

## WHY DID THE APOSTLES DIE AS MARTYRS

When I was teaching children about Catholicism, one of them asked me why the Apostles had to suffer awful deaths, couldn't God have made sure that they died without any pain and peacefully?

What a question, I hadn't a clue, but the answer I did give was not far from what I now believe to be a possible answer. I said that God wanted the new and future believers in Christianity to **remember** what Jesus had gone through when he died. We human beings tend to remember truly horrible things when they happen to others and truly good things when they happen to us. Jesus dying such a horrible death made sure we didn't forget it all.

The clue to a possible answer to that child's question came to me when I heard some specific words in a homily at mass: "God has absolute knowledge and wisdom, and this is why we humble human beings should trust him in all things."

Those words stuck in my mind, and after the mass, I turned them over in my mind. I had no doubts about them, and they made me wonder how God may have used his supreme knowledge and wisdom to make sure we mere mortals not only understood but, more importantly, **remembered** what he wanted from us, especially obeying his laws, which we call the commandments.

God knows that we are being tempted continually by Satan to disobey his commandments and that our desires, especially for wealth and power, are also great causes of sinning against him.

Knowing we could be weak in such situations, and because of his love for us, he sent His Son to show us how to overcome these problems. It was now that my answer to the child's question seemed to be all about our human memory's effectiveness. Could it be that God knew that we humans always needed reminding of his laws?

Throughout history, from the earliest civilisations, such as the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans and even the Nazis in the early 1900s, all made sure that their great accomplishments, as they saw them, were recorded for posterity on things such as stone, papyrus, vellum, and paper so that people would be reminded about what were nearly always their conquests, never what they invented for the benefit of people. This helped me realise that even throughout history, we have known that our human memory is limited.

It was this fact about our memory that made me realise why God allowed many of his staunchest supporters, such as Saints and Martyrs, to be put to death in cruel ways.

The death of St. John the Baptist is a very clever one. It's all about him telling the king, Herod Antipas, that his marriage to Herodias, his dead brother's wife, was against the law. She already had a beautiful young daughter called Salome, Herod's stepdaughter. Herod found her beauty captivating and promised her anything if she would dance for him. She promised to dance for him, but only if he had St. John's head cut off and served to her on a platter. This happened. It's a gruesome tale, probably why it is **easily remembered**.

We know that John and Jesus were born within a year of each other, so John could only have been in his early thirties when he was executed. Why so young? Was it because God knew that he had done the work he was put on earth for and wanted him to have the glory of heaven sooner rather than later?

The Apostles all died nasty deaths as martyrs except John, who was marooned on the isle of Patmos for not denying Jesus. Knowing how these saints died continually reminds us of what Christianity is all about and why we should be determined not to sin.

Our Lord Jesus Christ suffered a terrible death. He was beaten, whipped, crowned with thorns, crucified, and speared, all before dying on the cross. Because of his cruel death, we remember easily why it was very important. This was because he'd promised to rise from the dead after three days, and when he did this, it proved beyond any doubt that he was the Son of God.

We can never be sure why God does things unless he tells us, but when it helps us obey his commandments, then trying to understand his actions can help us keep our immortal souls free from mortal sin, which should always be our aim in life.

We can never be sure, but does God use gruesome situations to help us remember easily the important things he wants us to remember?