

Homily based on the readings from June 1, 2026 (2 Peter 1.2-7; Mark 12.1-12)

It may come as a surprise to learn that this parish does not actually have any dalmatics – the vestments worn by deacons. That is not a major problem, but it does mean I have to bring my own every time I come to serve at Mass. To be honest, my greatest concern is that I bring the correct color – since many days have multiple options, depending on what the priest decides to do. When I began serving with Father Tony, though, he clearly explained what his priorities are: when green and white are both options, he will always choose white; and when white and red are both options, he will always choose red. In other words, he will observe a saint's memorial whenever possible, but will always give precedence to any saint who is a martyr.

What is the reason for this practice, besides the fact that red vestments are particularly stylish? The most obvious is that we want to honor our forebears who made the ultimate sacrifice for the faith – rather like what

we did this past Monday, on Memorial Day, when we remembered the men and women who gave their lives in service to this country. Every time we set foot in a church or publicly express our allegiance to Christ, we should all give thanks for the heroic witness of our Christian brothers and sisters who came before us. All we have to do is consider today's saint – Justin Martyr, who was beheaded during the persecution of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius – to see that the practice of Christianity has often come at a tremendous cost.

There is another reason, though, that we take such care to remember the martyrs of the Church. Our fundamental objective, as Christians, is to become like Christ himself. There are many ways we can work toward this goal – through worship, through acts of mercy, through the sacraments of the Church. At a basic level, though, the surest way to become like Jesus is to follow directly in his footsteps – to offer up our own lives as witnesses to the faith. Shortly before he and his companions were executed, Justin Martyr explained to the Roman bureaucrat who was preparing to pass judgment:

We *hope* to suffer torment for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so be saved. For this will bring us salvation and confidence as we stand before the *more* terrible and universal judgment-seat of our Lord and Savior.

*We hope to suffer torment.* That is a difficult statement to make, in this or in any age. It reminds me of a passage from the Acts of the Apostles, where Peter and the other Apostles, after being flogged by the Sanhedrin, “rejoic[ed] that they had been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name.” When we think of *hope* or *rejoicing*, most of us rarely envision being beaten or decapitated. Nevertheless, as Christians, that should be our deepest longing – to unite ourselves, fully and completely, with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ. Our Lord has not granted this privilege to all his faithful followers, but – in the cases where he has – it is truly a cause for *celebration*.