

ST BASIL GREEK MELKITE CATHOLIC CHURCH
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FIRST GENERATION OF CHRISTIANS

St Luke's second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, shows the progressively negative treatment which Christians received for Christ's name. At first, Christ's followers were taken into custody and forbidden to speak in the name of Jesus (see Acts 4:13-17). When threats did not work, the disciples were beaten (see Acts 5:17-30). St Stephen was stoned to death (see Acts 7:57-60), becoming the first recorded to have lost his life for the Gospel. He is honored in the Church as the first, or Protomartyr.

As a result, many believers fled Jerusalem. Their dispersal became an occasion for witnessing to Christ, first to those in the surrounding area (see Acts 8:4-8) and then "as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch" (see Acts 11:19ff).

Acts 12 tells how the Apostle James was killed and Peter arrested. The Lord intervened and delivered Peter from prison, which enabled him to escape to the Roman city of Caesarea, away from the jurisdiction of the Jewish leaders.

Over the next 25 years, the Church spread throughout the Roman Empire, beginning in the cities of Asia Minor, chiefly through the activity of St Paul and his companions. Their preaching bore fruit in many places and Churches were established in places like Corinth, Ephesus and Thessalonika. At the same time, they experienced opposition and persecution from local Jewish leaders (see Acts 17:5-9) or devotees of the Roman gods and goddesses (see Acts 19:23ff.) who were intent on eliminating the new movement being spread in Jesus' name. Nevertheless, St Paul taught for two years in Ephesus "...so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:10).

Since there were many religions tolerated in the Roman Empire, the Roman state did not interfere with the Christians unless public order was threatened. One of those infrequent occasions is recorded in Acts 21. On his return to Jerusalem, Paul was accused of violating the temple. "...news came to the commander of the garrison that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. He immediately took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. ... when he could not ascertain the truth because of the tumult, he commanded [Paul] to be taken into the barracks" (Acts 22:32-34). St Paul was ultimately sent to Rome at his own request and was put to death, presumably in AD 68, when the Empire first set its face against those who professed the Gospel of Christ.

Persecution in the Roman Empire: In the summer of AD 64, fire devastated several sections of the city of Rome. A rumor spread that the Emperor Nero had the fire started so that he could rebuild the city his way. According to the historian Tacitus, Nero tried to diffuse this rumor by accusing the Christians of starting the fire. Tacitus wrote, "To get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called *Christians* by the populace" (Tacitus, *The Annals* XV, 44). The Christians' "abominations" consisted in refusing to offer sacrifice to the Roman gods or to take part in their feasts. Since religion in the ancient world was tied to nationalism, venerating the Roman gods was considered a sign of loyalty to the state which was thought to be protected by the gods. Refusing to do so marked the Christians as anti-Roman in the eyes of many.

The average Roman believed that refusing to honor the gods resulted in disaster. The Christian apologist Tertullian observed, "They think the Christians the cause of every public disaster, of every affliction with which the people are visited. If the Tiber rises as high as the city walls, if the Nile does not send its waters up over the fields, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, if there is famine or pestilence, straightway the cry is, 'Away with the Christians to the lions!'" (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 5,1)

During the next 150 years persecution of Christians was sporadic and localized, often involving mob violence. In AD 250 Emperor Decius issued a decree requiring citizens to offer public sacrifice to the gods. Christians could not comply, and many prominent believers were put to death in this, the first empire-wide assault on Christians. (*OctLeaflets*2019)

SUNDAY 4TH AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS Saturday, October 12 & Sunday, October 13, 2019

WEEKLY SERVICES

Daily Liturgy: Monday-Friday at 8:30AM
Holy Liturgy: Saturday at 4:30PM, Sunday at 11:00AM
Matins/ Orthos: Every Sunday at 9:00AM
Holy Confession: Every Monday at 4-6PM
Vespers: Every Saturday at 3:00PM
Holy Rosary: Every Sunday at 10:30AM

SPEEDY RECOVERY

Please continue to pray for our convalescing friends, including Archdeacon George Yanni, Jordan Barahmeh, Michael Klockowski, Eugene Hutchinson, Maggy Attalah, Nancy Gazzal, Rose Pawlinga, Jean Benoit and Fouad Marji. Please notify Fr. Shofany in case of illness.

WEEKLY OFFERINGS: THANK YOU!

Weekly Collection October 5/6: \$ 000.00
Fuel Offering: \$ 00.00
Cheese Sale: \$ 000.00
Memorial Offering: \$ 000.00

† MEMORIAL MASSES †

THIS SATURDAY, OCTOBER 12

† **William Chanatry**, By Louis & Julie Shkane
† **Jackie Albright**, By Marchel & Christine Rawda

THIS SUNDAY, OCTOBER 13

† **Ronald Murad**, By Alex Murad
† **Jackie Albright**, By Marchel & Christine Rawda

NEXT SATURDAY, OCTOBER 19

† **William Chanatry**, By Louis & Julie Shkane
† **Jackie Albright**, By Marchel & Christine Rawda

NEXT SUNDAY OCTOBER 20

† **Ronald Murad**, By Alex Murad
† **Jackie Albright**, By Marchel & Christine Rawda

* ANNOUNCEMENT *

The next Parish Pastoral Council meeting will be held on Mon October 7, 6:30 PM, Rectory Meeting Rm