

God, Life, and Everything “Dying for Christ”

I wish I could remember where I read it, but a few years ago some theologian noted that the craziness that seems to be going on in Islam these days mirrors almost exactly the craziness that plagued Christianity at almost exactly the same time in its history.

This does not comfort me much. If you remember, Christianity has had some pretty violent and intolerant patches, some of which continue to this day.

I bring this up because just last week I wrote about the #BringBackOurGirls campaign designed to get more action to free the nearly 300 kidnapped Nigerian school girls. This week, it is a young mother in Sudan who weighs heavily on me. I swear, next week, I'm writing about something funny.

But this week, I am praying for Meriam Yehya Ibrahim, a Christian woman who is eight months pregnant. She was sentenced to death for the crime of converting to Christianity. Mind you, she was raised as a Christian by her Christian mother, but her father, who had abandoned the family when she was young, was Muslim, so by the laws of Sudan, that made her Muslim, and it made her practice of Christianity (or any other religion) a mortal sin.

She has been given the opportunity to repudiate her Christianity and "return" to Islam, but she has repeatedly said that she is a Christian, and that what the Sudanese court is doing is wrong. Meanwhile, Meriam sits in prison with her 20-month-old son in miserable conditions (the boy has gotten sick repeatedly). Her husband, meanwhile, sits at home in a wheelchair - she used to be the one to care for him.

This hits on so many levels.

First, we can all agree that what the Sudanese court has done is vile and a violation of human rights. Heck, it's a violation of Sudanese law. And for those who say this is just another example of the evil of Islam, let us note that Muslims around the world are also condemning this abomination. Just as Christians around the world condemned Christian churches in Nigeria and Uganda who campaigned to imprison or execute all gays.

Another level where this hits me is

This past Sunday we read in the Acts of the Apostles how St. Stephen was stoned to death for preaching the Gospel. We read nearly every day about the lives of Saints who were killed for Christ. St. Stephen, St. James, St. Peter, St. Paul - and we haven't even gotten out of the bible yet. We consider these folks heroes, icons, people to emulate.

Many of the early martyrs - you know, the ones who were thrown to the wild beasts in Rome - were given opportunities to reject their Christianity and return to polytheism. One of these was a young mother (22 years old) named Perpetua. Her father and the judged begged her to give up Christianity for the sake of her child if nothing else, but she refused and was killed.

But when you see it raw, in real time, it looks very different. Is it a good thing to die for one's faith and leave a 20-month-old child and a physically disabled husband behind? I wonder if I could do that - and probably wouldn't know until the moment came.

I do suspect, however, that I would not blame anyone who reasoned that they needed to stay alive for the sake of others, that God would understand, and that God, in fact, knows what is truly in their heart. In other words, if Meriam chose to claim Islam so that they would not kill her, so that she could care for her child and husband, I am willing to be that God would forgive it.

And if she is executed, her name will not be forgotten as she joins a long list of people of faith who make the hard decision to not be bullied into a false belief (and by that, I mean saying that she believes what she clearly does not).

I have no advice for her on this. Just prayers and hope.

Many countries are putting pressure on Sudan to overturn this outrageous decision. Let's all at least pray that it's enough.