



# SHIELD OF FAITH

"Take Up the Shield of Faith" - Paul

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Friday, November 1, 2019

*Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. — Matthew 12:18*

## **Truth Living Lovers Sebastian and Oscar**

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This verse in Matthew's gospel is from the prophet Isaiah. Matthew writes of the verse as he introduces it, "Jesus, aware of this, withdrew from there. And many followed him, and he healed them all and ordered them not to make him known. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet." The healing work of Jesus drew out an odd reaction from the religious leaders, "But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him."

This proclamation of justice to the gentiles emerges in our world today. It comes to us in the same way that Jesus Christ brought it to the generation among whom He walked in the flesh two thousand years ago. It came into the Emperor Diocletian's world through a Christian named Sebastian seventeen hundreds years ago. And Sebastian still speaks today in Antigua, Guatemala.

My wife, Paulie, was treated in a medical clinic named after the martyred Christian Sebastian yesterday. I became curious about the man as a result of a lovely interior display of plants and flowers surrounding an elevated — enclosed in stone and glass, and locked — statue of a human figure pierced with arrows. The display extended perhaps twenty feet down a hallway and was three feet deep. The statue and enclosure took up only a small part of the display, but was prominently featured in the center.

The Christians of Rome in Sebastian's day had become known throughout the empire for bringing justice to the poor and to babies. They would pick live babies from dumps where they'd been left to die by pagan Romans. In constant conflict with synagogue attending Jews the Christian church-goers often found themselves the target of hostile Romans. The emperor Diocletian visited a brutal persecution on the Christians in the third century.

Like his Master, Jesus Christ, Sebastian managed to hide from the hostile religious forces in his culture for a time. He led many to Christ as a member of the Roman Army, and eventually became a target of the Emperor. He was tied to a stake and made to look like a spiked urchin, according to historical accounts. The spikes were arrows shot into his body by archers from Mauritania. Left for dead and tied to the stake Irene of Rome found him alive and nursed him to health. Later, channeling John the Baptist, Sebastian — according to Wikipedia, "stood by a staircase where the emperor was to pass and harangued Diocletian for his cruelties against Christians."

*Continued on the back*

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Diocletian had him clubbed to death. His finally dead corpse was thrown into a sewer to rot.

The Emperor's persecution ultimately gave way to the most profound change in the history of Christianity. A new Emperor Constantine embraced the faith, ending the persecutions. It was the unique compassionate complexion of Justice — the cultural realities of the Gospel over the three previous centuries — that caused Christianity to overcome the hollow realities of paganism. And Christianity would go on to become the institution that preserved art, culture, literature and religion through the last half of the first millennium. Rome collapsed. Christianity endured and watered the flowering of Western Civilization in Europe in the first half of the second millennium after Christ.

Sebastian's sacrificial heroism would endure to the point where he is venerated in a tiny hidden place of healing on a side street in Antigua, Guatemala in the year 2019. And Sebastian's example lives on in the surgeon who will operate on my wife tomorrow morning at 6:30.

While he could practice on the rich in Guatemala he chooses to heal the poor. Many Guatemalans live in the countryside raising their families as best they can in the rapidly changing economic and cultural conditions heavily influenced by their northern neighbor, the powerhouse of the world, the U.S.A. While economically challenged the nation is full of vibrant people who are dedicated to family life and work. They have something so much more valuable than Blue Cross and Blue Shield. They have the living and righteous example of the great Christian Saints of the past.

I was so thrilled to learn of Dr. Oscar's Christian heart for his people yesterday while talking with him about Paulie's situation. It is always a delight to be around virtue. It is contagious.

The blood of martyrs is the seed of the church. The good, the true and the beautiful is preserved and spread through the hard work and sacrifice of truth-living lovers like Dr. Oscar and Sebastian.

Praise the Lord!

Amen.