

# Death is Not the Ultimate Sacrifice

Reputation is.

TK Coleman told me about a Catholic Saint who faced martyrdom if she did not publicly deface a crucifix.

(I should mention, a few minutes on Google and I couldn't find the specifics of the story. It's possible it's different than what I remember from TK, but for purposes of this post, that's irrelevant. The way TK told it stuck with me and illustrates something powerful.)

Being a saint, wholly devoted to Christ and focused on a heavenly kingdom, she was ready and willing to be a martyr for her beliefs.

But that was too easy.

At the moment she faced the decision of death or defacement, she heard the voice of God tell her step on the face of the crucified Christ. She, a devoted Christian, was asked by God there, in front of everyone, to disrespect the cross. She was asked to make the ultimate sacrifice.

She claimed an unwavering devotion to God come what may. Death may not have been enough to make her turn away, but would the protection of her reputation?

This story presents an uncomfortable set of questions.

It's easy to deceive ourselves into believing we have unwavering devotion to something. We'd suffer poverty, pain, even death. But part of the reason we feel ready for them is because they are viewed as heroic by others.

The real test of commitment to a person, plan, or ideal is what the Saint faced. Would she do the thing she knew was right despite the fact that every single other person would view it as vile? Would she choose holiness even if it meant everyone else for all of history would see her as unholy?

## **You are willing to die, but are you willing to be misunderstood?**

You can imagine versions of this today. Pick the thing you are willing to sacrifice anything for. A belief. Your family. A goal. It's not too hard to imagine suffering or dying for it. In fact, imagining it can make you feel proud.

Now imagine doing something for it that you know with every fiber of your being is right and true, but no one else can or ever will. In fact, everyone else will forever misinterpret

your actions as the worst possible kind. History will make you one of its villains.

Would you do what you know is right even if it meant you were forever thought by everyone to be a loser, a liar, a coward, a scoundrel, or the most perverted and disgusting criminal imaginable?

Scary stuff.

This thought exercise is one of the best I know of to discover the gaps between who we are, who we say we are, and who we want others to think we are.

I die a little ego death just thinking through it.