



# MARIAN

## PRAYER PROGRAM



*Our Lady of the Sign. Fresco originally assigned to Giotto. Copying  
 from the fresco, May 14, 1871.  
 Museum of the Vatican, Rome.  
 Rome, 1910. (Vatican)*

*— John and Margaret —  
 Artists in the Vatican*

# INTRODUCTION

By Carl A. Anderson, Supreme Knight

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:10)*

In every age, Christians have suffered for their faith, from the Roman Coliseum to the recent beheadings perpetrated by ISIS. Brave men and women, embracing the cross of Jesus, have gone to their death rather than deny their faith, and the blood of these martyrs serves as the “seed of Christians,” enlivening faith in others. Today, the witness of martyrs continues in an especially intense way in the Middle East, where priests are murdered for offering Mass and families are driven from their homes for displaying a cross.

With this Marian Prayer Program, we honor the martyrs over the centuries as we call particular attention to the suffering of today’s Christians in the Middle East. Featuring the newly commissioned icon of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, the prayer program is the latest in a series of efforts undertaken by the Knights of Columbus to aid those who suffer for their faith. Since its inception in 2014 our Christian Refugee Relief Fund has raised and distributed close to \$20 million to help feed and clothe needy families in the Middle East and to resettle and rebuild villages destroyed by ISIS. Pope Francis has called these efforts “an eloquent sign of your Order’s firm commitment to solidarity and communion with our fellow Christians.”

Created by Italian iconographer Fabrizio Diomedì, this icon depicts the Blessed Mother, with the Child Jesus over her heart, spreading her protective mantle around a representative gathering of recent Christian martyrs—men and women, young and old, from East and West; priests, religious and laypersons, including one of the six priest-members of the Knights of Columbus who were killed by the Mexican government in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The four crosses represent an “ecumenism of blood” among martyrs of Roman and Eastern Catholicism, as well as those of Coptic, Armenian, Syriac and Orthodox traditions.

Since its inception in 1979, the Knights of Columbus’ prayer program has held more than 166,900 local council and parish prayer services with some 20 million participants. Featured images have included Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Czestochowa, Our Lady of Pochaiv, Our Lady of the Assumption, Our Lady of the New Advent, Our Lady of the Rosary and Our Lady of Charity.

By taking part in the current prayer program, Knights and their families, and all who join with them, are rendering spiritual aid to those who suffer today for their faith. Let us ask the holy martyrs, ancient and recent, to intercede for persecuted Christians everywhere as we invoke upon them the protection of Mary.





## PRAYER SERVICE

*Please stand. During the Opening Hymn, the blessed image of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians may be carried in procession and put in a place of honor.*

### Opening Hymn

*Sing of Mary*

1. Sing of Mar - y pure and low - ly, Vir - gin - moth - er  
 2. Sing of Je - sus, son of Mar - y, In the home at  
 3. Glo - ry be to God the Fa - ther; Glo - ry be to

un - de - filed, Sing of God's own Son most ho - ly,  
 Naz - a - reth. Toil and la - bor can - not wea - ry  
 God the Son; Glo - ry be to God the Spir - it;

Who be - came her lit - tle child. Fair - est child of  
 Love en - dur - ing un - to death. Con - stant was the  
 Glo - ry to the Three in One. From the heart of

fair - est moth - er, God the Lord who came to earth,  
 love he gave her, Though he went forth from her side,  
 bless - ed Mar - y, From all saints the song as - cends,

Word made flesh, our ver - y broth - er,  
 Forth to preach, and suf - fer,  
 And the Church the strain and re - ech - oes

Takes our na - ture by his birth.  
 Till on Cal - va - ry he died.  
 Un - to earth's re - mot - est ends.

## Greeting

Leader: As we gather under the protection  
of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians,  
let us beseech God to open our hearts  
to a deeper experience of his love and supreme mercy.

All: In the name of the Father, ✠  
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Opening Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.

O God, who in your inscrutable providence  
will that the Church be united  
to the sufferings of your Son,  
grant, we pray,  
to your faithful who suffer for your name's sake  
a spirit of patience and charity,  
that they may be found true and faithful witnesses  
to the promises you have made.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

All: Amen.

*Please be seated.*

# LITURGY OF THE WORD

## First Reading

*Esther C:1-4, 8-10*

A reading from the Book of Esther

Recalling all that the Lord had done, Mordecai prayed to the Lord and said: "Lord, Lord, King and Ruler of all, everything is in your power, and there is no one to oppose you when it is your will to save Israel.

You made heaven and earth and every wonderful thing under heaven.

You are Lord of all, and there is no one who can resist you, the Lord.

And now, Lord God, King, God of Abraham, spare your people, for our enemies regard us with deadly envy and are bent upon destroying the inheritance that was yours from the beginning.

Do not spurn your portion, which you redeemed for yourself out of the land of Egypt.

Hear my prayer; have pity on your inheritance and turn our mourning into feasting, that we may live to sing praise to your name, Lord. Do not silence the mouths of those who praise you."

The word of the Lord.

**R/ Thanks be to God.**

## Responsorial Psalm

*Psalm 27:1-3, 5*

**R/ Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.**

The LORD is my light and my salvation;  
whom should I fear?  
The LORD is my life's refuge;  
of whom should I be afraid?

**R/ Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.**

When evildoers come at me  
to devour my flesh,  
These my enemies and foes  
Themselves stumble and fall.

**R/ Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.**

Though an army encamp against me,  
my heart does not fear;  
Though war be waged against me,  
even then do I trust.

**R/ Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.**

For God will hide me in his shelter  
in time of trouble,  
He will conceal me in the cover of his tent;  
and set me high upon a rock.

**R/ Blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways.**



## Second Reading

*Acts 4:1-4, 18-21*

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

While they were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees confronted them, disturbed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word came to believe and (the) number of men grew to [about] five thousand.

So they called them back and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John, however, said to them in reply, "Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard." After threatening them further, they released them, finding no way to punish them, on account of the people who were all praising God for what had happened.

The word of the Lord.

**R Thanks be to God.**

*Please stand.*

## Gospel

*Matthew 5:1-12a*

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

**R Glory to you, O Lord.**

When he saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land.

Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of evil against you [falsely] because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven. Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

**R Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

*Please be seated.*

*A reflective pause is recommended after each  
papal excerpt is read aloud.*

# Catechesis of St. John Paul II

## *Homily*

June 7, 1999

A believer “suffers for righteousness’ sake” (1 Peter 3:18) when, in exchange for his fidelity to God, he experiences humiliations, maltreatment, derision from his own, and misunderstanding even from the persons dearest to him. When he exposes himself to opposition, he risks unpopularity or other unpleasant consequences. Yet he is always ready for any sacrifice, since “we must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). Alongside public martyrdom, which takes place before the eyes of many, how often does a hidden martyrdom take place in the depths of people’s hearts: there is a martyrdom of the body and a martyrdom of the spirit; a martyrdom of our vocation and of our mission; a martyrdom of the struggle with oneself and the victory over oneself. In the Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 *Incarnationis Mysterium*, I wrote: “The believer who has seriously pondered his Christian vocation, including what Revelation has to say about the possibility of martyrdom, cannot exclude it from his own life’s horizon.”<sup>1</sup>

Martyrdom is a great and radical test for man, the supreme test of being human, the proof of man’s dignity before God himself. Yes, it is a great test for man, which takes place in the eyes of God himself, but also before the eyes of a world forgetful of God. In this test, man wins the victory when he allows himself to be sustained by the power of grace and becomes an eloquent witness to that power.



## *Message for World Mission Day*

May 28, 1996

The identity of the Christian as witness is marked by the unavoidable and distinctive presence of the *Cross*. There can be no authentic witness without it. Indeed, the Cross is the necessary condition for all who have firmly decided to follow the Lord: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). All the witnesses of God and Christ, beginning with the Apostles, have known persecution because of him: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20). This is the legacy which Jesus left to his followers and which each one must accept and incarnate in his own life. Golgotha is the only way to the Resurrection.

The “Cross” in fact is the imitation of Christ in faithful witness and patient and persevering daily work. The “Cross” is swimming against the tide, making decisions according to God’s commandments despite misunderstanding, unpopularity, marginalization; the “Cross” is the prophetic denunciation of injustice, of trampled freedoms, of violated rights; it is having to live where the Church is most opposed, obstructed and persecuted.

How can we fail at this point to think of *our brothers and sisters and entire communities* which in so many parts of the world offer a splendid witness of a Christian life totally dedicated to Christ and the Church despite being surrounded by persecution and hostility? Every year there are reports of the heroic witness given by new “martyrs” who shed their blood in order to remain faithful to the Lord. The Church pays homage to their sacrifice. She draws close in prayer and fraternal love to believers who suffer violence, inviting them not to be discouraged or afraid. Christ is with you, dearly beloved brothers and sisters!



*Audience*

September 6, 2000

[I]t is necessary to turn one’s back on the past and make a clean break with it, a *metanoia* in the profound sense of the word: a change of mind and life. Christ proposes a narrow way that demands sacrifice and total self-giving: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). It is a way that includes the thorns of suffering and persecution: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you ... also” (John 15:20). It is one which makes missionaries and witnesses to Christ’s word, but demands that his apostles take “nothing for their journey ... no bread, no bag, no money in their belts” (Mark 6:8; Cf. Matthew 10:9-10.)

Discipleship, then, is not an easy journey on a level road. It can include moments of hardship to the point that on one occasion “many of his disciples drew back and no longer went about with him” (John 6:66), that is, with Jesus, who was compelled to challenge the Twelve with a crucial question: “Will you also go away?” (John 6:67). On another occasion, when Peter himself rebels against the prospect of the Cross, he is abruptly rebuked in words that, according to the nuance of the original text, could be an invitation to get “behind” Jesus again, after trying to reject the goal of the Cross: “Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men” (Mark 8:33).

*Please stand.*

## Intercessions

*Leader:* For those suffering because of their Christian faith, that the Holy Spirit may fortify them with the courage to remain strong in faith, as well as with the charity to forgive their persecutors. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord.

**R Lord, hear our prayer.**

*Leader:* For all our brothers and sisters fleeing persecution and devastation in the Middle East, that they may find safe haven and protection, and that they may rebuild their lives in dignity. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

*Leader:* For government leaders worldwide, that they may recognize the grave responsibility that comes with power, and may protect the persecuted. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

*Leader:* For those who persecute Christians and other religious minorities, that the light of God's truth and mercy may penetrate their hearts, and that they may come to recognize the common humanity of all peoples and cease committing acts of hatred. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

*Leader:* For those who provide assistance to those fleeing persecution and violence, that they may continue to see the face of Christ in the most vulnerable. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

*Leader:* For the cause for canonization of Venerable Father Michael J. McGivney, founder of the Knights of Columbus: that this holy priest, who cared so deeply for those persecuted in their places of work and in their own communities, may soon be raised to the honors of the altar. Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

*Leader:* For our personal intentions (*pause*). Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, we pray to the Lord. **R**

# THE MOST HOLY ROSARY OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

*Please kneel or sit.*

## Sign of the Cross

All: In the name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Apostles' Creed

All: I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
he descended into hell;  
on the third day he rose again from the dead;  
he ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand  
of God the Father almighty;  
from there he will come to judge  
the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Three Times*

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.

## I. THE AGONY IN THE GARDEN



Leader:     The first Sorrowful Mystery,  
              The Agony in the Garden.

“Sit here,” Jesus said to Peter, James, and John as they entered the Garden of Gethsemane, “while I go over there and pray.” The reality of persecution would soon fall upon Jesus and all of his disciples: Judas will betray him; Peter will publicly deny Jesus three times, and eventually all but John will be martyred. Today, every man, woman and child throughout the world who experiences persecution is united with Jesus in Gethsemani, as with him they pray, “not my will but yours be done.”

*Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, let us ask for the grace to stay and watch with Jesus.*



## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Ten Times*

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.

## II. THE SCOURGING AT THE PILLAR



Leader:     The second Sorrowful Mystery,  
              The Scourging at the Pillar.

Jesus was tied to a pillar and scourged. Persecuted by us and on account of our own sins, Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah: “He was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity; he bore the punishment that makes us whole.” Jesus did not deny his faith, run from his captors, or call down fire from heaven. Instead, in his scourging at the pillar, the Son of God was united with all of his persecuted disciples throughout all of time, sharing in their lacerations, bruises and wounds.

*Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, let us ask for the grace to persevere alongside our Lord through every form of suffering.*

## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Ten Times*

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.

### III. THE CROWNING WITH THORNS



Leader:     The third Sorrowful Mystery,  
              The Crowning with Thorns.

As he was crowned with thorns, Jesus united himself with all who experience humiliation, jeers, and mockery for his sake. Every Christian to some extent must receive a crown of thorns as he or she experiences rejection by the world and attacks from the evil one. “Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” With obedience, Jesus said “yes” to this pain. In so doing, he showed us how to accept and transform humiliation for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

*Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, let us ask for the grace to endure humiliations in solidarity with our persecuted brethren, for the glory of God.*

## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Ten Times*

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.

## IV. THE CARRYING OF THE CROSS



Leader:     The fourth Sorrowful Mystery,  
              The Carrying of the Cross.

Jesus must now lift the very wood upon which he will be crucified, and demonstrate to us the words he told his disciples: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.” Jesus united himself to all of his followers who, persecuted on account of him, nonetheless shoulder their burden with dignity. He showed us how to lift our own sufferings, failings, weaknesses, wounds and temptations. He is with us, inviting us to press on for his sake.

*Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, let us ask for the strength to carry our cross, enduring suffering in union with Jesus, who bore our cross.*

## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Ten Times*

Leader: Hail Mary, full of grace,  
the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.



## V. THE CRUCIFIXION



Leader:     The fifth Sorrowful Mystery,  
              The Crucifixion.

Jesus' hands and feet are nailed to the cross and he is crucified, paying the full price of persecution for our sake. "My God, my God", he cried in the words of the Psalmist, "why have you abandoned me?" In the third hour that Friday, as he said, "It is finished," Jesus persevered to the end with obedience to his Father's will. In his humanity, he united himself with all those who would be persecuted for his sake, experiencing their every emotion, pain and sense of abandonment. He goes before us, alongside us, behind us, within us.

*Through the intercession of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, let us ask for the grace to persevere to the end, knowing that the Lord will never abandon us.*



## Lord's Prayer

Leader: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.

All: Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us,  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.

## Hail Mary

*Pray Ten Times*

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the Lord is with thee:  
blessed art thou among women,  
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

All: Holy Mary, Mother of God,  
pray for us sinners, now,  
and at the hour of our death. Amen.

## Glory Be

Leader: Glory be to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.

All: As it was in the beginning,  
is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

## Fatima Prayer

Leader: O my Jesus,

All: Forgive us our sins,  
save us from the fires of hell;  
lead all souls to Heaven,  
especially those who have most need of your mercy.

*Please stand.*

## Salve Regina

- All:** Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,  
our life, our sweetness and our hope!  
To thee do we cry,  
poor banished children of Eve.  
To thee do we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn then, most gracious advocate,  
thine eyes of mercy toward us,  
and after this our exile  
show unto us the blessed fruit  
of thy womb, Jesus.  
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.
- Leader:** Pray for us, O holy Mother of God.
- All:** That we may be made worthy  
of the promises of Christ.

## Prayer

- Leader:** Let us pray.
- All:** O God, whose only begotten Son,  
by his life, death and resurrection,  
has purchased for us  
the rewards of eternal life;  
grant, we beseech thee,  
that meditating on these mysteries  
of the Most Holy Rosary  
of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
we may imitate what they contain  
and obtain what they promise.  
Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Please be seated.*

# Catechesis of Pope Benedict XVI

*General Audience*

April 18, 2012

[L]et us take note of an important basic attitude: when the first Christian community is confronted by dangers, difficulties and threats it does not attempt to work out how to react, find strategies, defend itself or what measures to adopt; rather, when it is put to the test, the community starts to pray and makes contact with God.

And what are the features of this prayer? It is a unanimous, concordant prayer of the entire community which reacts to persecution because of Jesus. In the original Greek, St Luke uses the word “*homothumadon*” — “all these with one accord,” “in agreement,” a term that appears in other parts of the Acts of the Apostles to emphasize this persevering, harmonious prayer (Cf. Acts 1:14; 2:46).

This harmony was the fundamental element of the first community and must always be fundamental to the Church. Thus it was not only the prayer prayed by Peter and John, who were in danger, but the prayer of the entire community since what the two Apostles were experiencing did not concern them alone but the whole of the Church.

In facing the persecution it suffered for the cause of Jesus, not only was the community neither frightened nor divided but it was also deeply united in prayer, as one person, to invoke the Lord. I would say that this is the first miracle which is worked when, because of their faith, believers are put to the test. Their unity, rather than being jeopardized, is strengthened because it is sustained by steadfast prayer. The Church must not fear the persecutions which she has been subjected to throughout her history but must always trust, like Jesus at Gethsemane, in the presence, help and power of God, invoked in prayer.

Let us take a further step: what does the Christian community ask God at this moment of trial? It does not ask for the safety of life in the face of persecution, nor that the Lord get even with those who imprisoned Peter and John; it asks only that it be granted “to speak [his] word with all boldness” (Acts 4:29). in other words it prays that it may not lose the courage of faith, the courage to proclaim faith. First, however, it seeks to understand in depth what has occurred, to interpret events in the light of faith and it does so precisely through the word of God which enables us to decipher the reality of the world.

It is always necessary to notice this distinctive feature of Christian martyrdom: it is exclusively an act of love for God and for man, including persecutors. At holy Mass today, we therefore pray to the Lord that he who “died praying for those who killed him, [may] help us to imitate his goodness and to love our enemies.”<sup>2</sup> How many sons and daughters of the Church down the centuries have followed his example, from the first persecution in Jerusalem to the persecutions of the Roman emperors, to the multitudes of martyrs in our day! Indeed, even today we receive news from various parts of the world of missionaries, priests, bishops, men and women religious and lay faithful who are persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, deprived of freedom or prevented from exercising it because they are disciples of Christ and apostles of the Gospel; at times, they even suffer and die for being in communion with the universal Church or for their fidelity to the Pope. Recalling the experience of the Vietnamese Martyr, Paul Le-Bao-Tinh (d. 1857) in my Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*,<sup>3</sup> I noted that suffering is transformed into joy through the power of hope that comes from faith. The Christian martyr, like Christ and through union with him, “accepts it in his heart, and he transforms it into an action of love. What on the outside is simply brutal violence — the Crucifixion — from within becomes an act of total self-giving love.... Violence is transformed into love, and death into life.”<sup>4</sup> The Christian martyr brings about the victory of love over hatred and death.

Let us pray for those who suffer for being faithful to Christ and to his Church. May Mary Most Holy, Queen of Martyrs, help us to be credible Gospel witnesses, responding to our enemies with the disarming power of truth and charity.

*Address*

May 21, 2010

Just as the Apostle Paul showed the authenticity of his apostolate through the persecutions, wounds and harassment he endured (Cf. 2 Cor 6-7), so also is persecution the proof of the authenticity of our own apostolic mission.

*Please stand.*

## Litany of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians

Leader: Queen of Martyrs

All: **R Pray for us...**

Queen of Confessors **R**

Queen of Apostles **R**

Queen of the most holy Rosary **R**

Queen of Families **R**

Queen of Peace **R**

Comfort of the afflicted **R**

Mirror of justice **R**

Seat of wisdom **R**

Cause of our joy **R**

Vessel of honor **R**

Mystical rose **R**

Tower of David **R**

Tower of ivory **R**

House of gold **R**

Ark of the covenant **R**

Gate of heaven **R**

Morning star **R**

Virgin most prudent **R**

Virgin most venerable **R**

Virgin most powerful **R**

Virgin most merciful **R**

Virgin most faithful **R**

Mother of Christ **R**

Mother of divine grace **R**

Mother of sorrows **R**

Mother of all persecuted **R**

Mother of our Savior **R**

Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians **R**

Leader: Let us pray.

**All: O God of infinite goodness  
and kindness, give us the grace  
to honor Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians,  
so that, imitating her son in this life,  
we may enjoy eternal life with him.**

**Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Please be seated.*

# Catechesis of Pope Francis

*Angelus*

June 25 2017

Even in our day, brothers and sisters, persecution against Christians is present. We pray for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted and we praise God because, in spite of this, they continue to bear witness to their faith with courage and faithfulness. Their example helps us to not hesitate in taking the position in favor of Christ, bearing witness bravely in everyday situations, even in apparently peaceful contexts...

But in all this, the Lord continues to tell us, as he did to the disciples of his time: "Do not fear!" Let us not forget these words: always, when we experience any tribulation, any persecution, anything that causes us to suffer, let us listen to the voice of Jesus in our hearts: "Do not fear! Do not fear! Go Forth! I am with you!" Do not fear those who mock you and mistreat you and do not fear those who ignore you or respect you "to your face," but fight the Gospel "behind your back." There are so many who smile to our face, but fight the Gospel behind our backs. We all know them. Jesus does not leave us all alone, because we are precious to him. That is why he does not leave us all alone. Each one of us is precious to Jesus and he accompanies us.

May the Virgin Mary, example of humility and courageous adherence to the Word of God, help us to understand that success does not count in the witness of faith, but rather faithfulness, faithfulness to Christ, recognizing in any circumstance even the most problematic, the inestimable gift of being his missionary disciples.



*Angelus*

December 26, 2016

[T]he liturgy [today] involves us in celebrating the martyrdom of Saint Stephen, the First Martyr, inviting us to reflect on the witness that he gave us with his sacrifice. It is precisely the glorious witness of Christian martyrdom, suffered for love of Christ; the martyrdom which continues to be present in the history of the Church, from Stephen up to our time.

Today too, in order to bear witness to light and to truth, the Church experiences, in different places, harsh persecution, up to the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom. How many of our brothers and sisters in faith

endure abuse and violence, and are hated because of Jesus! I shall tell you something: today's martyrs are more numerous with respect to those of the first centuries. When we read the history of the first centuries, here in Rome, we read of so much cruelty toward Christians; I tell you: there is the same cruelty today, and to a greater extent, toward Christians. Today we should think of those who are suffering from persecution, and to be close to them with our affection, our prayers and also our tears.



*Morning Meditation*

September 14, 2016

The early Christians confessed Jesus Christ by paying with their lives. The early Christians were presented with apostasy, namely: 'Say that our god is the real one, not yours. Make a sacrifice to our god or to our gods.' And when they did not do this, when they refused apostasy, they were killed. This story is repeated to this very day; and today in the Church there are more Christian martyrs than there were in the early days. Today Christians are murdered, tortured, imprisoned, and slaughtered, because they refuse to deny Jesus Christ. In this history, we come to our Fr. Jacques: he is part of this chain of martyrs. Christians who suffer today — whether it be in prison or by death or torture — in refusing to deny Jesus Christ, they indeed show the cruelty of this persecution. This cruelty that demands apostasy is — let us say the word — Satanic. How good it would be if all religious denominations would say: "Killing in the name of God is Satanic."

Fr. Jacques Hamel had his throat cut on the Cross, precisely while he was celebrating the sacrifice of the Cross of Christ. This good, meek man of brotherhood, who was always trying to make peace, was assassinated as if he were a criminal. This is the satanic thread of persecution. But there is one thing, in this man who accepted his martyrdom there, with the martyrdom of Christ, at the altar, there is one thing that causes me to reflect a great deal: in the midst of the difficult moment that he experienced, in the midst also of this tragedy that he saw approaching, this gentle man, this good man, this man who strove for brotherhood, did not lose his clarity of thought and clearly said the name of the murderer, he said it very clearly: "Be gone, Satan!" He gave his life for us, he gave his life so as not to deny Jesus. He gave his life in the same sacrifice of Jesus on the altar, and from there he accused the author of persecution: "Be gone, Satan!"

*Please stand.*



## Sub Tuum Præsidium

Leader: We fly to thy protection,  
O holy Mother of God.

All: **Despise not our petitions  
in our necessities,  
but deliver us always  
from all dangers,  
O glorious and blessed Virgin.**

**Amen.**

*Repeat three times.*



## PRAYER FOR POPE FRANCIS

**Leader:** Let us pray for the Pope.

**All:** Lord, source of eternal life and truth,  
give to your shepherd,  
our Holy Father Pope Francis,  
a spirit of courage and right judgment,  
a spirit of knowledge and love.

By governing with fidelity  
those entrusted to his care, may he,  
as successor of the Apostle Peter and Vicar of Christ,  
build your Church into a sacrament  
of unity, love and peace for all the world,  
and may we, in faithful communion with him,  
always seek to further the pastoral mission  
of your Church.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Final Prayer

*Prayer composed by  
Archbishop William E. Lori, Supreme Chaplain*

**All: O God of all the nations,  
the One God who is and was and always will be,  
in your providence you willed that your Church  
be united to the suffering of your Son.**

**Look with mercy on your servants  
who are persecuted for their faith in you.**

**Grant them perseverance and courage  
to be worthy imitators of Christ.**

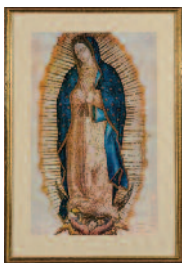
**Bring your wisdom upon leaders of nations  
to work for peace among all peoples.**

**May your Spirit open conversion  
for those who contradict your will,  
that we may live in harmony.**

**Give us the grace to be united in truth and freedom,  
and to always seek your will in our lives.**

**Through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

*Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, pray for us.*



1979-80  
Our Lady of Guadalupe



1981-82  
Immaculate Conception



1984-85  
Our Lady of  
Perpetual Help



1986-87  
Our Lady of Czestochowa



1988-89  
Our Lady of Pochaiv



1990-91  
Our Lady of the Assumption



1993-94  
Holy Family



1995-96  
Our Lady of Guadalupe



1997-98  
Our Lady of the  
New Advent



1999-2000  
Millennium Cross



2000-01  
Our Lady of Guadalupe



2002-03  
Our Lady of the Rosary



2003-04  
Divine Mercy



2007-08  
Our Lady of Charity



2011-13  
Our Lady of Guadalupe



2013-14  
Immaculate Conception



2015-17  
Holy Family



2018-19  
Our Lady Help of  
Persecuted Christians

## NOTES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

- 1 *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 13.
- 2 *Angelus*, Feast of St. Stephen the Protomartyr, December 26, 2007.
- 3 Cf. *Spe Salvi*, 37.
- 4 *Homily*, World Youth Day 2005, Mass on Marienfeld Esplanade, Cologne, August 21, 2005; *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 24 August, p. 11.

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The image of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians was painted by iconographer Fabrizio Diomedi for the Knights of Columbus.

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Some excerpts of papal remarks presented in the Catechesis sections of this booklet have been shortened for space.

Photo Credits: pg. 1: Carrying framed images of Our Lady Help of Persecuted Christians, State Deputies process from the Memorial of Saint Dominic Mass at the 136th Supreme Convention in Baltimore, Aug. 8, 2018 (Knights of Columbus/Matthew Barrick); pg. 30: Pope Francis with leaders of Christian churches as he speaks outside the Basilica of St. Nicholas in Bari, Italy, July 7, 2018. (CNS photo/Paul Haring). The images depicting the Sorrowful Mysteries are all mosaics by Father Marko Rupnik, S.J., and Centro Aletti, [www.centroaletti.com](http://www.centroaletti.com). “The Agony in the Garden” (pg. 12), “The Scourging at the Pillar” (pg. 14), “The Crowning with Thorns” (pg. 16), “The Carrying of the Cross” (pg. 18), “The Crucifixion” (pg. 20) all from the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Blessed Virgin of Ta’ Pinu, Malta.



*“Do not fear!’ Let us not forget these words:  
always, when we experience any tribulation,  
any persecution, anything that causes us to suffer,  
let us listen to the voice of Jesus in our hearts.”*

– Pope Francis  
*Angelus, June 25, 2017*



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