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FOR THE MARTYRS OF OUR  
DAY, WITNESSES TO CHRIST

## MARCH

**“Let us pray that those who  
risk their lives for the Gospel  
in various parts of the world  
might imbue the Church with  
their courage and  
missionary drive”**



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## PRAYER INTENTION REFLECTION

HOMILY IN MEMORY OF THE MARTYRS OF THE 20th AND 21st CENTURY<sup>4</sup>

Francis

22 April 2017

We have come as pilgrims to this Basilica of Saint Bartholomew on the Tiber Island, where the ancient history of martyrdom unites with the memory of the new martyrs, of the many Christians killed by the demented ideologies of the last century — and today too — and killed solely for being disciples of Jesus.

The memory of these ancient and recent heroic witnesses confirms us in the knowledge that the Church is Church if she is the Church of martyrs. Martyrs are those who, as the Book of Revelation reminds us, “have come out of the great tribulation” and “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). They had the grace to confess Jesus until the end, unto death. They suffer; they give their life, and we receive God’s blessing through their witness. And there are also many hidden martyrs, those men and women faithful to the gentle power of love, to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who in everyday life seek to help their brothers and sisters and to love God without reservation.

If we look closely, the cause of all persecution is hatred: the hatred of the prince of this world toward those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus through his death and his Resurrection. In the Gospel passage we have heard (cf. Jn 15:12-19), Jesus uses a harsh and frightening word: the word “hate”. He, who is master of

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<sup>4</sup> See full message:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170422\\_omelia-nuovi-martiri.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170422_omelia-nuovi-martiri.html)

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love, who so liked speaking about love, speaks of hate. He always wished to call things by their name. And he tells us: "Be not afraid! The world will hate you; but know that before you, it hated me".

Jesus chose us and redeemed us, through the freely given gift of his love. With his death and Resurrection he redeemed us from the power of the world, from the power of the devil, from the power of the prince of this world. The origin of hatred is this: since we are saved by Jesus, and the prince of the world does not want this, he hates us and causes persecution, which, since the time of Jesus and of the nascent Church, continues to our day. How many Christian communities today are the object of persecution! Why? Because of the hatred of the worldly spirit.

How often, in difficult moments of history, has it been heard: "Today the homeland needs heroes". A martyr can be thought of as a hero, but the fundamental thing about a martyr is that he or she was "graced": it is the grace of God, not courage, that makes us martyrs. Today, in the same way one could ask: "What does the Church need today?". Martyrs, witnesses, namely, everyday saints. Because the Church is led forward by saints. Saints: without them, the Church can no longer go forth. The Church needs everyday saints, those of ordinary life carried out with coherence; but she also needs those who have the courage to accept the grace to be witnesses to the end, unto death. All those are the living blood of the Church. They are the witnesses who lead the Church forward; those who attest that Jesus is Risen, that Jesus lives, and affirm it with coherence of life and with the strength of the Holy Spirit which they have been given.

Today, I would like to add one more icon, in this Church. A woman. I do not know her name. But she is watching us from heaven. I was in Lesvos; I was greeting the refugees and I found a 30-year-old man, with three children. He looked at me and said: "Father, I am a Muslim. My wife was Christian. Terrorists came to our country, they looked at us and asked us our religion and saw her with the Crucifix, and they asked her to throw it on the ground. She did not do so and they cut her throat in front of me. We loved each other so much!". This is the icon that I bring here today as a gift. I do not know if that man is still in Lesvos or has managed to go elsewhere. I do not know if he was able to get out of that concentration camp, because refugee camps — so many — are like concentration camps, because of the crowd of people who are left there. And the generous people who welcome them must also continue to bear this burden, because it seems that international agreements are more important than human rights. And this man did not have rancour: he, a Muslim, had this painful cross, carried on without rancour. He took refuge in the love of his wife, graced with martyrdom.

Remembering these witnesses of faith and praying in this place is a great gift. It is a gift for the Community of Sant'Egidio, for the Church in Rome, for all the Christian communities of this city, and for so many pilgrims. The living legacy of martyrs gives us peace and unity today. They teach us that, with the power of love, with meekness, one can fight against arrogance, violence and war, and one can bring about peace with patience. And thus, we can pray in this way: O Lord, make us worthy witnesses to the Gospel and to your love; pour out your mercy upon humanity; renew your Church; protect persecuted Christians; hasten to grant the whole world peace. To you, Lord, glory; and to us, Lord, shame (cf. Dn 9:7).



GENERAL AUDIENCE<sup>5</sup>

Francis

29 April 2020

It is painful to recall that in this very moment, there are many Christians in various parts of the world who are suffering from persecution, and we must hope and pray that their trials will soon end. They are many: today's martyrs outnumber the martyrs of the first centuries. Let us express our closeness to these brothers and sisters. We are a single body and these Christians are the bleeding limbs of the body of Christ who is the Church.

But we also have to be careful not to read this Beatitude from a self commiserating, victimized perspective. In fact, mankind's contempt is not always synonymous with persecution: indeed shortly later, Jesus tells Christians that they are the "salt of the earth" and warns against the danger of "losing their taste" because in that case, salt "is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men" (Mt 5:13). Thus, when we lose the taste of Christ and the Gospel, there is also contempt which is our fault.

We have to be faithful to the humble way of the Beatitudes because it leads us to be of Christ and not of the world. It is worth remembering the journey of Saint Paul. When he thought he was a righteous person, he was in fact a persecutor, but when he found out he was a persecutor, he became a man of love who rejoiced in the suffering of the persecution inflicted on him (cf. Col 1:24).

If God grants us the grace to be more like the Crucified Christ and joined to his Passion, then exclusion and persecution are the manifestation of new life. This life is the same as the life of Christ who was "despised and rejected" for us men and women and for our salvation" (cf. Is 53:3; Acts 8:30-35). Welcoming his Spirit can lead us to have so much love in our heart as to offer our life for the world without making compromises with its deceit and accepting its rejection.

Compromises with the world are dangerous: Christians are always tempted to make compromises with the world, with the spirit of the world. This — rejecting compromises and journeying on the way of Jesus Christ — is the life of the Kingdom of Heaven, the greatest joy and true happiness. And, in persecutions there is always the presence of Jesus who accompanies us, the presence of Jesus who comforts us and the strength of the Holy Spirit that helps us to go forward. Let us not be discouraged when a life that is faithful to the Gospel draws persecution from people. There is the Holy Spirit who sustains us in this journey.

**The Pope Video - March 2017:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/help-persecuted-christians/>

**The Pope Video - JANUARY 2022:**

<https://thepopevideo.org/january-religious-discrimination-and-persecution/>

- **22 August 2023 - The International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence Based on Religion or Belief**

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<sup>5</sup> See full message:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200429\\_udienza-generale.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200429_udienza-generale.html)

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