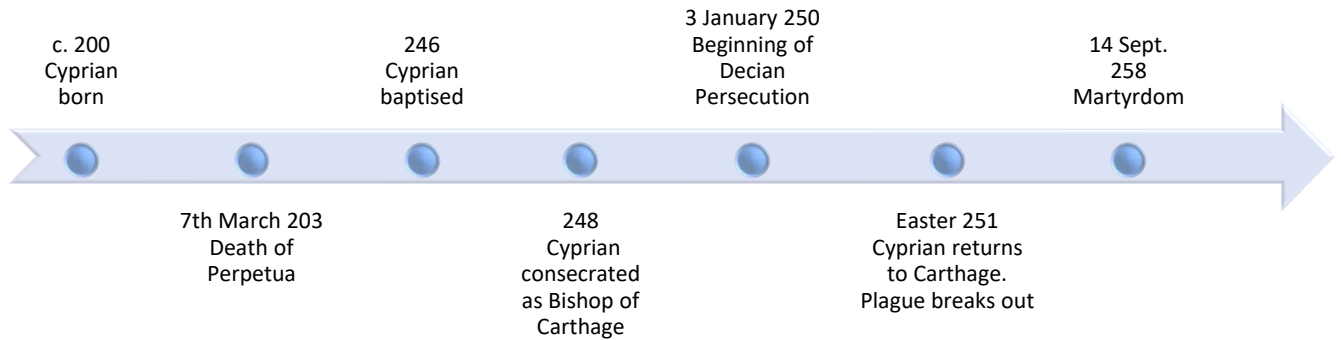


Cyprian

Showing Grace

Life and Times of Cyprian



- Cyprian from a wealthy Roman family, converted to Christianity and was baptised in his mid-40s in the year 246.
- Appointed Bishop of Carthage just two years later.
- Emperor Decius initiates the first Empire-wide persecution, issuing a decree that everyone sacrifices to the Roman gods.
- Cyprian flees to safety, for which he is criticised. Returns the following year, as the persecution begins to fade.
- Plague breaks out later the same year.

Responding to the 'Lapsed'

Some gave in straightaway, some only under torture, others bribed officials to get a certificate of compliance.

Matt. 10:33: 'Whoever denies me before others, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.'

How would you respond to the 'lapsed' and why?

Cyprian on penance:

Are we to believe that a man is sorrowing with all his heart, that he is calling on the Lord with fasting, tears, and lamentations, when from the very day of his sin he is found daily at the baths, or after feasting sumptuously and gorging himself to excess he is next day belching with indigestion, and never shares any of his food or drink with those in need? When he goes about laughing cheerfully, how can he be lamenting the state of death he is in?. (*On the Lapsed*, 30. Trans. Maurice Bévenot)

Cyprian on his care for the fallen:

Who could be so callous, so stony-hearted, who so unmindful of brotherly love, as to remain dry-eyed in the presence of so many of his own kin who are broken now? ... when my brethren fell, my heart was struck and I fell at their side. (*On the Lapsed*, 4)

Can we learn anything from Cyprian's response? Is there a place for penance in the Church today?

Responding to the Plague

‘[W]e who live in hope, and believe in God, and trust that Christ suffered for us and rose again, abiding in Christ, and through Him and in Him rising again, why either are we ourselves unwilling to depart hence from this life, or do we bewail and grieve for our friends when they depart as if they were lost, when Christ Himself, our Lord and God, encourages us and says, “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he die, yet shall live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall not die eternally.” If we believe in Christ, let us have faith in His words and promises; and since we shall not die eternally, let us come with a glad security unto Christ, with whom we are both to conquer and to reign for ever. (*On Mortality* 21, trans. Ernest Wallis)

Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ, and with them departed this life serenely happy; for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbours and cheerfully accepting their pains. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead ... The best of our brothers lost their lives in this manner, a number of presbyters, deacons, and laymen winning high commendation so that in death in this form, the result of great piety and strong faith, seems in every way the equal to martyrdom. (Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 7.22).

It profits nothing to show forth virtue in words and destroy truth in deeds. (Cyprian, *On Mortality* 20)

Questions for discussion

- What would it look like for us to live more by the Gospel we profess to believe?
- Can you think of other examples, in history or your experience, of the Gospel being powerfully seen in action?