

life itself. Nothing does man dread more than physical torments and death, "the fear of which," says St. Augustine, "deters even brute animals from the greatest pleasures." (1) Yet the martyr despises tortures and death through love of Christ. "The charity of Christ," says St. Maximus, "conquers in his martyrs." Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends, "says our Lord. (2) The martyr is therefore the special friend and lover of Jesus Christ. Hence, the fathers teach, in commenting on the parable of the sower, that martyrdom is the greatest act of the love of God, and that the good ground which brings forth one hundred fold is martyrdom. "The hundred fold," says St. Augustine, "is the merit of the martyrs, as the sixtieth is the merit of the virgins, and the thirtieth of those who are married." Thus the martyrdom of Agnes was more meritorious even than her virginity. But when we consider that martyrdom in all its details, we are forced to exclaim, was ever martyr, since Christ, like unto this; was ever such fortitude, such fearless contempt of death, such sublime love of Jesus Christ! A

(1) Lib. 83. quaest. quaest. 36.

(2) John xv, 13.