



Josef Mayr-Nusser

Martyr for Conscience

Sentenced to death because of his faith when his conscience would not allow him to make an oath of loyalty to Hitler, Josef Mayr-Nusser died on 24 February 1945 in a cattle wagon on the way to Dachau concentration camp where he was to be shot. He was beatified by Pope Francis on 18 March 2017.

This assembly celebrates the life of Bl. Josef and the lessons we can learn from his courageous witness.

Narrator: [Slide 1] It is October 1944 and a group of Italian men had been conscripted into the German army. Having been taken to Prussia and undergoing three weeks of training the time had come to be sworn in. At the critical moment one man, Josef Mayr-Nusser, told the officer he could not take the oath of loyalty to Hitler. His faith and his conscience would not allow it.

[Slide 2] Both comrades and officers tried to persuade him to change his mind but Josef stood firm. *If no one ever finds the courage to tell them that they do not agree with their Nazi ideology then nothing will ever change.*

A Reading from the Letter of St James (1: 2-4, 12)

You will always have your trials but, when they come, try and treat them as a happy privilege; you understand that your faith is only put to the test to make you patient, but patience too is to have its practical results so that you will become fully developed, complete, with nothing missing.

Happy are you who stands firm when trials come. You have proved yourself, and will win the prize of life, the crown that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

Narrator: [Slide 3] Born in 1910 into a wine producing family near the Italian city of Bolzano, Josef Mayr-Nusser worked as a cashier for a company in that city. His family were German speaking – the region of South Tyrol in which they lived had been part of Austro-Hungary until the First World War.

[Slide 4] Josef was a devout Catholic. As a member of Catholic Action he had the opportunity to openly and frankly reflect upon and discuss the political situation of the time and the rise of fascism. As a committed member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul much of his spare time was spent visiting and caring for the poor.

With the accord between Hitler and Mussolini in 1939 most of the German speaking citizens of South Tyrol accepted the option of moving to Germany. Josef was one of the few who remained in Italy judging Hitler's project to be completely incompatible with the Gospel.

[Slide 5] Josef married a work colleague, Hildegard Straub, in 1942 and their son Albert was born a year later. He had a deep interest in St Thomas More, the great English saint, and the challenge of taking a stand based on conscience.



A reading from a letter of St Thomas More to his daughter whilst in prison

[Slide 6] I will not mistrust him, Meg, though I shall feel myself weakening and on the verge of being overcome with fear. I shall remember how Saint Peter began to sink because of his lack of faith, and I shall do as he did: call upon Christ and pray to him for help. And then I trust he shall place his holy hand on me and in the stormy seas hold me up from drowning.

Narrator: Having refused to swear allegiance to Hitler, Josef Mayr-Nusser was arrested, imprisoned, and transferred to Danzig to await trial. The conditions in prison were harsh and he suffered extreme cold with little food.

[Slide 7] Condemned in January 1945 for undermining military morale, Josef was sentenced to death. He was moved to the Dachau concentration camp where he was to be shot but, much weakened by his time in prison, he died in the cattle wagon that was transporting him.



[Slide 8] In a letter to his wife he had written, *pray for me that in the hour of my testing I may act without fear and hesitation according to the dictates of God and my conscience.*

Josef Mayr-Nusser was beatified by Pope Francis on Saturday 18 March 2017 - a martyr for conscience.

Let us pray...

[Slide 10] ... that like Blessed Josef we will have the courage to stand up for what is right even when it is difficult and comes at some personal cost.

Creator God,
You desire that we live life in its fullness.
Embolden us to witness to your message
Give us courage when we fear,
Hope when we despair,
and strength when we are weak.
Make us heralds of hope and peace
that our lives will always proclaim your praise.

We pray through Christ our Lord

Amen

Blessed Josef Mayr-Nusser - **Pray for Us!**

More Information

Information in English on Blessed Josef Mayr-Nusser is currently very limited. Pax Christi have a profile of him on our website: www.paxchristi.org.uk

The main website for his beatification is available in Italian and German

www.josef-mayr-nusser.it/it/

It includes a photo archive of his life

www.josef-mayr-nusser.it/it/biografia/fotogallery/

