

**March 18, 2018 Dead Man Walking Homily:** In many of our nation's maximum security prisons there are inmates currently on death row and awaiting execution. In times past, they each were derisively referred to as a "dead man walking". As the condemned man walks from his prison cell to a place of execution, the guards would alert the other inmates that a 'dead man walking' is on his final journey in his mortal life. All appeals for a pardon have been exhausted. The judge shows no mercy. Not surprisingly, civil rights activists took offense at the condescending phrase, and demanded that it never be uttered again.

The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel marks a decisive turning point in the life of Christ. His public ministry is at an end. He must now face death. One could say that he is a "dead man walking", an innocent man who will be unjustly condemned to death.

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified", declares Jesus. (Jn. 12:23) Our Blessed Lord speaks of his "hour" from the very beginning of the gospel. Recall the words of Jesus at the wedding feast of Cana, "My hour has not yet come". (Jn. 2:4) On the night before his death, Jesus raised his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, thy hour has come". (Jn.17:1) The Evangelist present the "hour" as the high point of his life. It is the mystery of his glorification and his obedience to his Father's will. On the cross, Jesus will draw all men to Himself. (Jn.12:32) Unlike the other gospel portraits, the cross is not an instrument of grotesque suffering; it is the throne of a king. On the day of his death, Jesus is enthroned. He reigns from the cross as a king. By his saving death comes new life. "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies it produces much fruit". (Jn.12:24)

One can certainly appreciate why the Church honors the holy martyrs on their respective feast days. They are recalled, not so much for the way they lived their Christian life, but the circumstances surrounding their deaths. An early Church Father, Tertullian, was undoubtedly prescient in writing the words, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church". The twentieth century saw more Christians surrender their life in death than any other previous century in the history of the church.

In the film, "Dead Man Walking", a religious sister befriends a convicted criminal on death row. He had raped and murdered a young woman. Initially, he showed no remorse for his evil deed. The sister wanted the condemned man to acknowledge the gravity of his crime and to beg forgiveness from the woman's grieving and angry father. As the movie reaches a stunning climax, the condemned man acknowledges his guilt and begs forgiveness from the father, who had, heretofore, rejected any show of mercy. He suddenly undergoes a startling transformation. He prays for the condemned man about to be executed for a capital offense.

As Jesus had extended his mercy from the cross, so too does a grieving father who unexpectedly lost his precious daughter. Only by death comes new life!

Amen!