



## WEEKLY LETTER FROM MONSIGNOR KEN

August 10, 2025

Christians in the early Church suffered from great persecution and accounts from those years are filled with the names of many holy martyrs. One of them, even in the midst of so many, uniquely stands out. His feast day is today, August 10, but it is not observed this year since it falls on a Sunday. This martyr is credited with converting Rome and ending paganism. Who is he, and why did his story have such an impact?

It is, of course, St. Lawrence, one of seven deacons who assisted Pope Sixtus II, who himself was martyred. The year was 258 A.D. and hostility and hatred was growing for those early Christians. Pagan rulers, in their ignorance, accused them of “odium humani generis,” hatred of the human race. Despite the brutal persecution and hostile atmosphere, those early followers of Jesus remained faithful to their Lord.

Valerian, the emperor, issued an edict that all Christian clergy were to be arrested and executed. When even a Pope was beheaded along with six of his deacons, Lawrence, alone survived. He was heartbroken, but then delighted when his Pope prophesied that he would soon follow him in death. There are two parts of his story that have captured the imagination of Catholics to this day. His courage can inspire us today and challenge us to what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

In preparation for his death, it is said that Lawrence distributed much of the Church's wealth to the poor. When the Emperor angrily demanded the return of the wealth, Lawrence asked for three days to complete the task. When the third day arrived, Lawrence presented to the enraged emperor, not gold and silver, but the poor, handicapped, ill and misfortunate! More than just an insult to the pagan ruler, it was a proclamation for all time of the core of the Gospel. The wealth of the Church is in those we serve, a truth we should never forget.

Sadly, throughout Church history, there have been times and those who instead have put their interest in the values and riches of the world, ignoring the lesson and teaching of their Master.

St. Lawrence's clever lesson elicited rage from the emperor, who demanded, instead of beheading, that he be roasted alive on a griddle, a suffering he amazingly and courageously endured. History, or perhaps later legend, has given us his famous quote: “I'm done on this side; turn me over!” His bravery and calm amidst such inhumane torture, like that of many of the martyrs of the early Church, challenge us and inspire us still today.

Witnessing the ease of some Christians, and an embrace of materialism and worldly values, reveal a Church that has, at times, lost the fervor of Lawrence and others of his time. We don't have to, nor need we suffer their great atrocities, but we can learn from them and imitate them. Yes, we live in the world, but we must learn to turn our back on the world with its false values and embrace the truth of the Gospel. Too many, rather than dying in spirit for the Faith, have allowed themselves to die to the Faith. The courage and martyrdom of St. Lawrence changed Rome, changed history, and changed the world. May we regain just some of his faith. St. Lawrence, pray for us.

***“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroy, nor thieves break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.” (Matthew 6:19-21)***