July 30

Abel the Just and other Gentile witnesses to God righteous among the nations

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• Lectionary

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Since then, the Church has seen Abel as a figure who represents those people who have come to know the true God through divine providence in the world, and through the inner light that burns in the conscience of every human being. Abel was the first to give witness to a possibility that is reserved for the gentiles: that of becoming one of the individuals chosen by God from the beginning of history so that all of humanity might receive life.

Abel is "righteous" because he was chosen to bear witness to God's love by giving his life. His blood, poured out like the blood of the lamb he offered to God before his death, is seen in the Roman liturgy as prefiguring Christ's sacrifice. Abel's story assures us that the possibility of a victory of good over evil has existed in history as long as evil itself has existed.

Even though Abel was not a historical person, he has traditionally been seen as a symbol of God's sovereign freedom. From him we learn that God chooses his witnesses not only from among those who share in his covenant with Abraham, but also from among those who are outside of this covenant. In this way, God is able to reach every person through the one reality that saves, the paschal mystery of Christ his Son.

Abel is commemorated in the Ethiopian church on the second day of the month of Terr.

William Penn (1644-1718) witness

William Penn, one of England's most prominent Quakers, died on July 30, 1718.

William was born in 1644 in Wanstead, Sussex, in a strictly Puritan environment. He discovered the Society of Friends through the preaching of Thomas Loe, but was ostracized by many of his contemporaries when he admitted his interest in the movement. For William, the Quakers were witnesses to a Word powerful enough to challenge both England's emerging industrial society and the Church institutions of the time, in a radical yet peaceful way. Penn's convictions eventually led him to join the Quakers, whom he then guided towards a stronger focus on the Gospel kerygma, fulfilling a need that had existed in Quakerism since its beginnings.

A man of deep inner peace, who had learned gentleness by tolerating humiliation with the help of his faith, Penn was also a fervent defender of freedom of conscience and equality among all people. His dream of a freer society, one more firmly rooted in solidarity, was partly realized when he acquired the American territory that came to be known as the state of Pennsylvania. Its capital, significantly, was named Philadelphia. Penn wanted the state to have no army, and to be open to dialogue with the Indian tribes that lived within its borders. He died at the age of seventy-four.

William Wilberforce (1759-1833) witness

William Wilberforce, a politician and leader of the English missionary movement, died in London in 1833.

William was born in Hull in 1759. He became a member of Parliament in 1780 and took on prestigious responsibilities at a young age. In 1787, two years after his conversion to the evangelical movement, he agreed to take a motion requesting the abolition of slavery to Parliament. The fight against the slave trade remained his first priority until 1807, when both branches of the English Parliament passed a law outlawing slavery in the British territories.

But Wilberforce's testimony continued until the end of his life, in other areas: he promoted missionary activity in India and among the freed slaves of the British Empire, and founded the Biblical Society in his own country.

His three sons were among the most influential spiritual leaders of the English Church in the nineteenth century.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Gb 31,16-23; Gal 3,26-29; 4,6-7; Lc 4,16-21

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
William Wilberforce, social reformer

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Peter Chrysologus (d. 450), bishop and doctor of the church (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (23 abib/hamle):
Longinus the Soldier (1st cent.), martyr (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
William Penn, father of the Quackers in England
August Vilmar (d. 1868), theologian in Hesse

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Silas, Silvain, Epenetus, Crescents and Andronicus (1st cent.), apostles

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
Gregory Bar Hebraeus (d. 1286), monk