

St. Justin Martyr

First & Last Name

Period ??

Month Day, Year

St. Justin Martyr was born in the first decade of the second century in Flavia Neapolis, a city built by Vespasian over the ruins of Sichen, the former capital of Samaria, near the modern town of Nablus. His parents were pagan Greeks, and since Justin and his parents were Roman citizens, his family must have been well-to-do.

In his twenties or early thirties, Justin accidentally met an old man who was a Christian. The man convinced him that no philosophy could explain the nature and immortality of the soul. He advised Justin to study the writings of the prophets and the Christian authors and to pray for enlightenment in order to find the truth and knowledge of Jesus Christ. As a result of Justin's ensuing search, he arrived at Christ and converted sometime around A.D. 130. Justin's conversion was in part the result of his being impressed with Christians themselves and how they responded to unfair treatment by pagans, especially the way they faced torture and death without showing fear.

As a result of his conversion, Justin began to work as an itinerant teacher, traveling about and arguing in public with Jews and Gentiles about the faith. Ultimately, Justin's teaching led to his martyrdom. He was beheaded around A.D. 165 during the reign of Marcus Aurelius, but clearly regarded spreading faith as his duty and happily accepted martyrdom as his reward.

Justin was called before the prefect of Rome with five other Christians. The prefect asked whether Justin believed that he would ascend to heaven after being scourged and beheaded, and he also demanded that the prisoners sacrifice to the gods to avoid such punishment. In response, Justin expressed his confidence that heaven was the reward for all martyrs for the faith and rejected the required sacrifices as impiety. His fellow prisoners added that as Christians they would not sacrifice to idols (meaning the

pagan gods were false gods). The prefect then condemned them all to be scourged and beheaded.

From a Catholic perspective, Justin's discussions in his *First Apology* regarding the mass are his most important writings. His description of a baptismal mass would sound familiar to any Catholic. It includes the order of mass, a sign of peace, a great Amen, belief in the Real Presence, and the words of consecration. He also explained that Sunday was the day of gathering the faithful because that was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. Although he accomplished much more as a Christian teacher and martyr, Justin's ancient description of the mass would by itself make him an important figure from the early church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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