

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE



BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIEGE
PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLS

BOLLETTINO

SALA STAMPA DELLA SANTA SEDE

N. 170422e

Saturday 22.04.2017

Liturgy of the Word presided at by the Holy Father Francis in the Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola Tiberina, in memory of the "New Martyrs" of the 20th and 21st centuries

At 17.00 this afternoon, in the Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola Tiberina, Rome, the Holy Father Francis presided at the Liturgy of the Word in memory of the "New Martyrs" of the 20th and 21st centuries, with the Sant'Egidio Community.

The following is the homily the Pope pronounced during the liturgy, the words of thanks he addressed to refugees during a meeting, and the greeting to the faithful gathered outside the Basilica.

Homily of the Holy Father

We have come as pilgrims to this Basilica of San Bartolomeo all'Isola Tiberina, where the ancient history of the martyr unites with the memory of the new martyrs, of the many Christians killed by the unsound ideologies of the last century – and also today – and killed only because they were Jesus' disciples.

The memory of these heroic witnesses, ancient and recent, confirms our awareness that the Church is the Church if she is a Church of martyrs. And martyrs are those who, as the Book of Revelations reminds us, "are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14). They have had the grace to confess Jesus up to the end, unto death. They suffer, they give their life, and we receive God's blessing for their witness. And there are also many hidden martyrs, those men and women faithful to the gentle strength of love, to the voice of the Holy Spirit, who in their everyday life seek to help their brothers and to love God without reserve.

If we look carefully, the cause of every persecution is hatred: the hatred of the prince of this world towards those who have been saved and redeemed by Jesus by His death and His resurrection. In the passage from the Gospel that we have just heard (John 15:12-19), Jesus uses a strong and frightening word: the word "hatred". He, Who is the Master of love, Who so liked to talk about love, speaks of hatred. But He always wanted to call things by their name. And He tells us not to be afraid, since "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you".

Jesus has chosen us and has redeemed us, by 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. And the origin of hatred is this: since we have been saved by Jesus, and the prince of the world does not want this, he hates us and causes our persecution, that from the time of Jesus and in the early Church has continued until our times. How many Christian communities are victims of persecution today! Why? Because of the hatred of the spirit of the world.

How many times, in difficult moments in history, is it said: "Today the fatherland needs heroes"! The martyr may be thought of as a hero, but the fundamental aspect of the martyr is that he is "graced": it is the grace of God, not courage, that makes us martyrs. Today, in the same way we might ask: "What does the Church need?" Martyrs, witnesses, everyday saints. Because the Church is brought forward by saints. The saints: without them, the Church would not be able to go ahead. The Church needs everyday saints, those of ordinary life, carried forth consistently; but also those who have the courage to accept the grace of being witnesses to the end, unto death. They are all the living blood of the Church. They are the witnesses who carry forth the Church; those who attest that Jesus is risen, that Jesus is living, and they do so with coherence in life and with the strength of the Holy Spirit that they have received as a gift.

I would like, today, to add another icon in this Church. A woman. I do not know her name. But she looks at us from heaven. I was in Lesbos, greeting refugees, and I met a man aged around thirty, with three children. He looked at me and he said, "Father, I am Muslim. My wife was Christian. Terrorists came to our country, they looked at us and they asked us our religion, and they saw her with her crucifix, and they told 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 today as a gift here. I do not know if that man is still in Lesbos or if he managed to go elsewhere. I do not know if he has been able to leave that concentration camp, because refugee camps, many of them, are concentration camps on account of the number of people left there. And the generous peoples who receive them must carry this burden, because it seems that international agreements are more important than human rights. And this man bore no rancour: he, Muslim, had this cross of pain that he bore without rancour. He sought refuge in the love of his wife, graced by martyrdom.

Remembering these witnesses of faith and praying in this place is a great gift. It is a gift for the Sant'Egidio Community, for the Church in Rome, for all the Christian communities of this city, for many pilgrims. The living heritage of the martyrs gives us peace and unity today. They teach us that, with the strength of love, with gentleness, one may fight against aggression, violence and war, and this can be done with patience and peace. And so we can pray thus: O Lord, make us worthy witnesses of the Gospel and of Your love; pour Your mercy upon humanity; renew Your Church, protect persecuted Christians, grant peace to the entire world soon. Glory to You, Lord, and shame on us, Lord.

Thanksgiving after the encounter with refugees:

A word of greeting, to thank you for all that you give. Thank you very much. May the Lord bless you.

Final greeting in front of the Basilica:

Thank you for your presence and for your prayer in this Church of martyrs. I think of the cruelty, the cruelty today that is targeted at so many people; the exploitation of the people. ... The people who arrive by boat and then remain there, in generous countries such as Italy and Greece that welcome them, but then international treaties do not let them ... If in Italy two migrants were received in each municipality, there would be room for all of them. And may this generosity in the south, in Lampedusa in Sicily, in Lesbos, spread to the north. It is true, we are a civilization that does not have children, but which also closes the door to migrants. This is called suicide. Let us pray.
