Jesus tells his disciples that they will be martyrs and great witnesses of the faith. “They will expel you from the synagogues; in fact, the hour is coming when everyone who kills you will think he is offering worship to God.” (John 16:2).

We know that during the life of Jesus, the apostles did not have a good track record. They scattered when Jesus was crucified and locked themselves away after his death. Peter denied him 3 times on Good Friday. And let us not forget the glory seekers, James and John, who asked to sit on the right and left of Jesus in heaven. On more than one occasion, Jesus told them that he came to “give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

Jesus promises to send the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit who makes a remarkable difference in the ability of the Apostles to testify. And indeed, this we find in scripture and in history.

- Jesus tells Peter of the future that awaits him: “Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go” (Jn 21:18). Peter the 1st and longest serving Pope will be martyred in Rome in 66 A.D. by being crucified upside down.

- Peter’s older brother Andrew “was crucified in Achaia at Patras in the year 61 A.D. Tied to an X-shaped cross after being scourged, he made the cross his pulpit and preached to the people for two days before he died.”

- Jesus also tells James and John of their future. “The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized” (Mark 10:39).
  - Herod Agrippa persecuted the Christians and had James beheaded in 44 A.D. (Acts 12:2). He was the first apostle to be martyred.
  - His brother John, the beloved and youngest Apostle, lived long enough to document the persecution of Christians. The Book of Revelation is written to bolster the faith of the early church amidst a ruthless persecution. “The book is...an exhortation and admonition to Christians of the first century to stand firm in the faith and to avoid compromise with paganism, despite the threat of adversity and martyrdom” (Introduction to Book of Revelation). John, although not martyred, is exiled to the Roman penal colony of Patmos.

When we celebrate the feast of an Apostle, the priest and Deacon where red vestments, as we do with all martyrs. Truly, each of the Apostles, followed the example of Jesus in their willingness to lay down their lives to spread the faith. The heroic witness of the apostles is meant to encourage our faith and to help us in the difficult of times we face. Their example continues to inspire witnesses to this day.

In January, Michael Nnadi and 3 other seminarians were kidnapped in Nigeria by a gang seeking to profit from their abduction. Michael boldly proclaimed the Gospel to his captors and invited them to repent from their evil ways. The other 3 were released while Michael became the latest martyr for the faith. At his funeral, his bishop encouraged his flock to “become more robust in presenting the values of Christianity especially our message of love and non-violence to a violent society. Among the wolves of the world, we must become more politically alert, wise as the serpent and humble as the dove.” Praising Michael for his courage, the bishop continued:

We know that Michael’s strength will inspire an army of young people to follow in his steps. We will march on with the cross of Christ entrusted to us, not in agony or pain, because our salvation lies in your cross. We have no vengeance or bitterness in our
hearts. We have no drop of sorrow inside us. We are honored that our son has been summoned to receive the crown of martyrdom.

The Introduction to the Book of Revelations, helps to put everything in perspective: Those who remain steadfast in their faith and confident in the risen Lord need have no fear. Suffering, persecution, even death by martyrdom, though remaining impenetrable mysteries of evil, do not comprise an absurd dead end. No matter what adversity or sacrifice Christians may endure, they will in the end triumph over Satan and his forces because of their fidelity to Christ the victor. This is the enduring message of the book; it is a message of hope and consolation and challenge for all who dare to believe.

We never quite know what we are capable of until we are tested by the most trying of circumstances. But we do have the assurance of Jesus: “The Spirit of truth will testify to me, says the Lord, and you also will testify.” (Alleluia Verse).

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1 catholicism.org/how-did-the-apostles-die.html
2 Although he never claims to be John the apostle, whose name is attached to the fourth gospel, he was so identified by several of the early church Fathers, including Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Hippolytus. This identification, however, was denied by other Fathers, including Denis of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen, and John Chrysostom.