

32nd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

St. Luke 20:27-38

A young man was hauled into the city streets and was stoned to death for his belief in Jesus Christ. That was Saint Stephen, the first martyr for the Faith, and that was in Jerusalem one year after Christ's crucifixion. A young woman nursing her new-born son and another still pregnant with her child were torn apart by wild animals in a public spectacle because they refused to renounce their faith. They were St. Felicity and St. Perpetua and that was one thousand eight hundred years ago in north Africa. A young priest was killed as he walked out of the church one Sunday after Mass because he refused to close the church and to stop praying the Mass. That was Fr. Ragheed Ganni in Iraq and that was sixteen years ago. Whilst celebrating Mass three priests were taken hostage with hundreds of other people. Those three priests were murdered in front of the people and a further fifty people were killed by a bomb. That was in Baghdad and that was thirteen years ago. Eleven people were slaughtered because they believed and practiced their faith in Christ, and that was today. And tomorrow another eleven will be killed. And the day after that, and the day after that. That is the average number of Christians killed every day for their faith. And no one will talk about it.

In the twentieth century alone more Christians were martyred for the Faith than in all other centuries combined. Today two hundred million Christians are threatened daily with torture and murder because they will not renounce the Faith. That is equal to seven times the population of Australia. Another three hundred and fifty million are persecuted legally with restrictions to employment, social services, and the practice of the Faith. The number of countries that have shown extreme persecution of Christians has grown in the past few years from 58 to 73 countries. Archbishop George Casmoussa of

Mosul in Iraq said: "The persecution of Christians in our world today amounts to a human rights disaster. It is a catastrophe that has been ignored by the media, almost as if a news black-out has been enforced." The most persecuted people in the world today are not those that we are told about, but instead are Christians. The age of the martyrs did not end one thousand eight hundred years ago but continues today. Today these men and women, boys and girls, say with the brothers in the Book of Maccabees, as in the first reading, "...[Y]ou may discharge us from this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up, since it is for his laws that we die, to live again for ever... Ours is the better choice, to meet death at men's hands, yet relying on God's promise that we shall be raised up by him; whereas for you there can be no resurrection, no new life."

In Australia you and I are unlikely to be asked to make a sacrifice of our lives in blood for the Faith but we ought to make a sacrifice of our lives by witness to the Faith. We may not be called upon to be "red" martyrs but we ought to make of ourselves "white" martyrs. The word "martyr" comes from the Greek and means "witness." This witness is given by the way we live our lives. In seemingly small things like not gossiping, not lying, not speaking badly of others, not denying the needs of others even when it means we go without ourselves. It means that in a country where we can freely go to Mass that we do not make excuses to avoid that which other people around the world would, literally, die to attend. It means that when the Sacraments are so widely available that we seek those moments of grace which others often die without. Of course, in such a place, it is easy to become apathetic to that which is so common. This is why we need to place the freedom we enjoy in the context of the persecution of the Faith around the world.

The history of the Church has always been that the Faith flourishes and grows when it is most persecuted and that the Faith withers and dies when times are good and comfortable. An ancient saying says, "the blood of the

martyrs is the seed of Faith.”

Remember, if there is nothing that you would die for, then there is nothing worth living for.