

Jealousy That Kills

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.

The Church remembers a very youthful martyr: a boy named Hyacinthus or Hyacinth, who lived in Caesarea in Cappadocia in the second century.

Raised in a Christian family, Hyacinth had to face a terrible dilemma early in life. He was bright and articulate, and had a friendly, engaging manner. These qualities brought him to the attention of the emperor Trajan, who made him an assistant to the chamberlain in the royal court.

The dilemma, of course, was Hyacinth's faith. The emperor and his other servants were pagans, and Trajan was among those Roman rulers who hated and feared Christians. When Hyacinth stood aside and did not take part in ceremonies of sacrifice to the pagan idols, other court members were quick to notice. They were already jealous that a high position had been given to such a young person, and now they saw their chance to curry favor with the emperor.

They denounced Hyacinth, and had him brought to trial. When he refused to sacrifice to the idols and openly stated his willingness to be sacrificed himself for Christ, the infuriated emperor had him thrown into prison. Trajan also ordered that the only nourishment Hyacinth should be given was food that had been sacrificed to idols. The emperor, not surprisingly, assumed that the boy would give in to his hunger when it became too hard to bear, and would eat the food forbidden to Christians.

But Hyacinth did not and would not touch the food he was given. He died after a number of days, still short of reaching his teenage years. It happened in the year 108.

In the first verses of Romans 14: 9-18 Saint Paul talks about the danger of passing judgment on other people. But after asking why anyone would judge a brother, he also writes: "Or you, why do you despise your brother?" The "despising" that Paul writes about can be a form of jealousy, an attitude toward someone who is different from us and who might, we fear, have something we do not. This was the jealous fear that motivated Joseph's brothers, in Genesis, to sell him into slavery and what they thought would be his death. And it led Trajan's courtiers to bring about Hyacinth's martyrdom, though they hoped it would cause him to betray his principles when hunger became extreme.

Paul is referring in these verses to those who scrupulously keep religious laws (such as not eating meat) and then judge others who do not keep the same laws. That judgment too is a form of jealousy, a fear that even those who don't keep the laws may be accepted by God. If that happens, what advantage will the law-keepers have?

Paul urges us to abandon such concerns. He asks us "never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother" because of jealousy, but to look to the Kingdom where we find "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Troparion - Tone 4
Your holy martyr Hyacinth, O Lord,
through his suffering has received an incorruptible crown from You, our God.
For having Your strength, he laid low his adversaries,
and shattered the powerless boldness of demons.
Through his intercessions, save our souls!
Kontakion - Tone 2
Come, you faithful,
plait a crown of unfading hyacinths today for the Martyr Hyacinth,
and let us cry to Him:
"Rejoice, glory of martyrs."
t - Tone 4
Like a fragrant hyacinth of the Church of Christ, O all-blessed Hyacinth,
You radiate grace to the ends of the world.
By the brilliance of your confession of faith,
You were illustrious in contest in emulation of God the Word
And you ever illumine those who acclaim you.