

Homily Notes: Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians – November 26, 2017

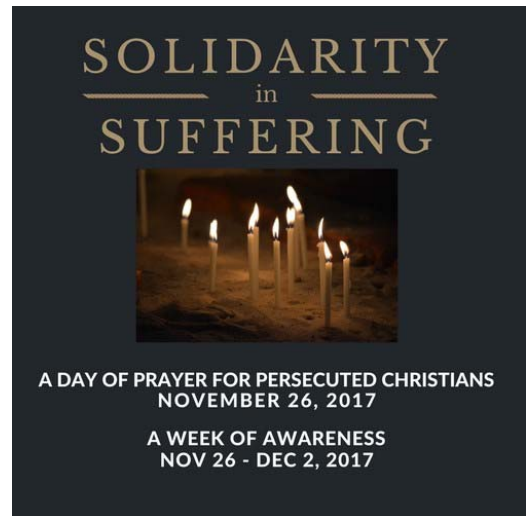
Readings: Ez 34:11-12, 15-17; Ps 23:1-3, 5-6;
1 Cor 15:20-26, 28; Mt 25:31-46

Today's readings reveal different aspects of Christ's Universal Kingship.

- He is the Good Shepherd (Ez 34: 12, 16 and Ps 23:1): he promises to **save** ("I will rescue them from every place where they were scattered when it was cloudy and dark." Ez 34:12), **heal** ("the injured I will bind up" Ez 34:16), and **nourish** ("You spread a table before me in the sight of my foes" Ps 23:5) his flock.
- He is **gentle and humble**, identifying himself with his suffering brothers and sisters:
"Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Mt 25:40). "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." (Mt 25:45)
- He will **triumph** (1 Cor 15:24): he will destroy every sovereignty, authority and power (1 Cor 15:24) and usher in his kingdom in its fullness, a kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love, peace (Preface).

Yet now we live in the mystery of the "already" and the "not yet"— Christ's kingdom is already present, but it is not yet fulfilled. The destruction of the last enemy, death, is still to come, and then, says St. Paul, God will "be all in all." This is why we pray "Thy kingdom come."

- We see this "not yet" in the suffering and persecution of Christians and other religious minorities throughout the world, perhaps most acutely today in the Middle East.



- Jesus told his disciples this would happen: “Remember the word I spoke to you, 'No slave is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” (Jn 15:20)
- St. Augustine said "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations" (CCC, 769)
- "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks." (CCC, 1816; LG)

We pray that Christ the King will be present in a special way to our persecuted brothers and sisters:

- As the Good Shepherd rescuing those scattered by war and persecution
- Binding up those injured by persecution, torture and abuse
- Providing spiritual strength for them in the sight of their foes
- Being present in the least of his brothers and sisters
- “At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that if you want peace, work for justice. The Gospel calls us to be peacemakers. Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we promote peace in a world surrounded by violence and conflict.” (from Seven Themes)

Today’s solemnity reminds us that when we pray “Thy kingdom come,” we are praying for a kingdom of truth, life, holiness, grace, justice, love, peace (Preface), a kingdom for which many of our sisters and brothers are suffering persecution. The *Prayer over the Gifts* is also a prayer for those suffering persecution: that your Son himself may bestow on all nations the gifts of unity and peace.

QUOTES

Catechism of the Catholic Church

675 Before Christ's second coming the Church must pass through a final trial that will shake the faith of many believers.⁵⁷³ The persecution that accompanies her pilgrimage on earth⁵⁷⁴ will unveil the "mystery of iniquity" in the form of a religious deception offering men an apparent solution to their problems at the price of apostasy from the truth. The supreme religious deception is that of the Antichrist, a pseudo-messianism by which man glorifies himself in place of God and of his Messiah come in the flesh.⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷³ Cf. $\Rightarrow$ Lk 18:8; $\Rightarrow$ Mt 24:12.

⁵⁷⁴ Cf. $\Rightarrow$ Lk 21:12; $\Rightarrow$ Jn 15:19-20.

⁵⁷⁵ Cf. $\Rightarrow$ 2 Th 2:4-12; $\Rightarrow$ I Th 5:2-3; 2 $\Rightarrow$ Jn 7; $\Rightarrow$ I Jn 2:1 8, $\Rightarrow$ 22.

769 "The Church . . . will receive its perfection only in the glory of heaven,"¹⁷⁹ at the time of Christ's glorious return. Until that day, "the Church progresses on her pilgrimage amidst this world's persecutions and God's consolations."¹⁸⁰ Here below she knows that she is in exile far from the Lord, and longs for the full coming of the Kingdom, when she will "be united in glory with her king."¹⁸¹ The Church, and through her the world, will not be perfected in glory without great trials. Only then will "all the just from the time of Adam, 'from Abel, the just one, to the last of the elect,' . . . be gathered together in the universal Church in the Father's presence."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ LG 48.

¹⁸⁰ St. Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, 18, 51: PL 41, 614; Cf. LG 8.

¹⁸¹ LG 5; Cf. 6; $\Rightarrow$ 2 Cor 5:6.

¹⁸² LG 2.

Faith

1816 The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks."⁸² Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."⁸³

⁷⁹ $\Rightarrow$ Rom 1:17; $\Rightarrow$ Gal 5:6.

⁸⁰ Cf. Council of Trent (1547): DS 1545.

⁸¹ $\Rightarrow$ Jas 2:26.

⁸² LG 42; cf. DH 14.

⁸³ $\Rightarrow$ Mt 10:32-33.

USCCB'S INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE CHAIR URGES SOLIDARITY WITH THOSE SUFFERING RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN ASIA, MIDDLE EAST

(JUNE 15, 2017)

Bishop Oscar Cantú highlighted the efforts of the local Church in Iraq to reach out to all in need in partnership with Caritas Iraq and Catholic Relief Services (CRS). He also pointed to the importance for the U.S. Church to follow the lead of the local Churches enduring persecution in expressing solidarity, particularly in Syria and Iraq.

Even in the midst of persecution there are moments of joy. He contrasted the image of "a tent camp for Christians" covering "the Church grounds across the street from our hotel" in Erbil with attending "the ordination of three deacons in Erbil" where "the Cathedral erupted [in joy] when a displaced man from Mosul was ordained."

In his report, Bishop Cantú also highlighted the following recommendations for the U.S. government that include:

- Providing assistance to refugees and displaced persons, including through faith-based organizations like CRS;
- Assisting in the resettlement of refugees, including victims of genocidal actions and other vulnerable families; and
- Encouraging central and regional governments in Iraq and Syria to strengthen the rule of law based on citizenship, to insure the protection of vulnerable minorities, and to improve policing, judiciary and local governance with the help of U.S. assistance.

He also invited the Church and Catholics in the United States, who wish to help, to:

- Pray for those suffering from persecution.
- Become aware of the Christian presence in the Middle East and of an accurate understanding of Islam with openness to dialogue with Muslim neighbors. Resources are available at: www.usccb.org/middle-east-christians.
- Donate to non-profit Catholic organizations such as CRS, Catholic Near East Welfare Association (CNEWA), Aid to the Church in Need and the Knights of Columbus.
- Advocate with the U.S. government for assistance and the dignity of refugees.

Bishop Cantú also shared with the bishops the research study *In Response to Persecution*, conducted by the University of Notre Dame's Center for Ethics and Culture, the Religious Freedom Institute, and Georgetown University's Religious Freedom Research Project. The study is available at: http://ucs.nd.edu/assets/233538/ucs_report_2017_web.pdf.