

**MESSAGE OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**FOR THE “NIGHT OF WITNESSES”**  
**AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED, VESPERS, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2019**  
**BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**

Pleased to learn through Sarkis Boghjalian, Executive Director of Aid to the Church in Need, of the “Night of Witnesses” being held this evening in this Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, as the Apostolic Nuncio, the representative of the Holy Father to the United States of America, I wish to express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of His Holiness Pope Francis to all gathered here, to those joining by television, radio, and online broadcasting, and most especially to those who are persecuted for their faith in Christ. I assure you not only of the prayers of the Holy Father but also of his gratitude to those who have highlighted the plight of persecuted Christians and to those Christians who have, in the face of persecution, witnessed to the saving power of Christ.

Last November, the Holy Father said:

“Before the entire world – which too often averts its gaze – lies the tragic situation of Christians who are persecuted and killed in ever increasing numbers. In addition to their martyrdom of blood, there is also their ‘white martyrdom’, such as that which occurs in democratic countries where freedom of religion is limited. And this is the everyday white martyrdom of the Church in those places.” (ADDRESS TO THE CONSULTA OF THE EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM, 16 NOVEMBER 2018)

More recently, the Holy Father, reflecting on the martyrdom of Saint Stephen noted that:

“...it is not beautiful speeches that reveal our identity as children of God, but that only by surrendering one’s life into the hands of the Father and forgiving those who offend us can the quality of our faith be shown. There are more martyrs today than there were at the beginning of the life of the Church, and martyrs are everywhere. Today, the Church is rich in martyrs, it is steeped in their blood: “The blood of Christians is seed” and ensures the growth and fruitfulness of the People of God. The martyrs are not just “saintly”, but rather men and women in flesh and blood who – as Revelation says – “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7:14). They are the true victors” (GENERAL AUDIENCE, 25 SEPTEMBER 2019)

Indeed, the fidelity of persecuted Christians, of every denomination, to the Gospel, often at their cost of their lives, represents an outstanding form of ecumenism and a summons to all Christ’s followers to unite in prayer and practical solidarity on their behalf.

Pope Francis willingly joins all gathered here this evening in praying that the witness of these modern martyrs, and their dramatic sharing in the mystery of the Cross, will bear rich fruit for the conversion of hearts, the spread of the Kingdom and the growth of reconciliation, justice, and peace in the lands torn apart by violence and discord.

Commending all of you to Saint Stephen the Proto-Martyr and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of Martyrs, the Holy Father cordially imparts his Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of peace and joy in Christ Jesus.