

"When our hearts are reluctant we often have to compel ourselves to pray for our enemies, to pour out prayer for those who are against us. Would that our hearts were filled with love! How frequently we offer a prayer for our enemies, but do it because we are commanded to, not out of love for them. We ask the gift of life for them even while we are afraid that our prayer may be heard. The Judge of our souls considers our hearts rather than our words. Those who do not pray for their enemies out of love are not asking anything for their benefit."
St. Gregory the Great

"A burning-glass only sets fire to wood, paper, or any other combustible material when we place it in such a position that the rays of the sun, concentrated in the focus of the glass, being all concentrated upon one point of the object, will act upon it through their entire combined power, and thus direct upon the object, as it were, the whole sun on a small scale. It is thus also during prayer, when our souls are warmed, vivified, and inflamed by the wise sun - God, when through our intellect, acting like the burning-glass, we direct upon our heart, as the spiritual point of our being, the mental Sun, and when it acts upon the heart with all its singleness and power."
St. John of Kronstadt

I weep and mourn with pity for mankind. Many people think to themselves, 'I have sinned much - plundered and killed, used violence, slandered and led a wanton life; and done many other wrong things.' And shame keeps them from the path of repentance. But they forget that in God's sight all their sins are as drops of water in the sea. O my brethren the world over, repent while there is still time. God mercifully awaits our repentance. As God is love, so the Holy Spirit in the Saints is love. Ask, and the Lord will forgive. And when you receive forgiveness, there will be joy and gladness in your soul, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will enter your soul, and you will cry: 'This is true freedom. True freedom is in God and of God.'
Saint Silouan of Mount Athos

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Sts. Cyprian and Justina the Martyrs of Nicomedia

Hieromartyr Cyprian, Virgin Martyr Justina and Martyr Theoctistus suffered for Christ at Nicomedia in the year 304.

St Cyprian was a pagan and a native of Antioch. From his early childhood his misguided parents dedicated him to the service of the pagan gods. From age seven until thirty, Cyprian studied at the most outstanding centers of paganism: on Mount Olympus, in the cities of Argos and Tauropolis, in the Egyptian city of Memphis, and at Babylon. Once he attained eminent wisdom in pagan philosophy and the sorcerer's craft, he was consecrated into the pagan priesthood on Mount Olympus. Having discovered great power by summoning unclean spirits, he beheld the Prince of Darkness himself, and spoke with him and received from him a host of demons in attendance.

After returning to Antioch, Cyprian was revered by the pagans as a prominent pagan priest, amazing people by his ability to cast spells, to summon pestilence and plagues, and to conjure up the dead. He brought many people to ruin, teaching them to serve demons and how to cast magic spells.

The holy virgin Justina lived in Antioch. After turning her own father and mother away from pagan error and leading them to the true faith in Christ, she dedicated herself to the Heavenly Bridegroom and spent her time in fasting and prayer. When the youth Aglaides proposed marriage to her, the saint refused, for she wished to remain a virgin. Agalides sought Cyprian's help and asked for a magic spell to charm Justina into marriage. But no matter what Cyprian tried, he could accomplish nothing, since the saint overcame all the wiles of the devil through her prayers and fasting.

Cyrian sent demons to attack the holy virgin, trying to arouse fleshly passions in her, but she dispelled them by the power of the Sign of the Cross and by fervent prayer to the Lord.

Even though one of the demonic princes and Cyprian himself, assumed various guises by the power of sorcery, they were not able to sway St Justina, who was guarded by her firm faith in Christ. All the spells dissipated, and the demons fled at the mere mention of the saint's name.

Cyprian, in a rage, sent down pestilence and plague upon Justina's family and upon all the city, but this was thwarted by her prayer. Cyprian's soul, corrupted by its domination over people and by his incantations, was shown in all the depth of his downfall, and also the abyss of nothingness of the evil that he served.

"If you take fright at even the mere shadow of the Cross and the Name of Christ makes you tremble," said Cyprian to Satan, "then what will you do when Christ Himself stands before you?" The devil then flung himself upon the pagan priest who had begun to repudiate him, and attempted to beat and strangle him.

St Cyprian then first tested for himself the power of the Sign of the Cross and the Name of Christ, guarding himself from the fury of the enemy. Afterwards, with deep repentance he went to the local bishop Anthimus and threw all of his books into the flames. The very next day, he went into the church, and did not want to leave it, though he had not yet been baptized.

By his efforts to follow a righteous manner of life, St Cyprian discerned the great power of fervent faith in Christ, and made up for more than thirty years of service to Satan. Seven days after Baptism he was ordained reader, on the twelfth day, sub-deacon, on the thirtieth, deacon. After a year, he was ordained priest. In a short time St Cyprian was elevated to the rank of bishop.

The Hieromartyr Cyprian converted so many pagans to Christ that in his diocese there was no one left to offer sacrifice to idols, and the pagan temples fell into disuse. St Justina withdrew to a monastery and there was chosen Abbess.

During the persecution against Christians under the emperor Diocletian, Bishop Cyprian and Abbess Justina were arrested and brought to Nicomedia, where after fierce tortures they were beheaded with the sword. St Cyprian, fearful that the holy virgin's courage might falter if she saw him put to death, asked for time to pray. St Justina joyfully inclined her neck and was beheaded first.

The soldier Theoctistus, seeing the guiltless sufferings of St Justina, fell at Cyprian's feet and declared himself a Christian, and was beheaded with them.