

Fr. McDowell preaches
at Lenten Devotions Wed.
at 6:45 and 7:15 p.m.

University of Notre Dame
Religious Bulletin
March 10, 1947

Are you keeping your
Lenten Resolutions?

Forty Martyrs

In Sebaste, a town in Armenia, forty martyrs died at one time. This happened in the fourth century. Today is the feast of those forty men -- they were soldiers. The story of their death is worth thinking about.

When the pagan authorities discovered that these men were Christians, they condemned them to death by freezing. On a bitter winter's night they were taken to a frozen lake, placed in the open, without shelter, and left to die. These men had a great spirit. No sooner did they reach the place of martyrdom than they gathered together to pray: "Forty have we entered on the battle; let us, O Lord receive forty crowns, and suffer not our number to be broken."

A number of guards were placed on duty that night to watch these Christians; only one remained awake. This one overheard their prayers and the wonderful sight that took place when the prayers were finished. The men were encircled by a light, and angels came down from heaven like messengers sent by a king to distribute thirty-nine crowns. The guard became puzzled. He knew the number of condemned men was forty; yet there were only thirty-nine crowns. While wondering about the discrepancy, he discovered that one had lost his courage. Not able to bear the cold any longer, this one threw himself into the warm bath which had been placed near the shore to tempt the forty.

The guard was astonished at the apostasy of that one. He went immediately to the sleeping guards, awakened them, and confessed that he too was a Christian; and then removing his warm garments hurried out on the ice to be the fortieth martyr. This provoked the guards to anger. Picking up clubs, they approached the Christians and broke their legs to hasten their death.

All but one died under this torture. This was Melithon, the youngest of the forty. He had a valiant mother. She had followed him to the place of martyrdom. When she saw that her son was still living after his legs had been broken, she encouraged him, saying: "Son, be patient a while. Lo, Christ is at the door helping you."

The pagan guards removed the bodies of the martyrs, but they left Melithon, hoping they could make him apostatize later. When this good mother saw that her son was being left behind, she picked up the boy in her arms and ran after the burial carts. Melithon died in her arms, and she placed his body on the funeral pile with the other martyrs with whom he had been united in faith and courage, that he might be one with them in burial and go to heaven in their company. The bodies of the forty were burned. Fellow Christians recovered the remains and buried them with respect.

A Christian husband must have a large share of the faith, courage, longsuffering and determination of the martyrs -- that's why you should make the Novena for a Happy Marriage: to develop those qualities in yourself still further. Start the Novena in honor of St. Joseph today.

A good wife and mother has much of the spirit of the mother of Melithon. The Novena will bring you a girl of that character. Mass, Communion, a visit to the Grotto and the Litany of St. Joseph for nine consecutive days will bring you happiness in marriage.

PRAYERS: (Ill) mother of Art Burkert, '30; Irene Burns. Seven Special Intentions. One Thanksgiving