

The Perspective of Eternity

On this Wednesday we are joining with Catholics around the world to mark Red Wednesday. It is estimated 327 million Christians live in a countries where there is persecution at various degrees. Because of their faith, they endure discrimination, they get scorned, they get arrested, they get incarcerated, they get tortured and sometimes they even get killed. Approximately 75 % of acts of violence for religious reasons are perpetrated against Christians. Among persecutors we find governments who fear the influence of the Church and try by all means to reduce Christians to silence. This is frequent in communist or totalitarian countries. We also find other religious groups who wish to eliminate Christians in order to become the only religious group of a region.

It is appropriate that on a day when we remember the Persecuted Church that our first reading speaks so eloquently of the persecution that occurred during the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, around 160 BC. We hear in our reading of a remarkable family whose courage is such that they can see view their lives with a perspective that is eternal. Can anything be more unimaginable than the story recounted here? This mother witnesses the brutal persecution and murder of six of her seven sons. When Antiochus tries to butter up the youngest child with words to seduce him to renounce his faith and contradict the witness of his brothers. Not able to convince him to capitulate the king tries to persuade the mother to talk some sense into the boy. Rather than take the counsel of the wicked king she encourages her son with strengthen his resolve:

“My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. ²⁸ I beg you, my child, to look at the heaven and the earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. And in the same way the human race came into being. ²⁹ Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God’s mercy I may get you back again along with your brothers.”¹

What a profound witness in the face of such brutality. It is this kind of witness we see depicted in the photo of these 21 men, who died for their faith. It is this witness that is shown today around the world by those who are persecuted for their faith. And it is this witness that is to inspire you and me to live dedicated lives as represented by those we have considered today that is also embodied in the first two men described by Jesus in today’s parable.

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, Queen of Peace, pray for us.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (2 Mac 7:27–29). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.