Opinion

Guest Voices



Lorenzo de Moor as St. Sebastian in "Martin Scorsese Presents: The Saints" (IMDb)



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Donald Trump is now the 47th president of the United States. Though only God knows the future, Trump has been explicitly clear about what he plans to do now that he is in office. He's signed over a hundred executive orders and actions to start the mass deportations of millions of immigrants, end birthright citizenship, and pardon those who participated in the January 6th terror attack.

Two events were in some ways overshadowed by the inauguration. The first being Martin Luther King Jr. Day feels almost too ironic to dive into. But the second was the feast of St. Sebastian, and this Diocletian martyr gives me a glimmer of hope for the future.

Like that of early church martyrs, the veneration of Sebastian spread further than just his hometown. Through centuries of devotion, his wide patronage has come to include athletes, soldiers, and the LGBTQ+ community.

Sebastian lived under the Roman emperor Diocletian, whose eponymous persecution was perhaps the fiercest attempt ever at the elimination of Christianity. Sebastian was a guard of the emperor, and secretly saved imprisoned Christians while rising through the civil ranks. His faith was eventually discovered by the imperial court, however, and Sebastian was sentenced to death by arrows. Even so, he miraculously survived and recovered, ultimately coming back to preach against Diocletian in a pagan temple. Angered, Diocletian ordered Sebastian to be clubbed to death.

Sebastian's double martyrdom came at a pivotal point in the Church's history. It had suffered numerous persecutions up to that point, but had entered into a relatively calm period in the decades immediately preceding Diocletian. But with growing economic and political issues plaguing his realm, the emperor sought the persecution of those viewed as the reason for Rome's issues.

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St. Eusebius, a fourth-century Church historian and witness to the persecutions, wrote:

> I saw with my own eyes the places of worship thrown down from top to bottom, to the very foundations, the inspired holy Scriptures committed to the flames in the middle of the public squares, and the pastors of the churches hiding disgracefully in one place or another, while others suffered the indignity of being held up to ridicule by their enemies — a reminder of another prophetic saying: 'For contempt was poured on rulers, and He made them wander in a trackless land where there was no road.'

This desire for Rome's former glory led to a brutal persecution of humans made in the image of God. It's scary to see a similar desire boiling up in our country today. Trump is nowhere near Diocletian in terms of severity or depravity, but his solution of "Making America Great Again" comes at the cost of the poor, the immigrant, and the forgotten. Billionaires like Elon Musk and racists like Stephen Miller will be Trump's right-hand men in orders and policy proposals that Pope Francis and many U.S. bishops warn are an infringement on human dignity.

Many of Trump's political appointees, such as Secretary of Defense nominee Pete Hegseth, have openly espoused Christian nationalist beliefs. Even in my own family, I wait in fear to see what Trump will do in our native Panama.

I'm worried, simply put, but God and his graces are pushing me on. Jesus promised that he will never leave us or forsake us. That same promise was true for St. Sebastian. This doesn't mean as Catholics we shouldn't push for justice. Instead, the Catholic Church must be a beacon of that justice. We must always remember the poor, and always defend the defenseless, emulating Sebastian as he freed prisoners and proclaimed Christ to the emperor.

It will be hard, and it might even feel like arrows piercing our skin. But Christ is sovereign, and through Sebastian's intercession, we will not forget that.

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This story appears in the **Trump's Second Term** feature series. View the full series.