

**REMARKS OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
“NIGHT OF WITNESS”, SPONSORED BY AID TO THE CHURCH IN NEED
BASILICA OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION
WASHINGTON, DC
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2018**

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I want to express the spiritual closeness and paternal affection of Pope Francis to all gathered here and to all who are persecuted for their faith. The Holy Father stands in solidarity with all who witness to Christ, and he never ceases to remind us that “Peace triumphs through solidarity.” (ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ACCREDITED TO THE HOLY SEE, 9 JANUARY 2017).

I want to thank Archbishop Broglio and Aid to the Church in Need for their remarkable work of supporting persecuted Christians. Archbishop Warda, Bishop Doege and Sister Demerjian have also shared their powerful stories of what many Christians suffer today for the sake of the Holy Name of Jesus. Their living witness reminds us that faith is a gift and should never be taken for granted.

In his Angelus address on November 4, 2018, Pope Francis offered prayers for the Coptic Christians who were killed and injured as they were journeying to a monastery south of Cairo. Five years earlier, the Holy Father sent a message to Pope Tawadros of the Coptic Church, writing:

“If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (1 Cor 12:26). This is a law of the Christian life, and in this sense, we can say that there is also an ecumenism of suffering; just as the blood of the martyrs was a seed of strength and fertility for the Church, so too the sharing of daily sufferings can become an effective instrument of unity” (POPE FRANCIS, MESSAGE TO POPE TAWADROS II, 10 MAY 2013).

Indeed, God can bring good even from the most-dire situations. Countering the “hatred of the worldly spirit”, the Spirit of God leads Christians, through their sufferings, to greater unity and solidarity. The Holy Father is convinced that the “ecumenism of suffering and of the martyrdom of blood are a powerful summons to walk the long path of reconciliation between the Churches, by courageously and decisively abandoning ourselves to the working of the Holy Spirit” (cf. POPE FRANCIS, ADDRESS TO PATRIARCH KAREKIN II, 14 MAY 2014). The *communio martyrum* is a great sign of Christians journeying together.

For our part, each person must commit himself or herself to showing solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters – those who spill their blood and those who “in the name of some badly interpreted principle of tolerance” are prevented from “freely expressing and practicing their own religious convictions in a peaceful and legitimate way” (cf. ADDRESS OF POPE FRANCIS TO THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES, 7 MAY 2015).

What is presently happening to Catholics and Christians throughout the world demands our attention, prayers, and action. Indifference is not an option. At a recent Wednesday audience,

commenting on the fifth commandment, the Holy Father reminded us forcefully, “To annihilate a man, it suffices to ignore him. Indifference kills. It is like telling the other person: ‘you are dead to me’...” (POPE FRANCIS, GENERAL AUDIENCE, 17 OCTOBER 2018)

Our prayers, sacrifices and mortifications, are signs of our solidarity and our refusal to be indifferent. This evening we have heard testimonies from Nigeria and Syria, but this type of persecution is happening around the globe. At the recent Synod on Youth, a young Chaldean Catholic from Baghdad, Safa Al Alqoshy, described the suffering of Christians at the hands of the Islamic State. He remarked, “It is very important to pay attention that there is not only persecution by killing, there is a persecution by psychology, by feelings. You feel that you are alone, that you are not supported.”

The Holy Father wants persecuted Catholics and other Christians to know that they are not alone. We stand with them. While lamenting their persecution, we are also inspired by the courageous witness given by our persecuted brothers and sisters, which calls us to live our faith more deeply. Again, at the Synod, Archbishop John Barwa of Cuttack-Bhubaneswa in India recalled Rajesh Digal, a young catechist, who was buried in mud up to his neck by a mob and asked to renounce Christ. Finally, when asked one last time, he closed his eyes, looked to heaven, and said, “No.” The archbishop recounted that a man then dumped a stone on his head, sending him to his eternal reward. His *No* to his persecutors was a resounding *Yes* to Christ, and, for us, is a precious witness of a life dedicated to God.

This evening, as night falls, may our prayers, efforts, and witness be a light of hope for those who suffer persecution, trusting in Christ, the Light of the World. *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome the light.*