

Today's Martyrs

Resources for understanding current Christian witness and martyrdom

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Pastoral letter of the Dutch Bishops

July 20, 1942

We live in a time of great affliction, both spiritual and material. In recent times two specific afflictions have come to the fore: the persecution of the Jews and the unfortunate lot of those who are sent to work in foreign countries.

All of us must become fully aware of these troubles, and for this reason, they are now brought to our attention as a community.

These afflictions must also be brought to the attention of those who are responsible for them. To this end, the venerable Dutch Episcopate, in communion with nearly all the churches in the Netherlands, approached the authorities of the occupying forces concerning, among other things, the Jews, in a recent telegram of Saturday, July 11. The telegram stated the following:

"The undersigned Dutch churches, already deeply shocked by the actions taken against the Jews in the Netherlands that have excluded them from participating in the normal life of society, have learned with horror of the new measures by which men, women, children, and whole families will be deported to the German territory and its dependencies.

"The suffering that this measure will bring upon tens of thousands of people, the knowledge that these measures are contrary to the deepest moral sense of the Dutch people, and, above all, the hostility of these measures against the divine norms of justice and mercy urge the churches to direct to you the urgent petition not to execute these measures.

"Our urgent petition to you is also motivated by the consideration that, for the Christian Jews, these measures would make it impossible for them to participate in the life of the Church."

As a result of this telegram, one of the General Commissioners, in the name of the Reich's Commissioner [Reichskommissar], promised that Christian Jews will not be deported if they belonged to one of the Christian churches before January 1941.

Beloved faithful, when we consider the immense spiritual and physical misery that, for three years already, has threatened the entire world with destruction, then we think naturally of the situation that the Gospel of today [9th Sunday after Pentecost] paints for us:

"And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace; but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone: because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation." [St. Luke 19, 41-44]

Jesus's prediction was literally fulfilled: forty years later, God's judgment over the city of Jerusalem was accomplished. They had not, unfortunately, recognized the time of grace.

Now, too, everything around us points to a punishment from God. But, thanks be to God, it is not yet too late for us. We can still avert it if we recognize the time of grace, if we recognize what will bring us peace. And that is only the return to God, from whom for many years already a great portion of the world has turned away. All human means have failed; only God can still bring a solution.

Beloved faithful, let us first examine ourselves with a deep sense of repentance and humility. Are we not, after all, partly responsible for the disasters that affect us? Have we always fulfilled the duties of justice and charity toward our neighbor? Have we not sometimes entertained feelings of unholy hatred and bitterness? Have we always sought our refuge in God, our Heavenly Father?

When we turn to ourselves, we will have to confess that we have all failed. Peccavimus ante Dominum Deum nostrum: We have sinned before the Lord our God. [Baruch 1,17]

We also know, though, that God will not despise a contrite and humbled heart. [Psalm 50, 19] Cor contritum et humiliatum non despicias. We therefore turn to him and beg him with childlike confidence for his mercy. He himself tells us, "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you." (Luke 11,9)

In the Introit of today's Holy Mass [9th Sunday after Pentecost], the Church calls to us with the words of the Psalmist: "For behold God is my helper: and the Lord is the protector of my soul." [Psalm 53,6] And the Epistle repeats the very comforting words of the Apostle: "Let no temptation take hold on you, but such as is human. And God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it." [1 Cor. 10, 13]

Therefore, beloved faithful, let us implore God, through the intercession of the Mother of Mercy, that He will soon grant the world a just peace.

May He sustain the people of Israel, who are being so bitterly tested in these days, and may He bring them to true redemption in Jesus Christ.

May He protect those whose lot it is to work in foreign lands and to be separated from their loved ones. May He protect them in soul and body, protect them from becoming bitter and discouraged, keep them faithful to the Christian faith, and may God also strengthen those they left behind.

Let us implore Him for a solution for all those who are tested and oppressed, for prisoners and hostages, for so many who are threatened by death.

Pateant aures misericordiae tuae, Domine, precibus supplicantium: that the ears of your mercy, Lord, may be open to the prayers of those who cry to you.

This, our joint pastoral letter, shall be read in the usual manner next Sunday, July 26, during all scheduled Holy Masses in all the churches and chapels in our Church Province that have an appointed rector.

Given in Utrecht, the 20th day of July of the Year of Our Lord 1942.

Archbishop Johannes de Jong

Bishop Arnold Frans Diepen

Bishop Johannes Petrus Huibers

Bishop Jozef Hubertus Willem Lemmens

Bishop Pieter Adriaan Willem Hopmans

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