



The Holy See

LITURGY OF THE WORD WITH THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO
IN MEMORY OF THE MARTYRS OF THE 20th AND 21st CENTURY

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Church of St Bartholomew on Tiber Island
Saturday, 22 April 2017

[Multimedia]

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 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).

Pope Francis then greeted the refugees assisted by the Community of Sant'Egidio:

I would like to thank you for everything you give us. Thank you so much. May God bless you.

In front of the Basilica, before departing, the Holy Father greeted the faithful with these words:

I thank you for your presence and for the prayers in this Church of martyrs. Let us think of the cruelty, the cruelty that today victimizes so many people; the exploitation of people.... People who arrive in boats and then stay there, in the generous countries like Italy and Greece, which welcome them but then the international treaties do not allow.... If in Italy, two migrants were welcomed per municipality, there would be room for everyone. And may this generosity of the south, of Lampedusa, of Sicily, of Lesvos, infect the north a bit. It is true: we are a civilization that is not having children, but we also close the door on migrants. This is called suicide. Let us pray!