

September 2 The Martyrs of New Guinea 1942

New Guinea, the second largest island in the world, is still one of the main frontiers of Christian mission, because of its difficult terrain and the cultural diversity of its peoples, who speak some 500 distinct languages. Christian missionaries first began work there in the 1860s and 1870s, with only limited success. The Anglican mission began in 1891, and the first bishop was consecrated in 1898. During World War II, the suffering of missionaries and of native people was severe. One historian reckons the total number of martyrs from all Christian denominations during this period at around 330. This feast day, observed in the Diocese of New Guinea and in many dioceses of the Church of Australia, marks the witness of nine Australian missionaries and two Papuan martyrs who died while serving those who needed them. The missionaries were determined to stay with their flocks during the Japanese invasion, and to continue their work of healing, teaching, and evangelism. Once the invasion occurred, they realized that their presence was a danger to the local people with whom they stayed; any people of European descent were considered enemy combatants and villages harboring them were severely punished. Two of the missionaries, one Australian and one Papuan, were evacuating with the villagers with whom they ministered when their boat was strafed and sunk by sea-planes. The remaining missionaries were captured in the bush. Some were executed by soldiers, others by locals who feared retribution for their presence. One of the Papuan martyrs, Lucian Tapiedi, is among one of the ten 20th century martyrs honored with a statue above the west door of Westminster Abbey in London. While accompanying his Australian companions as a guide, he was separated from the group and killed by a local Orokaiva named Hivijapa. After the war, Hivijapa converted to Christianity, was baptized as Hivijapa Lucian, and built a church at Embi in memory of the evangelist he had slain.

In 1950, the Primate of the Anglican Church in Japan gave several bamboo crosses to be erected at the parish churches of the martyrs as a mark of contrition. In addition to remembering those who gave up their lives, the day also includes remembrance of the faith and devotion of Papuan Christians of all churches, who risked their own lives to care for the wounded, and to save the lives of many who otherwise would have perished.

Collect Almighty God, we remember before you this day the blessed martyrs of New Guinea, who, following the example of their Savior, laid down their lives for their friends; and we pray that we who honor their memory may imitate their loyalty and faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Lessons

1 Chronicles 22:11–13

Now, my son, the Lord be with you, so that you may succeed in building the house of the Lord your God, as he has spoken concerning you. 12 Only, may the Lord grant you discretion and understanding, so that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the Lord your God. 13 Then you will prosper if you are careful to observe the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord commanded Moses for Israel. Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed.

Psalm 126

1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.

2 Then our mouth was filled with laughter,
and our tongue with shouts of joy;
then it was said among the nations,
"The Lord has done great things for them."
3 The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

4 Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the watercourses in the Negeb.
5 May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
6 Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

Luke 12:4–12

"I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten in God's sight. But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

"And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before the angels of God. And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When they bring you before the synagogues, the rulers, and the authorities, do not worry about how you are to defend yourselves or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that very hour what you ought to say."