to reign in a perpetual eternity with the Lord-to be free from the threatening destruction of the world, and not to be mixed up with the bloody carnage of wasting diseases in a common lot with others; and, not to speak of the crown itself, if, being situated in the midst of these critical evils of nature, you had the promise of an escape from this life, would you not rejoice with all your heart? If, I say, while tossing amid the tempests of this world, a near repose should invite you, would you not consider death in the light of a remedy? Thus, surrounded as you are with the knives of the executioners, and the instruments of testing tortures, stand sublime and strong, considering how great is the penalty of denying, in a time when you are unable to enjoy, the world for the sake of which you would deny, because indeed the Lord knew that cruel torments and mischievous acts of punishment would be armed against us for our destruction, in order that He might make us strong to endure the all. son, says He, "if thou come to serve God, stand fast in righteousness, and fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation." Moreover, also, the blessed Apostle Paul exclaimed, and said, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

15. Wherefore, beloved brethren, with a firm faith, with a robust devotion, with a virtue opposed to the fierce threatenings of the world, and the savage murmurs of the attending crowds, we must resist and not fear, seeing that ours is the hope of eternity and heavenly life, and that our ardour is inflamed with the longing for the light, and our salvation rejoices in the promise of immortality. But the fact that our hands are bound with tightened bonds, and that heavy links fastened round our necks oppress us with their solid weight, or that our body strained on the rack hisses on the red-hot plates, is not for the sake of seeking our blood, but for the sake of trying us. For in what manner should we be able to recognise

even the dignity of martyrdom, if we were not constrained to desire it, even at the price of the sacrifice of our body? I indeed have known it, and I am not deceived in the truth of what I say, when the cruel hands of the persecutors were wrenching asunder the martyr's limbs, and the furious torturer was ploughing up his lacerated muscles, and still could not overcome him. I have known it by the words of those who stood around. "This is a great matter. Assuredly I know not what it is-that he is not subdued by suffering, that he is not broken down by wearing torments. Moreover, there were other words of those who spoke: "And yet I believe he has children:

for he has a wife associated with him in his house; and yet he does not give way to the bond of his offspring, nor is he withdrawn by the claim of his family affection from his stedfast purpose. This matter must be known, and this strength must be investigated, even to the very heart; for that is no trifling confession, whatever it may be, for which a man suffers, even so as to be able to die."

16. Moreover, beloved brethren, so great is the virtue of martyrdom, that by its means even he who has wished to slay you is constrained to believe. It is written, and we read: "Endure in suffering, and in thy humiliation have patience, because gold and silver are tried by the fire. Since, therefore, the Lord proves us by earthly temptations, and Christ the Judge weighs us by these worldly ills, we must congratulate ourselves, and rejoice that He does not reserve us for those eternal destructions, but rejoices over us as purged from all contagion. But from those whom He adopts as partners of His inheritance, and is willing to receive into the kingdom of heaven, what else indeed does He ask than a walk in integrity? He Himself has said that all things are His, both those things which are displayed upon the level plains, and which lift themselves up into sloping hills; and moreover, whatever the greatness of heaven surrounds, and what the gliding water embraces in the circum-fluent ocean. But if all things are within His ken, and He does not require of us anything but sincere actions, we ought, as He Himself has said, to be like to gold.

Because, when you behold in the glistening ore the gold glittering under the tremulous light, and melting into a liquid form by the roaring flames (for this also is generally the care of the workmen), whenever from the panting furnaces is vomited forth the glowing fire, the rich flame is drawn away from the access of the earth in a narrow channel, and is kept back by sand from the refluent masses of earth. Whence it is necessary to suffer all things, that we may be free from all wickedness, as He has said by His prophet: "And though in the sight of men they have suffered torments, yet is their hope full of immortality; and being vexed in a few things, they shall be well rewarded in many things, because God has tried them, and has found them worthy of Himself, and has received them as a sacrifice of burnt-offering."

17. But if ambitious dignity deter you, and the amount of your money heaped up in your stores influence you-a cause which ever distracts the intentions of a virtuous heart, and assails the soul devoted to its Lord with a fearful trembling-I beg that you would again refer to the heavenly words. For it is the very voice of Christ who speaks, and says, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my name's sake, shall receive in this world a hundred fold, and in

the world to come shall possess eternal life. And we ought assuredly to reckon nothing greater, nothing more advantageous, than this. For although in the nature of your costly garments the purple dye flows into figures, and in the slackening threads the gold strays into a pattern, and the weighty metals to which you devote yourselves are not wanting in your excavated treasures; still, unless I am mistaken, those things will be esteemed vain and purposeless, if, while all things else are added to you, salvation alone is found to be wanting; even as the Holy Spirit declares that we can give nothing in exchange for our soul. For He says, "If you should gain the whole world, and lose your own soul, what shall it profit you, or what exchange shall a man give for his soul? " For all those things which we behold are worthless, and such as resting on weak foundations, are unable to sustain the weight of their own mass.

For whatever is received from the world is made of no account by the antiquity of time. Whence, that nothing should be sweet or dear that might be preferred to the desires of eternal life, things which are of personal right and individual law are cut off by the Lord's precepts; so that in the undergoing of tortures, for instance, the son should not soften the suffering father, and private affection should not change the heart that was previously pledged to enduring strength, into another disposition. Christ of His own right ordained that truth and salvation alone must be embraced in the midst of great sufferings, under which wife, and children, and grandchildren, under which all the offspring of one's bowels, must be forsaken, and the victory be claimed.

18. For Abraham also thus pleased God, in that he, when tried by God, spared not even his own son, in behalf of whom perhaps he might have been pardoned had he hesitated to slay him. A religious devotion armed his hands; and his paternal love, at the command of the Lord who bade it, set aside all the feelings of affection. Neither did it shock him that he was to shed the blood of his son, nor did he tremble at the word; nevertheless for him Christ had not yet been slain. For what is dearer than He who, that you might not sustain anything unwillingly in the present day, first of all Himself suffered that which He taught others to suffer? What is sweeter than He who, although He is our God and Lord, nevertheless makes the man who suffers for His sake His fellow-heir in the kingdom of heaven? Oh grand-I know not what!-whether that reason scarcely bears to receive that consciousness, although it always marvels at the greatness of the rewards; or that the majesty of God is so abundant, that to all who trust in it, it even offers those things which, while we were considering what we have done, it had been sin to desire. Moreover, if only eternal salvation should be given, for that very perpetuity of living we should be thankful.

But now, when heaven and the power of judging concerning others is bestowed in the eternal world, what is there wherein man's mediocrity may not find itself equal to all these trials? If you are assailed with injuries, He was first so assailed. If yon are oppressed with reproaches, you are imitating the experience of God. Whence also it is but a little matter whatever you undergo for Him, seeing that you can do nothing more, unless that in this consists the whole of salvation, that He has promised the whole to martyrdom. Finally, the apostle,

to whom all things were always dear, while he deeply marvelled at the greatness of the promised benefits, said, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to follow, which shall be revealed in us. Because he was musing in his own mind how great would be the reward, that to him to whom it would be enough to be free from death, should be given not only the prerogative of salvation, but also to ascend to heaven: to heaven which is not constrained into darkness, even when light is expelled from it, and the day does not unfold into light by alternate changes; but the serene temperature of the liquid air unfolds a pure brightness through a clearness that reddens with a fiery glow.

19. It now remains, beloved brethren, that we are bound to show what is the advantage of martyrdom, and that we should teach that especially, so that the fear of the future may stimulate us to this glorious title. Because those to whom great things are promised, seem to have greater things which they are bound to fear. For the soldier does not arouse himself to arms before the enemy have brandished their hostile weapons; nor does a man withdraw his ship in an anchorage, unless the fear of the deep have checked his courage. Moreover also, while eager for his wealth, the considerate husbandman does not stir up the earth with a fortunate ploughshare, before the crumbling glebe is loosened into dust by the rain that it has received. Thus this is the natural practice of every man, to be ignorant of what is of advantage, unless you recognise what has been mischievous. Whence also a reward is given to all the saints, in that the punishment of their deeds is inflicted on the unrighteous. Therefore what the Lord has promised to His people is doubtful to none, however ignorant he is; but neither is there any doubt what punitive fires He threatens. And since my discourse has led me thus to argue about both these classes of things in a few words, as I have already spoken of both, I will briefly explain them.

20. A horrible place, of which the name is Gehenna, with an awful murmuring and groaning of souls bewailing, and with flames belching forth through the horrid darkness of thick night, is always breathing out the raging fires of a smoking furnace, while the confined mass of flames is restrained or relaxed for the various purposes of punishment. Then there are very many degrees of its violence, as it gathers into itself whatever tortures the consuming fire of the heat emitted can supply. Those by whom the voice of the Lord has been rejected, and His control contemned, it punishes with different dooms; and in proportion to the different degree of deserving of the forfeited salvation it applies its power, while a portion assigns its due distinction to crime. And some, for example, are bowed down by an intolerable load, some are hurried by a merciless force over the abrupt descent of a precipitous path, and the heavy weight of clanking chains bends over them its bondage. Some there are, also, whom a wheel is closely turning, and an unwearied dizziness tormenting; and others whom, bound to one another with tenacious closeness, body clinging to body compresses: so that both fire is devouring, and the load of iron is weighing down, and the uproar of many is torturing.

21. But those by whom God has always been sought or known, have never lost the position which Christ has given them, where grace is found, where in the verdant fields the luxuriant

earth clothes itself with tender grass, and is pastured with the scent of flowers; where the groves are carried up to the lofty hill-top, and where the tree clothes with a thicker foliage whatever spot the canopy, expanded by its curving branches, may have shaded. There is no excess of cold or of heat, nor is it needed that in autumn the fields should rest, or, again in the young spring, that the fruitful earth should bring forth. All things are of one season: fruits are borne of a continued summer, since there neither does the moon serve the purpose of her months, nor does the sun run his course along the moments of the hours, nor does the banishment of the light make way for night. A joyous repose possesses the people, a calm home shelters them, where a gushing fountain in the midst issues from the bosom of a broken hollow, and flows in sinuous mazes by a course deep-sounding, at intervals to be divided among the sources of rivers springing from it. Here there is the great praise of martyrs, here is the noble crown of the victors, who have the promise of greater things than those whose rewards are more abundant. And that either their body is thrown to wild beasts, or the threatening sword is not feared, is shown as the reason of their dignity, is manifested as the ground of their election. Because it would have been inconsistent, that he who had been judged equal to such a duty, should be kept among earthly vices and corruptions.

22. For you deserve, O excellent martyrs, that nothing should be denied to you who are nourished with the hope of eternity and of light; whose absolute devotion, and whose mind dedicated to the service of heaven, is evidently seen. Deservedly, I say deservedly, nothing to you is forbidden to wish for, since by your soul this world is looked down upon, and the alienated appearance of the time has made you to shudder, as if it were a confused blindness of darkness; to whom this world is always regarded in the light of a dungeon, its dwellings for restraints, in a life which has always been esteemed by you as a period of delay on a journey. Thus, indeed, in the triumph of victory he is snatched from these evils, whom no vain ambition with pompous step has subdued, nor popular greatness has elated, but whom, burning with heavenly desire, Christ has added to His kingdom.

23. There is nothing, then, so great and venerable as the deliverance from death, and the causing to live, and the giving to reign for ever. This is fitting for the saints, needful for the wretched, pleasing to all, in which the good rejoice, the abject are lifted up, the elect are crowned. Assuredly God, who cares for all, gave to life a certain medicine as it were in martyrdom, when to some He assigned it on account of their deserving, to others He gave it on account of His mercy. We have assuredly seen very many distinguished by their faith, come to claim this illustrious name, that death might ennoble the obedience of their devotion. Moreover, also, we have frequently beheld others stand undismayed, that they might redeem their sins committed, and be regarded as washed in their gore by His blood; and so being slain they might live again, who when alive were counted slain. Death assuredly makes life more complete, death finds the glory that was lost. For in this the hope once lost is regained, in this all salvation is restored. Thus, when the seed-times shall fail on the withering plains, and the earth shall be parched with its dying grass, the river has delighted to spring forth from the sloping hills, and to soothe the thirsty fields with its gushing streams, so that

the vanquished poverty of the land might be dissolved into fruitful wheat-stems, and the corn-field might bristle up the thicker for the counterfeited showers of rain.

24. What then, beloved brethren, shall I chiefly relate, or what shall I say? When all dignified titles thus combine in one, the mind is confused, the perception is misled; and in the very attempt to speak with brilliancy, my unworthy discourse vanishes away. For what is there to be said which can be sufficient, when, if you should express the power of eternal salvation, its attending glories come in your way; if you would speak of its surroundings, its greatness prevents you? The things at the same time are both in agreement and in opposition, and there is nothing which appears worthy to be uttered. Thus the instances of martyrdom have held in check the impulses of daring speech, as if entangled and ensnared by an opponent. What voice, what lungs, what strength, can undertake to sustain the form of such a dignity? At the confession of one voice, adverse things give way, joyous things appear, kingdoms are opened, empires are prepared, suffering is overcome, death is subdued, life is preferred, and the resisting weapons of a mischievous enemy are broken up. If there is sin, it perishes; if there is crime, it is left behind. Wherefore I beseech you, weigh this in your minds, and from my address receive so much as you know that you can feel.

25. Let it present itself to your eyes, what a day that is, when, with the people looking on, and all men watching, an undismayed devotion is struggling against earthly crosses and the threats of the world; how the minds in suspense, and hearts anxious about the tremblings of doubt, are agitated by the dread of the timid fearfulness of those who are congratulating them! What an anxiety is there, what a prayerful entreaty, what desires are recorded, when, with the victory still wavering, and the crown of conquest hanging in doubt over the head while the results are still uncertain, and when that pestilent and raving confession is inflamed by passion, is kindled by madness, and finally, is heated by the fury of the heart, and by gnashing threats! For who is ignorant how great a matter this is, that our, as it were, despised frailty, and the unexpected boldness of human strength, should not yield to the pangs of wounds, nor to the blows of tortures,-that a man should stand fast and not be moved, should be tortured and still not be overcome, but should rather be armed by the very suffering whereby he is tormented?

26. Consider what it is, beloved brethren: set before your perceptions and your minds all the endurance of martyrdom. Behold, indeed, in the passion of any one you will, they who are called martyrs rejoice as being already summoned out of the world; they rejoice as being messengers of all good men; they rejoice in like manner as elected. Thus the Lord rejoices in His soldier, Christ rejoices in the witness to His name. It is a small matter that I am speaking of, beloved brethren; it is a small matter, so great a subject in this kind of address, and so marvellous a difficulty has been undertaken by me; but let the gravity of the issue, I beseech you, not be wanting for my own purpose, knowing that as much can be said of martyrdom as could be appreciated. Whence also this alone has been the reason of my describing its glory, not that I judged myself equal and fitted for its praise, but that I saw that there was such a virtue in it, that however little I might say about it, I should profess

that I had said as much as l possible. For although the custody of faith may be preferred to the benefit of righteousness, and an immaculate virginity may recognise itself as better than the praises of all; yet it is necessary that even it should give place to the claim of blood, and be made second to a gory death. The former have chosen what is good, the latter have imitated Christ.

27. But now, beloved brethren, lest any one should think that I have placed all salvation in no other condition than in martyrdom, let him first of all look especially at this, that it is not I who seem to speak, that am of so great importance, nor is the order of things so arranged that the promised hope of immortality should depend on the strength of a partial advocacy. But since the Lord has testified with His own mouth, that in the Father's possession are many dwellings, I have believed that there is nothing greater than that glory whereby those men are proved who are unworthy of this worldly life. Therefore, beloved brethren, striving with a religious rivalry, as if stirred up with some incentive of reward, let us submit to all the abundance and the endurance of strength. For things passing away ought not to move us, seeing that they are always being pressed forward to their own overthrow, not only by the law proposed to them, but even by the very end of time. John exclaims, and says, "Now is the axe laid to the root of the tree; " showing, to wit, and pointing out that it is the last old age of all things. Moreover, also, the Lord Himself says, "Walk while ye have the light, lest the darkness lay hold upon you." But if He has foretold that we must walk in that time, certainly He shows that we must at any rate walk.

28. And to return to the praise of martyrdom, there is a word of the blessed Paul, who says; "Know ye not that they who run in a race strive many, but one receiveth the prize? But do ye so run, that all of you may obtain." Moreover also elsewhere, that be may exhort us to martyrdom, he has called us fellow-heirs with Christ; nay, that he might omit nothing, he says, "If ye are dead with Christ, why, as if living in the world, do ye make distinctions? " Because, dearest brethren, we who bear the rewards of resurrection, who seek for the day of judgment, who, in fine, are trusting that we shall reign with Christ, ought to be dead to the world. For you can neither desire martyrdom till you have first hated the world, nor attain to God's reward unless you have loved Christ. And he who loves Christ does not love the world. For Christ was given up by the world, even as the world also was given up by Christ; as it is written, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." The world has been an object of affection to none whom the Lord has not previously condemned; nor could he enjoy eternal salvation who has gloried in the life of the world. That is the very voice of Christ, who says: "He that loveth his life in this world, shall lose it in the world to come; but he that hateth his life in this world, shall find it in the world to come." Moreover, also, the Apostle Paul says: "Be ye imitators of me, as I also am of Christ." And the same elsewhere says: "I wish that all of you, if it were possible, should be imitators of me."

29. He said this who suffered, and who suffered for this cause, that he might imitate the Lord; and assuredly he wished us also to suffer for this cause, that through him we might imitate Christ. If thou art righteous, and believest in God, why fearest thou to shed thy

blood for Him whom thou knowest to have so often suffered for thee? In Isaiah He was sawn asunder, in Abel He was slain, in Isaac He was offered up, in Joseph He was sold into slavery, in man He was crucified. And I say nothing of other matters, such as neither my discourse is able to tell nor my mind to bear. My consciousness is overcome by the example of His humility; and when it considers what things befell when He suffered, it marvels that He should suffer on whose behalf all things quaked. The day fled into the night; the light gave up all things into darkness; and, its mass being inclined backwards and forwards, the whole earth was jarred, and burst open; the dead were disturbed, the graves were laid bare, and as the tombs gaped open into the rent of the earth, bodies returning to the light were restored; the world trembled at the flowing of His blood; and the veil which hung from the opening of the temple was rent, and all the temple uttered a groan. For which cause it is a great matter to imitate Him who, in dying, convicted the world. Therefore when, after the example of the Lord's passion, and after all the testimony of Christ, you lay down your life, and fear not to shed your blood, everything must absolutely give way to martyrdom. Inestimable is the glory of martyrdom, infinite its measure, immaculate its victory, invaluable its title, immense its triumph; because he who is presented to Him with the special glory of a confessor, is adorned with the kindred blood of Christ.

30. Therefore, beloved brethren, although this is altogether of the Lord's promise and gift, and although it is given from on high, and is not received except by His will, and moreover, can neither be expressed in words nor described by speech, nor can be satisfied by any kind of powers of eloquence, still such will be your benevolence, such will be your charity and love, as to be mindful of me when the Lord shall begin to glorify martyrdom in your experience. That holy altar encloses you within itself, that great dwelling-place of the venerable Name encloses you within itself, as if in the folds of a heart's embrace: the powers of the everlasting age sustain you, and that by which you shall ever reign and shall ever conquer. O blessed ones! and such as truly have your sins remitted, if, however, you who are Christ's peers ever have sinned! O blessed ones! whom the blood of the Lord has dyed from the beginning of the world, and whom such a brightness of snowy clothing has deservedly invested, and the whiteness of the enfolding robe has adorned! Finally, I myself seem to myself to behold already, and, as far as is possible to the mind of man, that divine and illustrious thing occurs to my eyes and view. I seem, I say to myself, already to behold, that that truly noble army accompanies the glory and the path of their Christ. The blessed band of victors will go before His face; and as the crowds become denser, the whole army, illuminated as it were by the rising of the sun, will ascribe to Him the power. And would that it might be the lot of such a poor creature as myself to see that sight! But the Lord can do what He is believed not to deny to your petitions.

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**Authorship.** These four short works were handed down with Cyprian's writings but are not by him; they come from various unknown authors, mostly of the third century.

**Source.** English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.