

When Life Suddenly Changes

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During the week of April 8, we encounter the stories of three men whose lives changed abruptly. For all three, the sudden changes had huge consequences. They are Moses, the Holy Martyr Ardalion the Actor, and Saint Martin, Confessor and Pope of Rome.

On April 9 we read from the first chapter of Exodus. Here Moses, who had been raised in the palace of the Egyptian pharaoh, kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave. Though he believes nobody has seen the crime, he is confronted by two Hebrews who know all about it. Now Moses realizes that the members of the Egyptian court certainly also know. His crime means that he is suddenly no longer like the pharaoh's son, but has become his enemy. Sure enough, "When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses." Moses flees to Midian and says of himself, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land." As the Book of Acts tells us, this man who had been "instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (2: 22) has become an exile and a wanted man.

April 14 is the feast day of the Holy Martyr Ardalion the Actor. He was a popular mimic and comedian whose specialty was a routine in which he mocked Christian martyrs. His winks, broad gestures and booming voice made the crowds roar with delight at this imitation of the martyrs' deaths that were actually taking place at that time. But one day during a performance Ardalion suddenly stopped and proclaimed to the audience that he was a Christian, and said they must not laugh. At first everyone thought this was just another joke, and waited for him to go on with his routine. But Ardalion refused to continue, and the infuriated crowd booed and jeered. Ardalion was arrested, tried, and sentenced to die by literally being roasted to death—a true martyr, no longer a joking mocker.

Another saint commemorated on April 14 is Martin, Confessor and Pope of Rome. Raised in the Church and respected as a priest, he was called to become Pope of Rome in the year 649, a time of serious disagreements over the Church's teachings. Suddenly, because he insisted on upholding the true teachings, he became the enemy of the Emperor, who wanted to heal the terrible divisions by accepting the false teachings and thus ending all disputes. Saint Martin's determined refusal to give in resulted in so much abuse and persecution that in six years he was dead. But the false teachings were later condemned, and his staunch defense of the truth led the Church to honor him as a saint.

Troparion - Tone 3

You strengthened the Church with true doctrine,
wise hierarch Martin.
You declared the two natures of Christ,
putting heresy to shame.
Entreat the Lord to grant us His great mercy.

Even when life suddenly changes and becomes much harder, or is put in jeopardy, the words of Saint Paul in Romans 6:3 are reassuring. We read these words on April 14: "For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His."