



THE BEATITUDES

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake." (Mt 5:11)

Violence against Christians was present in early Christian times. Jesus was the first and the king of martyrs. After him came a multitude of men and women: from the famous martyrs listed on our calendars to the anonymous people in the gulags and other camps and today, our brothers in the Orient. All of them make up a people, throughout the ages, who underwent and still undergo multiple persecutions because of their fidelity to Christ.

Meditating on martyrdom, remembering our persecuted brothers does not mean lingering indulgently on their suffering, but rather contemplating Christ's work in them. They are like us, humble members of Christ's body and not super heroes. They bear witness to the power of the resurrection and to the victory of Love. Their life represents a source of grace and spiritual nourishment for our service as Intercessors.

Martyrdom is not an option that is reserved for the special few. Father Marcovits, in his book, *Loving to the extreme limit, (Aimer jusqu'à l'extrême)* reminds us that *"perhaps we will not have to die as martyrs ourselves, but we are all called to give more of ourselves, right up to the end and completely."*

Elisabeth & Bernard Gérard

SPIRITUAL LETTER

Blessed are you when they persecute you!

The mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Redemption are the characteristic and original events of the Christian faith. That's what we have in our own right. There are also many of the Lord's words that illuminate our ways of living, in particular the commandment about love. The Lord's words can be found in other religious literature. But two of the Lord's words can only be found in Christianity: the forgiveness of enemies and the beatitude of the persecuted. Therefore, the beatitude that we are meditating upon today is essential.

"Blessed are you when they persecuted you!" These words apply firstly to Jesus. "Through his passion and cross, through his resurrection, he has conquered death and has given us life," the liturgy ceaselessly tells us. This is the centre of life of Jesus, our Saviour. He is "blessed" because he gives us his life and he saves us. He is blessed because he brings us thus, through his ascension, close to the Father, his Father. Finally, he is blessed because, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, he experiences his mystery of death and resurrection in every man and woman's life. Through Christ's presence in us, we can make sense of our suffering and can face adversity with faith. When St Felicity was having her baby in the prison of Carthage (203 AD), the guard made fun of her labour pains insulting her by saying, "If you think you suffer now, how will it stand when you face the wild beasts?" Felicity answered him calmly, "Now I'm the one who is suffering, but in the arena, Christ will be in me suffering for

me, because I will be suffering for him." This confession of faith enlightens all our confessions of faith in times when we are oppressed with all kinds of suffering. How many say, "Yes, I suffered! But the Lord was with me!" This is the essential thing to remember: we are not exempted from undergoing all sorts of ordeals, just like every man and woman in this world. But faith shows us that, in the ordeal, the Lord comes and shares with us his mystery of death and resurrection. We understand then that the lives of the martyrs touch and move us. We not only admire their courage and their extraordinary fidelity, but we feel that what they experience, we experience too. Namely that Christ is the source of our courage and our fidelity in the midst of our own ordeals, in the midst of adversity. The martyrs' lives are also our lives: our blood is possibly not shed, but our faith in God is experienced.

Pascal, the great French 17th century thinker, used to say, "their fidelity perhaps was worth ours." The Intercessors pray for couples, and for the salvation of the world. The Intercessors do more: their life, with their joys and suffering, is offered up. This offering is a source of life for many of our brothers in humanity.

Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.
Spiritual Counsellor to the Intercessors

CHOSEN TEXTS

Martyrs' Words

"Will you remain faithful to the Crucified? Consider carefully! The world is in flames... If you decide for Christ, it could cost you your life. Carefully consider what you promise. (...) It is the loving heart of your Saviour that invites you to follow. (...) The world is in flames. The conflagration can also reach our house. But high above all flames towers the cross. They cannot consume it. It is the path from earth to heaven. It will lift one who embraces it in faith, hope and love into the bosom of the Trinity.

The world is in flames. Are you impelled to put them out? Look at the cross. From the open heart gushes the blood of the Saviour. This extinguishes the flames of hell. Make your heart free by the faithful fulfilment of your vows, then the flood of divine love will be poured into your heart until it overflows and becomes fruitful to all the ends of the earth. Do you hear the groans of the wounded on the battlefields in the west and the east? You are not a physician and not a nurse and cannot bind up the wounds. You are enclosed in a cell and cannot get to them. Do you hear the anguish of the dying? You would like to be a priest and comfort them. Does the lament of the widows and orphans distress you? You would like to be an angel of mercy and help them.

Look at the Crucified. If you are nuptially bound to him by the faithful observance of your holy vows, your BEING is precious blood. Bound to him, you are omnipresent as he is. You cannot help here or there like the physician, the nurse, the priest. You can be at all fronts, wherever there is grief, in the power of the cross. Your compassionate love takes you everywhere, this love from the divine heart. Its precious blood is poured everywhere—soothing, healing, saving."

Edith Stein
Ave Crux, Spes unica! The Hidden Life

"When one has decided to be in God's service, one must constantly give more than one has, be beyond what one is. But God is there to make it happen. It cannot be done without a certain bewilderment, nor without a certain and very understandable fatigue. But God is there to ward it off."

Blessed Vladimir Ghika
Romanian Prince who became a Catholic and a priest and died a martyr's death
(Monsignor Ghika gave Father Henri Caffarel his first spiritual formation)

"Martyrdom in its original sense means the testimonial of the greatest love. It does not mean running to face death or seeking suffering for its own sake or creating suffering for oneself because it is by spilling one's blood that one gets close to God... It means taking on the difficulties of life, assuming the consequences of one's commitments. It is what happened to Jesus: he assumed the consequences of his actions."

Jean-Jacques Pérennès
Pierre Claverie, *Un algérien par alliance*, Cerf, 2000

"Having personally experienced violence has made me feel more intensely close to those who, no matter where on earth and in whatever manner, suffer persecution in Christ's name. And I feel close too to all those who suffer oppression for the holy cause of man and dignity, for justice and peace in the world. And finally, I feel close to those who have sealed this fidelity with their death."

Saint John Paul II
General Audience, 28 October 1981

THOUGHTS

Whether we are going through an ordeal ourselves or whether we bear that of our brothers through intercession, we are born by the gift of Christ.

"Jesus, king of the martyrs!" exclaims a liturgical antiphon. All martyrs resemble Christ. There are no martyrs who in one way or another do not experience what Jesus experienced. Jesus is the model for all martyrs. In order to be convinced of this, just look at our existence... Every one of us, one day or another, has come across tough ordeals that have left us with painful memories. It is the Lord who helped us, since he knows what suffering is! Therefore he is not only a model, but even more, he is the source of life. Jesus, king of the martyrs, awakens in us life and love to the extreme limit. How is Jesus the source in our lives that are fraught with ordeals?

Jesus is free. Jesus dominates suffering, anxiety, fear in the face of violence, everything that makes us flee, that stops us from speaking, that paralyzes us. "No one takes (my life) from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." (Jn 10:18) Freedom is a fundamental characteristic found in martyrs. Let us try to conquer this freedom in the midst of difficulties. Enduring ordeals, whatever they may be, means going towards death. Dominating them, seeing them as an opportunity to open ourselves up to others, to love, means living. Sometimes, we have to dig deep down within ourselves to find the energy that will help us raise our heads... Freedom is at that price. The grace of crucified Jesus helps too. Jesus forgives. Remember, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Lk 23:24) (...) From high up on his cross, Jesus looks at humanity with mercy. No martyrdom without forgiveness to the persecutors.

Freedom is not possible for us without us gradually following the path of forgiveness. All martyrs find the source of their love to the extreme limits by contemplating Jesus on the cross. They look at the Lord's death... They discover life! (...) Each time that we emerge from our difficulties, that we conquer our fear, it is because the power of the Resurrection is with us. It leads us to God and makes us witnesses of hope! "All is done." All the martyrs and we, who encounter ordeals, are all carried and supported by Christ's gift, for he is the beginning and the end of our lives.

Father Paul-Dominique Marovits, o.p.
Aimer jusqu'à l'extrême, Martyrs pour le Christ, Cerf, 2010

The democratic face of our Western societies can conceal the threats that weigh on Christian faith.

The Son of God had announced to his disciples that they would never be in peace on this earth. The only way of winning this great combat is to unite with God. Christians will not manage to overcome the challenges thrown up by the world by calling upon political tools, human rights or respect for religious freedom. The only true rock for the baptised person is prayer and the encounter with Jesus Christ. Men who are steadfast in prayer are unshakable. Jesus began his public ministry by forty days of prayer in the desert and he ended his life with a cry that is the ultimate prayer, "Father, forgive them. They know not what they do." (...) Persecution is more refined when it does not physically destroy, but when it demolishes the teaching of Jesus and the Church and therefore the foundations of faith, by misleading hearts. Using violence, some people want to weaken and depersonalise Christians, in order to dissolve them in a liquid society, without religion or God. There is no greater contempt than indifference. This insidious war stems from a diabolic hatred of Jesus Christ and his true witnesses.

I can still hear the powerful echo of John Paul II's voice in Lyon (4 October 1986) when he warned us of the danger of an environment that can imprison us in amnesia: "Of course, today, you have not been fed to the beasts. You are not being put to death because of Christ. But should we not recognize that another type of ordeal is surreptitiously attacking Christians? Schools of thought, styles of life and even sometimes laws contrary to the true sense of man and God undermine the Christian faith in the lives of people, families and society. Christians are not badly treated, they even enjoy all kinds of freedom; but perhaps there is a real risk of seeing their faith imprisoned by an environment that tends to relegate it to the domain of the individual's private life. (...) This form of pressure or seduction could kill the soul without attacking the body. The spirit of evil that attacked our martyrs is still at work. With and through other means, it continues to turn people away from the faith."

In the West, this violence is more and more insidious, especially as it refrains from unveiling its true face.

Cardinal Robert Sarah with Nicolas Diat
Dieu ou rien - Entretiens sur la foi, Fayard, 2015

In our societies that make laity their ideology, every Christian who fully experiences their vocation could be called to undergo reprisals for their faithfulness to the evangelical demands: the nursing staff in hospitals, the deciders in the socio-economic world...

(...) But it would be very naïve to believe that this evangelisation of the temporal world will happen without conflict and combat. The temporal world is still very much the stronghold of "the prince of this world," who does not give up his prey so easily! Do we think that the

working world will be brought to Christ without great effort and that the capitalistic world will be easily converted to the Gospel? And what about the world of politics, science, thoughts, and the arts? ... This recovery of nature by grace demands that holiness be present everywhere throughout the modern world. And there resides the whole problem: will we have lay saints (by saints, we mean, men totally given up to Christ, inhabited by his charity, moved by his Spirit), workers, peasants, captains of industry who are saints, politicians who are saints, and artists who are saints? Saints and also missionaries and maybe martyrs...

Father Henri Caffarel

Des saints pour "oser l'Évangile" - Anneau d'Or (Golden Ring), n° 30

MEDITATION

"My God, take me by the hand, I will follow you bravely, without much resistance; I will not shy away from any of the storms that will break over me in this life; I will withstand the shock to the best of my ability; but from time to time give me a short moment of peace. And I will not believe, in my innocence, that the peace that descends over me is eternal. I will accept the uncertainty and struggle that will follow. I like to linger in the warmth of security, but I will not rebel when the cold has to be affronted, as long as you guide me by the hand. I will follow you everywhere and I will try not to be afraid. Where ever I am, I will try and radiate a little love, a little of the true love for others that is in me."

Etty Hillesum

An Interrupted Life

The Diaries 1941-1943 and Letters from Westerbork

Pantheon Books, 1984

GENERAL INTENTION

We join with the prayer "Lord, give us peace in Iraq," of Monsignor Louis Raphaël I Sako, Chaldean Catholic Patriarch of Baghdad, who on July 30th, 2014, already expressed his fear for the future of the Iraqi Christian community.

For the families, the men, women and children, who are threatened with extermination and are condemned because of their Christian identity, we pray:

"Lord, The plight of Iraq is deep and the suffering of Christians is severe and frightening. Therefore, we ask you, Lord, to spare the lives of Iraqi Christians, and to grant them patience and courage to continue their witness to their faith and to Christian values with trust and hope.

Lord, peace is the foundation of life; grant the Iraqi people the peace and stability that will enable them to live with each other without fear and anxiety, and with dignity and joy.

Glory be to You forever. Amen."

SPECIFIC INTENTION

On September 10th, during a private audience on the occasion of the Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady's Regional Responsible Couples, Gérard and Marie-Christine de Roberty, members of the Intercessors' international organisation team, presented the Intercessors' family to Pope Francis. The Pope asked us expressly to pray for him.