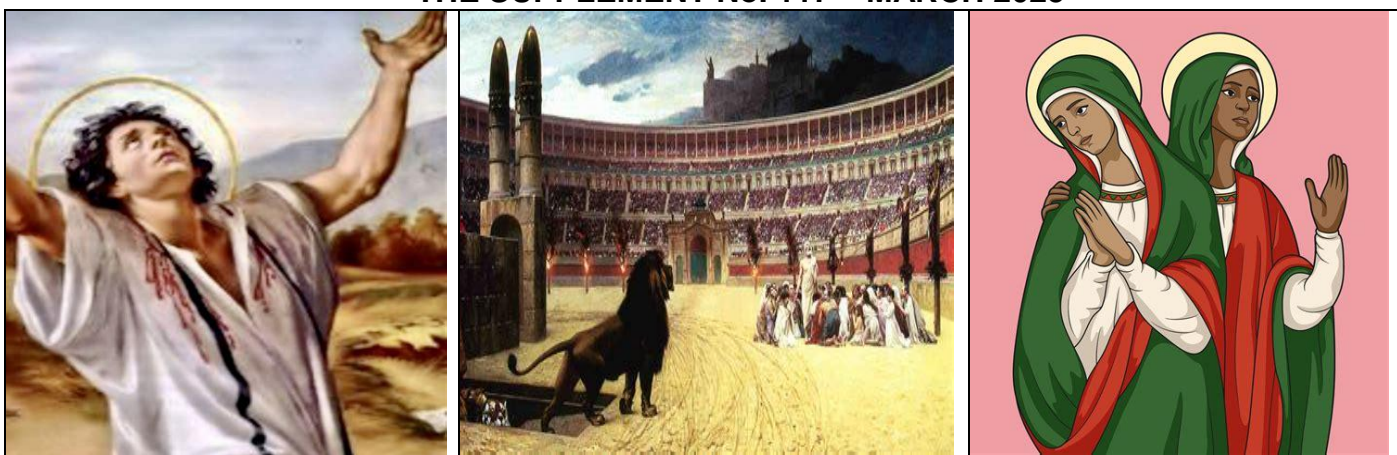


MARIA VALTORTA READERS' GROUP
THE SUPPLEMENT No. 117 – MARCH 2025



MARTYRDOM & MARTYRS - THE EXECUTED

THE MANY TYPES OF MARTYRDOM

Jesus says: "The soul that has abandoned itself to its God completely becomes His martyr. [...] Nor is the martyrdom of the creature [...] less bloody - even if blood is not materially shed - than that of the one who is immolated by an executioner." (*Notebooks 1943, p. 135*)

"All deaths are glory offered to God when they are accepted and undergone by holiness. [...] In the arena of a circus or in the darkness of a jail, in the midst of family affections or in the solitude of those without anyone, swift or long in torments, it is always, always glory rendered to God. [...] Consider that the bloody death of an Agatha (died a martyr of the third century) is no different for Me from that of a Liduina (died of an infirmity) or a Therese Martin of the Child Jesus, (died of an illness in the cloister) or a Dominic de Guzman (founder of the Dominicans, died of exhaustion rising from his travels) or a Thomas More (beheaded by Henry VIII for his profession of faith in the 16th century), or a Contardo Ferrini (who died of typhus)." (*Notebooks 1944, pp. 229-31*)

"[...] in Heaven, the martyrdoms [...] though consummated in different ways, receive the same reward, for the glory of God was the agent spurring them to encounter it, and love for souls that spurred them to ask for it."

(*Notebooks 1943, p. 384*)

"And both forms of martyrdom will receive the reward for martyrdom: the purple stole of those who have come to Me by way of a great tribulation, [...] together with the white procession of the virgins, the latter at my right, the former at my left..." (*Notebooks 1943, p. 352*)

SAINT STEPHEN

(*Maria Valtorta sees and writes:*) The hall of the Sanhedrin, identical both with regard to disposition and to people, to what it was in the night [...] during Jesus' trial. In the middle, in front of the High Priest during the trial where Jesus was, there is now Stephen.

He must have already spoken professing his faith and bearing witness to the true Nature of the Christ and to His Church because the tumult is at its climax and in its violence, it is similar to the one that raged against the Christ in the fatal night of the betrayal and deicide. Blows, curses, horrible oaths are hurled against the deacon

Stephen who, under the brutal blows, staggers and totters while they savagely tug him here and there.

But he keeps his calm and dignity, and even more, he is not only calm and dignified, but he is even blissful and almost ecstatic. Disregarding the spittles streaming down his face, and the blood running from his nose that has been violently struck, at a certain moment, he raises his inspired face and his bright smiling eyes to stare at a vision known to him alone. He stretches his arms out crosswise; he raises them up as if he wished to embrace what he sees, then he falls on his knees exclaiming: «Here, I can see the Heavens thrown open, and the Son of Man, Jesus, the Christ of God, whom you have killed, standing at the right hand of God.»

Then the tumult loses even that least part that it still retained of humanity and legality and, with the fury of a pack of wolves, of jackals, of rabid wild beasts, they all hurl themselves on the deacon, they bite him, they trample on him, they grasp him, they raise him lifting him by his hair, they drag him, letting him drop again, while fury opposes fury because in the rush, those who try to drag the martyr outside are hindered by those who pull him in another direction to strike him and tread on him again. [...]

Outside the walls there is a stretch of waste-land covered with stones, completely desert. When the executioners arrive there, they spread out forming a circle, leaving the condemned man all alone in the centre with his torn garments and his body bleeding in many parts as a result of the wounds already inflicted on it. They tear his garments off him before moving away from him. Stephen is left with a very short tunic. [...] The executioners pick up some large pebbles and some sharp stones, in which the place abounds, and they begin the lapidation (stoning).

Stephen receives the first blows standing, and with a smile of forgiveness on his wounded lips which, a moment before the beginning of the lapidation, have shouted to Saul: «My friend, I will wait for you on the way of the Christ.»

To which Saul replied: «Pig! Possessed!» adding to the insults, a mighty kick on the shin-bone of the deacon, who almost falls because of the blow and of the pain.

After some blows with stones that strike him from all directions, Stephen falls on his knees, supporting himself

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

with his wounded hands. And certainly recollecting a remote episode, he whispers, touching his temple and his wounded forehead: «As He foretold me! The crown... The rubies... O my Lord, Master, Jesus, receive my spirit.»

Another hail of blows on his already wounded head makes him collapse on the ground that becomes impregnated with his blood. While he lies on the stones, always under hails of more of them, on the point of breathing his last, he whispers: «Lord... Father... forgive them... bear them no grudge for this sin of theirs... They do not know what...» Death breaks the sentence on his lips, a last start makes him curl himself up, and he remains so. Dead.

The executioners approach him, they throw another volley of stones on him, and almost bury him under them. They then put their clothes on, and they go away back to the Temple, intoxicated with satanic zeal, to report what they have done. **(P5, pp. 908; G10, Ch. 645.1, 645.6-7)**

SAINT AGNES

(Maria sees and writes:) The [three young girls about sixteen or eighteen years old at most [...] were dressed in white with their heads covered. [...] I understood that the latter was Agnes.

Agnes, smiling and secure, went right up to the Magistrate's dais. And here I heard the following dialogue.

"Did you wish for me? Here I am."

"When you find out why I wanted you, I don't think you will still call this gesture of mine a 'wish'. Are you a Christian?"

"Yes, by the grace of God."

"Do you realize what this assertion can bring to you?"

"Heaven."

"Be careful! Death is ugly, and you are a child. Don't smile because I'm not joking."

"And I'm not, either. I am smiling at you because you are the pronubus of my eternal wedding, and I am grateful to you."

"Think of an earthly wedding instead. You are beautiful and wealthy. Many are already thinking of you. You have only to choose to become a happy patrician."

"My choice has already been made. I love the Only One worthy of being loved, and this is the hour of my wedding; this is the temple for it. I am hearing the voice of the Spouse who is coming and am already seeing His look of love. I am sacrificing my virginity to Him so that He will make it into an eternal flower."

"If you are concerned about your virginity and about your life as well, sacrifice at once to the gods. This is what the law requires."

"I have one true God and will sacrifice to Him willingly."

And here it seemed that some of the Prefect's assistants gave Agnes a vase with incense in it so that she could scatter it before a god over the tripod chosen by her.

"These are not the gods I love. My God is our Lord Jesus Christ. To Him, whom I love, I will sacrifice myself."

It seemed to me at this point that the angered Prefect ordered his assistants to place chains around Agnes' wrists to keep her from fleeing or committing some offensive act against the images, since from that moment on, she was regarded as guilty and a prisoner.

But the smiling virgin turned to her executioner, saying, "Don't touch me. I came here spontaneously because I am called here by the voice of the Spouse who, from Heaven, is inviting me to the eternal wedding. I have no need for your bracelets or your chains. *Only if I wanted to*

be moved towards evil would you have to place them on me. And – perhaps - they would be of no use, for my Lord God would make them more useless than a linen thread on a giant's wrist. *But to go out to meet death, joy, and marriage with Christ - no, your chains are of no use, O brother. I bless you if you give me martyrdom. I do not flee. I love you and pray for your spirit."*

As beautiful, white, and upright as a lily, Agnes was a heavenly vision in the vision...

The Prefect gave the sentence. [...] At her side was the executioner, with his sword already unsheathed. They seemed to be making a last attempt to bend her will. But Agnes, with flashing eyes, was shaking her head and, with her small hand, refusing the statue. [...]

I saw they were having Agnes kneel down on the floor in the middle of the room, where the large slab of white marble was located. The martyr recollected herself, with her arms over her chest and her gaze uplifted to the sky. Her eyes, in the rapture of a delicate contemplation, became flooded with tears of superhuman joy. There was a smile on her face, which was not paler than before.

One of the assistants took hold of her braids as if they were a rope, to keep her head still. But there was no need to. "I love Christ!" she cried when she saw the executioner lift the sword, and I saw it penetrate between the shoulder blade and collarbone, and open her right carotid, and the martyr fell, still maintaining her kneeling position, to her left, like someone cuddling up to sleep, in a blessed sleep, for the smile did not leave her face and was hidden only by the stream of blood gushing from her slashed throat as if from a beaker. **(Notebooks 1944, pp. 70-3)**

SAINT JUSTINE OF ANTIOCH AND SAINT CYPRIAN

I see a young woman, little more than a girl. She is struggling with a young man about thirty-years-old. The woman is beautiful. Tall, brown-haired, and shapely. The young man is also handsome. But in the same measure as the woman, he has a gentle, though severe, look. Under his forced smile, there is something not very pleasant about the man. [...] He is making great protestations of affection for the young woman, declaring he is ready to make her a happy wife, the queen of his heart and his home. But the woman, whom I hear addressed as "Justine," rejects these proposals of love with serene constancy.

"But you could make me a saint of **your** God, Justine. Because you are a Christian - I know. [...] And I am convinced that the two of us, joined together, will do great things."

"Cyprian, don't insist. [...] I will pray that you may love them to the point of becoming a hero among [Christians]. Then, God willing, we shall be joined in a destiny. In an entirely spiritual destiny, though. For I am averse to other unions, wanting to reserve my whole self for my Lord [...]. And God wants virginity for me and, I hope, martyrdom. Your spirit thus cannot spur me towards anything contrary to God's will. [...] Go in peace, brother, and may God enlighten you to know the truth. I will pray for the light of your soul."

(Maria says: In another vision, I see two rooms:) [...] In one, I see Justine's room, and in the other, a room in Cyprian's house. The former is praying, prostrated [...] in prayer, there hovers a gentle luminosity which, though incorporeal, has an angelic appearance.

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

[There is] a change is taking place. A phosphoric point dancing like a will-o'-the-wisp, forms tighter and tighter circles around the young woman in prayer. My inner counselor (Valtorta's guardian angel) advises me that it is the hour of temptation for Justine and that light conceals an evil spirit who, by prompting sensations and mental visions, seeks to incline God's virgin toward sensuality. I do not see what she sees. I see only that she is suffering and that, when she is about to be overcome, she defeats the occult power with the sign of the cross traced out by her hand upon herself and in the air with a little cross she has removed from over her breast. When, the third time, the temptation must be violent, Justine leans against the cross drawn on the wall and raises the other little cross in front of herself with both hands. She looks like an isolated soldier defending herself to the rear by remaining pressed against an unshakable refuge, and in front with an invincible shield. The phosphoric light does not withstand that twofold sign and dissolves. Justine remains in prayer. There is a gap here, for the vision appears to be interrupted. But I rediscover it later with the same individuals. The virgin and Cyprian are still there, in a brief conversation attended by many people who join Cyprian in asking the girl to give in and get married so as to free the city from a pestilence.

"It is not I," Justine responds, "who ought to change my way of thinking, but your Cyprian. Let him free himself from slavery to his evil spirit, and the city will be saved. Now, more than ever, I remain faithful to the God in whom I believe, and I sacrifice everything to Him for the good of all of you. And now it will be seen whether the power of my God is superior to that of your gods and of the Evil One whom he worships."

The crowd rises up, some against Cyprian and some against the young woman... [...]

I find them once again together, with the young man now much older and displaying the signs of priesthood: the palium and circular tonsure, no longer with the flamboyant, rather long hair he had before. They are in the Antioch prison, awaiting martyrdom, and Cyprian reminds his female companion of a former conversation.

"So now what we prophesied as having to take place is occurring in a different way. Your cross has won, Justine. You have been my teacher, not my wife. You have freed me from evil and led me to Life. When the spirit of darkness I worshipped confessed to me his incapacity to overcome you, I understood. 'She is victorious through the Cross,' he said to me. 'My power over her is null. Her Crucified God is more powerful than all of Hell together. He has already won out over me on numberless occasions and will always win out. Whoever believes in Him and in his Sign is saved from all treachery. Only those who do not believe in Him and disdain his Cross fall into our power and perish in our fire.' I did not want to go to that fire, but know the Fire of God that made you so beautiful and pure, so powerful and holy. You are the mother of my soul, and since you are my mother, I ask you in this hour to nourish my weakness with your strength so that we may rise to God together."

"You are now my bishop, my brother. In the name of Christ our Lord, absolve me from every sin so that, purer than a lily, I may precede you into glory." "I bless you. I do not absolve you, for there is no sin in

you. And forgive your brother for all the traps I have set for you. Pray for me, who have committed so many errors."

"Your blood and your present love wash away every trace of error. But let us pray together: 'Our Father...'"

Some jailers enter to disturb the noble prayer.

"Are the torments still not enough for you? Are you still withstanding? You won't sacrifice to the gods?"

"We offer the sacrifice of ourselves to God. To the true, one, eternal, holy God. Give us Life. That's what we want. Through Jesus Christ, the Lord of the world and of Rome, through the powerful King, before whom Caesar is base dust, through the God before whom the angels bow and the demons tremble. For us, death."

The slayers furiously knock them to the ground and drag them along without being able to separate them, for the hands of Christ's two heroes are joined to each other.

They thus go to the place of martyrdom, which seems to be one of the usual halls of the Quaestors. And two downward strokes falling from two muscular executioners sever the two heroic heads and give the souls wings for Heaven. The vision ends like this.

(Notebooks 1944, pp. 246-50)

SAINT FLORA & SAINT MARY OF CORDOBA (SPAIN)

(Maria Valtorta says:) I am now clearly presented with the strange vision of a cellar, certainly a jail in some castle - a Moslem castle - for I see an ugly-looking fellow dressed as a Turk or an Arab, but he looks to me more like a Turk from a former period, with a long brown caftan from which a petticoat made of a dark-red shiny cloth-like silk emerges, with long trousers which are clasped at the malleolus (the protruding bone on each ankle). He is wearing heel-less slippers of red Morocco leather. He has a brown hat in the shape of a truncated cone, with a circle of emerald-green cloth twisted around it like a turban. [...]

A very pretty young woman is brought in. Her hands are tied behind her back, and she is practically thrown down the five steps leading into the corridor which precedes the gloomy room where the personage described above is waiting for her, pacing restlessly. [...]

"I am asking you for the last time: do you want to leave the religion of the Jewish dogs and return to the holy faith of the Prophet?"

"No."

"Be careful. You know that in the land of the Moors, there is veneration of one alone: Mohammed, the true prophet of Allah! And you know the fate which awaits the apostates."

"I know. But remain believers in your faith, and I'll remain a believer in mine. Believe in yours, which is false, and I'll believe in mine, which is true."

"I'll have you stripped of life amidst torments."

"But you will not strip me of Heaven with its rejoicing."

"You will lose health, life, joy, everything."

"But I will find God and his Mother, the Virgin Mary, and my mother, who begot me for God." The man stamps his foot with rage and orders that she be flogged with iron rods.

They tear the clothes off the girl's body, and she appears naked down to her waist. They pull her clothing down over her hips, without untying her hands, which are thus left covered by her clothes. They tie a rope around her neck as if it were a necklace and secure her to the ring, after making her kneel alongside the square block, in such

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

fashion that her chin is touching the hard rock. And then two sinewy jailers from the escort that has dragged her there, start fiercely striking blows to her young shoulders, neck, and head. Each blow raises up a blood-filled blister on her tender, white flesh. Her chin, as her head is being stricken, knocks harshly against the stone and gets wounded, and of course her teeth crack against each other, bringing pain. Since she is kneeling at a distance from the block, with her hands tied behind her back, and forced to remain bending over at nearly a right angle, she cannot find relief in any way, and, in addition to the blows, that position itself is a torture.

The judge is not yet satisfied and, as he stands overseeing the torture with his arms crossed, as if he were watching a peaceful spectacle, he orders that the blows to her head be intensified "to make her more like her accursed Christ," he sneers.

And the executioners beat and beat with the thin, nearly flexible rods - I think they are made of steel, which fall in clusters upon the poor head after whistling in the air. Her hair gets entangled with the rods and is pulled out in clumps. What remains is reddened with blood, for her skin is broken and the skull bone is exposed, as blood runs down her neck and behind her ears, continuing over her naked chest and halting at her waist, where it is absorbed by her clothing.

"Enough! " the judge orders.

They untie her, put her clothes back on, and lay her on the floor, as she is half-conscious.

The judge gives her a kick and, when the young woman opens her eyes (the meek, pained look of a tortured lamb), asks, "Will you apostatize?"

"No." It is no longer the previous triumphal "no," but in its feeble tone, it is quite sure.

"Your brother will take care of that. And he will be worse than I. Call him and give her to him." And, after giving her a last kick, the judge goes off

... And the vision ends in another place, clearly a prison, too, for there are enclosures with heavy gratings over the windows, and voices are heard cursing and chattering, alongside Christian songs coming from inside.

Now the young woman is with another woman of her age (Mary), and they are led into a pompous room where I see the same judge as before, surrounded by other Moslems, servants or judges of lesser rank.

"I must still interrogate you, then! This is the last time. So what do you want?"

"To die for Jesus Christ."

"To die for Jesus Christ! But, Flora, do you know what torture means?"

"I know what Jesus means."

"But do you know that for your whole life I could keep you among the ... [I say "prostitutes," but he used an ugly term], the way you've been these last few days? What will you take into your Heaven then? Slime and filth."

The other girl speaks: "You're mistaken. That remains here, with you. I firmly believe that by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, of Mary Most Holy, his Mother, whose name I bear, and of all the saints in Paradise, the most recent of whom is my brother, the deacon, martyred by you, once we rise to Heaven, we will be able to make the seed blossom which was cast into so many poor hearts enclosed in vile flesh and thereby, redeem our very unfortunate sisters, among whom you have placed us,

hoping they would corrupt us and our firmness in faith would be shattered, whereas - know this - we have emerged even purer and more steadfast and wishing more than ever to die so as to add our blood to Christ's and redeem our hapless companions."

"Call the executioner. Let them be beheaded."

"May the true God reward you for opening Heaven to us and touch your heart. Come, Flora. Let us go singing."

And they go out with the escort, singing the *Magnificat*...

Jesus says to me, "You have come to know the story of the martyrs and virgins Flora and Mary of Cordoba, in the time when Spain was in the hands of the Moors, in the ninth century. Holy martyrs, almost unknown, but how blessed in Heaven!" **(Notebooks 1945-50, pp.84-7)**

SAINT IRENE

(*Maria Valtorta sees and writes:*) I insistently saw the remains of a carbonized human body. It was a pathetic, fearful sight. It was so corroded by the flames that it resembled a formless iron statue taken from the bottom of the sea. The head could still be discerned in the main outlines of the nose, cheekbones and chin, but it lacked the roundness of the cheeks, the fleshy part of the nose, the ears, and the lips. It was all dried up or destroyed. And the extremities were the same, with arms and legs resembling half-burnt branches whose appearance had been changed by the heat, as if they had been made of wax covering tendons contracted by a blaze, stiffening and contorting feet and hands. Hair and eyebrows were, of course, missing. Nor could I say whether that poor individual lying on the remains of a now-extinguished fire was a man or a woman, a young person or an adult, light- or dark-haired. The place seemed to be the outskirts of a city, where the countryside began, in a desolate, rocky, gloomy area.

I contemplated and contemplated the poor body abandoned in this place and was prompted to wonder, "Who are you?"

I received no reply for many hours. But now, though finding myself again in that same place, I see it is animated by people dressed in an old-fashioned way [...]. And then I see a procession of soldiers and townspeople coming from the city - I don't know what city it is, but it is certainly near the sea, which is sparkling off in the background under the midday sun.

A young woman who is barely beyond adolescence is in their midst. She is being taken to the pyre. It was for her. She calmly and securely ascends, with the expression of supreme, dreamy peace I have always seen on the faces of the martyrs. She is followed to the foot of the pile of wood and taken leave of there by a veiled, elderly woman, who is seen to be such from her rather plump figure and the glimpse of her emerging when she lifts up her veil to kiss the young woman. She does not say a word - only kisses and tears. They want to push her back and harshly oblige her to withdraw while the first flames are already flickering over the pyre, setting fire to the dry heather of the faggots. But, with a dignity not devoid of haughtiness, she replies (to those who ask, "Why do you take an interest in this rebel? Are you a relative? Go away. One can't stay here comforting the enemies of Caesar"), "I am Anastasia, a Roman lady, her sister. It is my right to remain at her side, as with my sisters yesterday. Leave me alone, or I will appeal to the Emperor. "

They let her remain, and she looks at the young woman, towards whom tongues of flame and waves of smoke are rising, concealing her at intervals. She observes her, serene and smiling in her spiritual dream, not feeling the nipping of the flames, which first take hold of her hair, which burns in a smoking tongue of fire, and then her clothing ... until, replacing the white robe, burnt up by the flames, the instrument of martyrdom itself weaves her a splendid robe of living fire and conceals her behind it from the gaze of the throng.

"Good-bye, Irene. Remember me when you are at peace," Anastasia shouts. And the calm youthful voice replies from behind the veil of fire, "Good-bye. I am already speaking about you with..." And nothing is heard but the crackling of the flames.

The soldiers and executors of the sentence withdraw when they understand that death has come upon her and let the pyre finish its destruction on its own.

Anastasia does not move. Motionless between the heat of the fire and the heat of the sun, which is intense in this zone, she waits.... Until there fall the shadows of twilight, in which there feebly shine a few surviving flickers in the midst of the pyre's wood. They seem to be writing mysterious words, narrating the glories of the young martyr in the evening.

[...] "She died like an angel, as she lived. I did not touch the ashes because ... I gave her everything, as the Father of my soul ordered me. But ... oh, it is too horrible to see a young lily reduced to coal!" says Anastasia to a few Christians.

[Anastasia and others] go towards the pyre, which is totally extinguished: a heap of scattered ashes on which the carbonized body I saw before is resting. Anastasia slowly weeps as she wraps the body mummified by the flames in precious cloth, helped by the Christians. They then lay it on a litter, and the small, sad cortege, proceeding at the fringe of the city, reaches a vast house with a lovely appearance behind which they go, placing the body in a cemetery which has been dug out in the garden, as one of them, who is surely a priest, blesses it amidst the measured singing of the Christians present.

(Notebooks 1945-50, pp. 63-6)

THE ELDERLY PRIEST & TEN GLADIATORS

A time of persecution, one of the greatest persecutions, for the Christians are tortured in large numbers, not taken individually, but many, many Christians of all ages are grouped together [...]

And there are also gladiators, already wearing helmets and the corresponding body armour which both defends and does not defend, for it leaves some vital parts still unprotected, such as the throat or sections of the abdomen where the liver and spleen are located. They put this armour on over their bare skin and hold short and long daggers almost in the shape of a chestnut leaf. [...] Some have scars from old wounds, while others display no sign of lacerations. They speak to one another, and I note that they must be from countries subject to Rome, surely prisoners of war, for they use only a very hybrid Latin, pronounced in a harsh, guttural manner, when they address the Christians waiting to die who are singing their sweet, sad hymns.

One gladiator, almost two metres in height - a real colossus as golden as honey, with clear grey-blue eyes

which are gentle even in the dark iron shadow cast over his face by the visor of his helmet - addresses an old man dressed entirely in white, dignified and austere - or, rather, ascetic - whom all the Christians venerate with the maximum respect. "White father, if the beasts spare you, I'll have to slay you. Those are the orders. And I am sorry, since I left an elderly father like you in Pannonia." <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pannonia>

"Don't be grieved, son. You are opening Heaven for me. And in my long life, I have never received a more beautiful gift from anyone than the one you are giving me. [...] My God is the only one. In his Heaven, He reigns with love and justice. And whoever arrives there, experiences only eternal rejoicing."

"I have heard that from many Christians during this persecution. And I said to a girl who was smiling at me as I brought the dagger down upon her...[he stops]. And I pretended to kill her, but I didn't kill her in order to save her, since she was tender and blonde like young heather in my forests.... But it was of no use to me.... I couldn't take her away from here, and the next day ... that body of milk and roses was given to the snakes." The man grows silent with a sad look.

"What did you say to her, son?" asks the old man.

"I said, 'Do you see? I am not bad. But it is my job. I am a slave of war. If it is true that your God is just, tell Him to remember **Albulus** - that's what they call me in Rome - and to appear with his goodness.' She said to me, 'I will.' But she has been dead for days, and no one has come."

"As long as you are not a Christian, God will show Himself to you only in his servants. And how many of them He has brought to you! Every Christian is a servant of God; every martyr, a friend to the point of living in God's arms."

"Oh, many ! And not I alone, but also **Dacius** and **Illiricus**, and others among us too - sad about our fortune, have been caught up by your rejoicing ... and would like to share it. You are in chains.... We are not. But not even our breath is free. If Caesar wills, they will chain up our breath and kill us. Are you filled with disgust by our talk of God?"

"It is my only earthly joy, son, and it is a great one. May Jesus, my God and Master, bless you for it. I am a priest, Albulus. I have consumed my life preaching Him and taking many creatures to Him. And I no longer hoped to receive this joy. Listen. And the old man repeats the life of Jesus to him and the other gladiators who have formed a circle around them, from his birth to his death on the cross, and he outlines the essential requirements of the Faith. He speaks sitting on a rock serving as a bench - peaceful, solemn, totally radiant, with his long hair, Mosaic beard, and robe, totally aflame in his gaze and words. He interrupts himself on two occasions alone to bless two groups of Christians brought into the arena to be fed to the crocodiles during the naval games. He then resumes speaking in the ring of sturdy gladiators - nearly all are blond, with a rosy complexion - who listen to him with their mouths open.

He concludes by saying, "This is what's essential to believe in order to receive Baptism and Heaven."

The robust voices of the gladiators - ten of them - make the low vault boom: "We believe. Give us your God."

"I have nothing to sprinkle you with, not a drop of water or any other liquid, and my time has come. But you will find a way.... No! God is telling me! A liquid is ready for you."

"The Christians to the lions!" orders the guard. "All of you."

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

The old priest at the head and the others behind - including the mothers, on whose breasts the children have fallen asleep, go into the arena singing.

What a crowd! What light! What noise! It is incredibly packed with people of every extraction. [...]

The Christians are pushed towards the sunny area.

[...] The Christians are then grouped together in the sunlit area. The lions burst in. The elderly priest is the first to advance, alone, with his arms extended. He speaks: "Romans, for the sake of my brothers and sisters and myself, peace and blessing. May Jesus, because of the joy you give us of confessing Him with our blood, give you Light and eternal Life. We pray to Him for this because we are grateful to you for the eternal purple with which you robe us with the-"

A lion has leapt forward after having approached, nearly crawling along the ground, and knocks him down, biting his shoulder. His snow-white robe and hair are now completely red.

It is the signal for the beastly attack. The pack of brutes leaps upon the flock of the gentle. With a blow of her paw, a lioness tears one of the sleeping babies away from her mother, and the blow is so fierce that it rips out part of the breast of the mother, who collapses onto the arena and dies, perhaps lacerated right to her heart. The beast, striking blows with her paws and tail, defends her tender meal and crunches it in a flash. A little red stain remains on the sand, the only trace of the martyred baby, as the beast gets up, licking her muzzle.

But there are a lot of Christians and few animals in comparison. And they are perhaps already sated. Rather than devour, they kill for the sake of killing. They knock down, tear throats, rip open bellies, lick a bit, and then move on to another prey.

The people get restless because there is no reaction by the Christians and the brutes are not sufficiently ferocious. They howl, "Death to them! Death to them! Death to the superintendent, too! These are not lions, but well-fed dogs. Death to the betrayers of Rome and Caesar! "

The emperor gives an order, and the beasts are driven back into their caves. The gladiators are brought in for the coup de grace. The crowd yells out the names of their **favourites**: "Albulus, Illiricus, Datus, Hercules, Polyphemus, Tratus," and others too. They are not just the gladiators spoken to by the elderly martyr, who is agonizing in the arena with one lung nearly exposed by a clawing, but others as well who come in from elsewhere.

Albulus runs over to the old priest. The people say, "Make him suffer! Lift him up for the blow to be seen! Come on, Albulus! "But Albulus bends over to ask the old man something and, on receiving a sign of consent, calls the companions who previously heard the old priest speak.

I cannot manage to understand what they do - whether they obtain a blessing or what - since their robust bodies form a sort of roof over the old man, lying prostrate. But I do understand when I see that an aged, now trembling hand rises over the group of heads pressed close together and sprinkles them with the blood it has been filled with like a cup. It then falls back down.

The gladiators, sprinkled with that blood, leap to their feet and raise their daggers, shining in the light. They yell out, "Hail, Caesar, Emperor. The victors greet you." And then, as fast as a lightning bolt, they run to that structure in the

middle of the circus, leap upon it, overturn idols and tripods, and trample upon them.

The crowd howls as if crazed. Some would like to defend their favourite gladiator and some call down an atrocious death upon the new Christians, who, for their part, having returned to the arena, stand in a line, serene and magnificent, like statues of giants, with a fresh smile on their fierce faces.

Caesar, an ugly, obese, cynical man crowned with flowers and dressed in purple, stands up in the circle of his patricians, all dressed in white, [...] keeps everyone in suspense for a few minutes and then turns his thumb downwards, saying, "Let them be killed by their companions."

The unconverted gladiators, who have meanwhile slashed the throats of the barely surviving Christians as methodically as a butcher cuts lambs' throats, rise up, and with the same automatic coldness and precision they open their companions' throats at the jugular vein. Like a bundle of ears of grain which the pruning hook cuts down stele by stele, the ten neo-Christians, sprinkled with the blood of the martyred priest, make themselves a robe of eternal purple with their blood, and fall with a smile on their backs, gazing at heaven where their blessed day is dawning.

I don't know what Circus it is. I don't know what period of Christianity it is. I have no data. I see and state what I see. The vision of the elderly martyred priest and of the last ones he baptized remains in my heart, and that's all.

(Notebooks 1945-50, pp. 34-40)

SAINT PERPETUA AND SAINT FELICITY

(Maria sees and writes:) First of all, I am facing some Africans, or at least Arabs, whereas I always thought these saints were Europeans. For I didn't have the slightest idea of their social and physical condition or their martyrdom. It is as if I am reading an unknown tale.

I saw an amphitheatre more or less like the Coliseum (but not in ruins), which was at the moment, not occupied by a crowd. Only a very beautiful Moorish girl was standing upright in the middle, upraised from the ground, radiant with a beatific light issuing from her dark body and dark clothing covering her. She seemed to be the angel of the locality. She looked at me and smiled. I then fainted and saw nothing more.

Now the vision is being completed. I am in a building which must be a fortress being used as a jail. It is not the Tullianum dungeon I saw yesterday. Here, there are little rooms and super-elevated corridors. But they have so little space and light, and are endowed with so many bars and iron doors covered with bolts that the trace of superiority they possess, as regards their position, is canceled out by their severity, which negates even the slightest idea of freedom.

The Moorish girl I saw in the amphitheatre is sitting on a wooden board which serves as a bed, chair, and table. Now she is not emitting light, but only great peace. She is holding a baby a few months old on her lap and giving him milk. She rocks him and cuddles him with an act of love. The baby plays with his young mother, rubs his very swarthy face against his mother's dark breast, and clings to and separates from it with impetuous milk-filled chortles. The girl is quite pretty. An even, rather rounded face, with large, very lovely velvet-black eyes, a small,

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

tumid mouth filled with very white, even teeth, and black, rather curly hair which is nevertheless held in place by tight braids coiling around her head. Her skin color is olive brown, not very dark. Even among us Italians, especially in southern Italy, you see that colour, only a little lighter. When she gets up to put the baby to sleep, going back and forth across the cell, I see that she is tall and graciously curvaceous. Not excessively buxom, but quite shapely. She looks like a queen with her dignified bearing. She is wearing a simple dress almost as dark as her skin which falls in soft folds over her lovely body.

An old man who is also a Moor comes in. The jailer lets him enter by opening the heavy door. And he then withdraws. The girl turns and smiles. The old man looks at her and weeps. They remain like this for a few minutes.

The old man's affliction then bursts out. He anxiously begs his daughter to have mercy on his suffering. "I have loved you from among all my children, the joy and light of my home. And now you want to destroy yourself and your poor father, who feels his heart dying from the pain you are causing him. Daughter, I have been begging you for months. You have wanted to resist and have experienced jail - you that were born in the midst of comfort. By bowing down to the powerful, I obtained the possibility for you to continue in your house, though as a prisoner. I promised the judge I would sway you with my authority as a father. He now mocks me because he sees you don't care about that authority. This is not what the doctrine you say is perfect ought to teach you. What God is the one you are following, then, who tells you not to respect the man who begot you, not to love him, for if you loved me, you would not cause me such pain? [...] But now there is no longer talk of prison, but of death. And an atrocious one. Why? Who for? Who do you want to die for? Does your God need your and our sacrifice - my own and that of your child, who will no longer have a mother? Does his triumph need your blood and my tears to be fulfilled? How can this be? The wild beast loves her offspring, and the more she holds them to her breast, the more she loves them. I was hopeful about this, too, and therefore got you permission to be able to feed your child. But you don't change. And after having fed and warmed him and made yourself a pillow for him to sleep on, you now reject him and abandon him with no regret. I am not asking you for myself. But on his behalf. You have no right to make him an orphan. Your God has no right to do this. How can I believe He is better than ours if He wants these cruel sacrifices? [...] Do you want me to love your God? I will love Him more than myself, but remain among us. Tell the judge that you give in. You will then love whichever of the gods on earth you wish to. [...] Save yourself while you still can. There is no more time to wait. [...] Your son will be snatched from you. You will no longer see him. Maybe tomorrow, maybe this very day. Have mercy, daughter! Have mercy on me and on him, who can't speak yet, but you see how he looks at you and smiles! How he is pleading for your love!"

But nothing sways her.

"It is because of the love I have for you and for him that I remain faithful to my Lord," she replies. "No earthly glory will give your white head and this innocent child so much dignity as my death will. You will arrive at Faith. And what would you then say about me if, out of a moment's cowardice, I renounced Faith? My God does not need my

blood and your tears to triumph. But you need them to arrive at Life. And this innocent child does to remain in it. For the sake of the life you gave me and the joy he has given to me, I obtain for you the Life that is true, eternal, and blessed. No, my God does not teach a lack of love for fathers and children, but true love. Sorrow is now making you rave, father. But later, the light will shine in you, and you will bless me. I will bring it to you from heaven. And it's not that I love this innocent child less, now that I have let myself be emptied of blood to feed him. If pagan ferocity were not against us Christians, I would be his most loving mother, and he would be the aim of my life. But God is greater than the flesh born of me, and the love which should be given to Him is infinitely greater. Not even in the name of motherhood can I subordinate love for Him to love for a child. No. I am still your daughter and obedient in all things except in this: to renounce the true God for you. Let men's will be carried out. And if you love me, follow me in Faith. There you will find your daughter, and forever, for the true Faith confers Paradise, and my holy Shepherd has already welcomed me into his Kingdom."

And here the vision changes, for I see other people [prisoners] entering the cell: three men and a very young woman. They kiss and embrace one another. The jailers also come in to take Perpetua's child away from her. She wavers as if stricken by a blow. But she recovers.

Her companion Felicity comforts her: "I, too, have already lost my child, but that child is not lost. God was good to me. He granted that I might beget my child for Him, and that baptism is adorned with my blood. It was a girl... and as beautiful as a flower. Your child is beautiful, too, Perpetua. But to have them live in Christ, these flowers need our blood. We shall thus give them a twofold life."

Perpetua takes her baby, whom she had placed on the couch, filled to satiety and content, and hands him to her father, after having given him a light kiss so as not to awaken him. She also blesses him and traces out a cross on his forehead, hands, feet, and chest, wetting her fingers with the tears falling from her eyes. She does everything so gently that the child smiles in his sleep as if being caressed.

Then those condemned go out and are taken in the midst of soldiers into a dark cavea in the amphitheatre to await martyrdom. They spend the hours praying and singing sacred hymns, exhorting one another to be heroic.

Now I, too, seem to be in the amphitheatre. It is filled with a mostly dark-skinned crowd. There are also many Romans, however. The crowd in the tiers is rumbling and getting excited.

The six martyrs in a row are brought into the arena, where I think some cruel games have already taken place, for it is stained with blood. The crowd whistles and curses. The martyrs, with Perpetua at the head, come in singing. They stop in the middle of the arena. [...] A low-level gate opens, and the beasts burst forth; though they are so swift in their race that they look like fireballs, I think they are wild bulls or bison. Like a catapult adorned with pointed horns, they assault the defenseless group. They lift them on their horns, fling them into the air as if they were a bunch of rags, slam them to the ground again, and trample on them. They flee once more like those maddened with light and noise and attack again. Perpetua, caught like a twig by a bull's horns, is hurled

MARIA VALTORTA READERS GROUP

Website: <http://www.valtorta.com.au> Email: catherine @valtorta.com.au

many metres away. But, though wounded, she gets up again, and her first concern is to rearrange the clothing over her breast which has been torn off. Holding it close with her right hand, she drags herself towards Felicity, who has fallen on her back and is half disemboweled, and she covers and bolsters her, making herself a brace for the wound. The beasts come back to lacerate until the six, barely alive, are lying on the ground. The animal-keepers then take the brutes back in, and the gladiators finish the work.

But, whether out of mercy or inexperience, the one close to Perpetua is unable to kill. He wounds her, but he does not catch the right point. "Brother, here; let me help you," she says with a faint voice and a very sweet smile. And, leaning the point of the sword against her right carotid artery, she says, "Jesus, I entrust myself to You! Thrust, brother. I bless you." And she moves her head towards the sword to help the inexpert, distraught gladiator.

(Notebooks 1944, pp. 187-93)

SAINT MARTINA

(Maria Valtorta sees and writes:) A place with stonework appears to me: thick, dark walls, damp, I think the colour of very light coffee or very dark mud. The place is like a rotunda from which corridors extend out in this shape. I say corridors because the sky is not visible. There is a high, dark ceiling like the walls, and big square stones like the ones at the Tullianum.

Right at the centre of the rotunda, a child appears to me. Not much older than a little girl. She must be twelve-years-old at most, and [...] her hair is brown and her skin is a brownish white. She has two big, very sweet black eyes, a bit sad, as if tired, as if they have suffered a lot, or belong to one who has suffered *very much*. Her robe is completely white, made of linen, very loose, without a belt, elbow-length sleeves, from which two very shapely forearms emerge, ending in two little brownish hands crossed over her chest. The figure is luminous, but not excessively. It is not the radiant figure of a saint. It is a humble apparition, and yet it is luminous, with starlight within a light veil of mist. But it attracts me because it is light with a pure softness bestowing peace and joy. The contrast to the dark walls is very sharp. She looks at me and smiles.

Behind her back, some men in short yellow-grey robes are running off, Four are heading north, towards a barely visible, far-off light, as if the high corridor ended in an open place; the others are heading south, in a deeper darkness, to the point where I cannot tell exactly how many there are. I understand, however, that the girl is a martyr, for she is clasping a small palm to her breast in her folded arms, a white palm, I dare to say spiritualized, as is the linen of the tunic, which is more immaterial and magnificent than even the most beautiful linen.

But I do not know who she is and ask, "Who are you?" She answers, "Martina. And this is the place where I suffered greatly. One of the places. For I have suffered greatly. So many martyrdoms before the sword. And those who are fleeing are the ones who tormented me. The ones heading towards the light are those I saved with my pain and baptized with my blood. The others are those who did not want to convert to Jesus. But now I am happy. There is no more pain. To come to glory one must suffer everything. Remember: I am Martina ... and I am also

particularly called upon in the invocations of the Church. Oh, for Jesus is good! And for a little pain He grants so much joy and so much power! Good bye. I am your friend. You do not remember me. And yet you knew me and loved me when you were a girl my age. I have always loved you, though, together with Agnes. May the light of Paradise always shine in you and help you to bear the Light to so many souls. Good-bye. Receive this. I will sprinkle you with my balms. "

And she shakes the palm towards me and then folds her arms over her chest again and disappears from my sight with a soft, immaterial, unrepeatable song, and everything sparkles in the dismal place while she goes off, leaving as a memento only a tremendous indescribable fragrance.

I take up the Missal: four lines on St. Martina for January 30. I look at an old prayer book. She is not even mentioned. I search through my memory - nothing. Complete historical darkness. There remain, though, her friendship, her gaze, her smile, and the scent of her balms. And the previous joy lasts and takes me high up, very high up....

(Notebooks 1945-50, pp.119-21)

A PROPHECY ABOUT MARJAM & THE APOSTLES

Marjiam, whose hand is still in that of Jesus', says: "Master, my father [Peter] will certainly tell mother [Porphirea] to prepare a meal for You. Let me go and help her..."

"Yes, go. And may God bless you for honouring your father and mother."

Marjiam runs away, picks up his bundle of firewood, puts it on his shoulder, reaches Peter and walks beside him.

"They look like Abraham and Isaac climbing the mountain." remarks Bartholomew.

"Oh! Poor Marjiam! That would be the last straw indeed!" says Simon Zealot.

"And poor brother of mine! I don't know whether he would have the strength to act as Abraham..." says Andrew.

Jesus looks at him and then looks at the grey head of Peter, who is moving away close to his Marjiam, and He says: "I solemnly tell you that the day will come when Peter will rejoice knowing that his Marjiam has been imprisoned, beaten, scourged, sentenced to death, and that he would have the heart to lay the boy on the scaffold himself to clothe him with the purple of Heaven and to fertilise the earth with the blood of a martyr. And he will be jealous and sorrowful for one reason only: that he is not in the place of his son and subordinate because his election to Supreme Head of My Church will compel him to spare himself for the Church until I say to him: "Go and die for it". You do not know Peter yet. I do."

"Do you foresee martyrdom for Marjiam and my brother?"

"Are you sorry, Andrew?"

"No. I am sorry that You do not foresee it also for me."

"I solemnly tell you that you will all be clad with purple, except one."

(P 3, pp. 393; G5, Ch. 347.4)

WORDS FROM JESUS

"In truth, I tell you that *all of My saints are martyrs. Because to be saints, they had to undergo persecution by Satan and remain faithful.* Glory for those who overcome! The heavenly palms are for you."

(Notebooks 1944, p.564)