



Scripture nugget – I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me from within (cf. Philippians 4:13)

Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8).

The merits and graces of Christ empower the courage and holiness of martyr saints of all ages. Starting from the Old Testament era, God provides sterling examples of exemplary filial obedience to God's laws in courageous men and women even to martyrdom. Widely known is the story of Daniel's three friends who refused to worship the statue of King Nebuchadnezzar even at the threat of death in a fiery furnace. God spared the three young men and they emerged from the furnace unharmed (cf. Daniel 3: 8-30). Lesser known but not less courageous is the case of elderly Eleazar (cf. 2 Maccabees 6:18-31) who refused to eat pork which would violate the ancestral laws of the Hebrews, defying the command of the pagan king, Antiochus Epiphanes. *When he was about to die under the blows, he groaned, saying: "The Lord in His holy knowledge knows full well that, although I could have escaped death, I am not only enduring terrible pain in my body from this scourging, but also suffering it with joy in my soul because of my devotion to Him."* (2 Maccabees 6:30). Eleazar died a holy death, not terrified with fear but notably with joy in his soul.

I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me from within (cf. Philippians 4:13). Of same courage and sharing the similar tragic fate as Eleazar, is the case of a Hebrew woman with seven sons (cf. 2 Maccabees 7:1-42). Each of them in turn endured cruel, maiming tortures including the cutting off of tongue, hands and feet and finally death for refusing to eat pork. Capping these sterling examples is the obedience of Christ Who accepted to be deprived of His glory, to be born incarnate in lowly human flesh, to be confined to a human body and to offer His Body as an atoning Sacrifice for the sins of mankind through terrible torture and death on the Cross of crucifixion. Through His patient enduring of suffering in the human flesh, Christ perfected for us a once-for-all perfect Sacrifice and graces for us to fulfill God's will to perfection.

Conversation with Jesus: Precious Lord, You teach us that the sure way to true and complete joy is the filial obedience to God's Commandments (cf. John 15:10-11). Indeed, the martyrs did not die with fear in their hearts but with enduring joy in their souls. Just as a mother is solicitous of her suffering child, Your grace never fails to accompany them at all times. Some of them even had a vision of heaven before they died as did St Stephen (cf. Acts 7:55). Just as Your Supreme Sacrifice on Calvary yielded salvation for all repentant sinners, their holy deaths offered to You in love and united to Your Passion helped You save many souls who would otherwise be lost. Let Your awesome grace empower me mightily also so that I too can courageously stand up for the Truth. For it is not by my human power but in You that I can do all things You commission me to do (cf. Philippians 4:13). Mary, Mother of Salvation, pray for me. Thank You, Jesus. Praise You, Jesus.