

Brother 5112 Knights,

Please review a past Church program that the council held at both of our parishes. Rev. Jerome Joseph Day, O.S.B. pastor of Saint Raphael Parish - <http://st-raphael-parish.org> was kind enough to write up a summary of his homily and discussion at this prayer service held November 14, 2019. I believe this is a brilliant and intellectual summary of what is happening to our fellow Christians in the middle east and other parts of our world. They need our prayers and active assistance. If you are a parishioner and council member please thank Fr. Jerome for assisting our council in holding this church activity for us. The Supreme K of C Council has a Christian Refugee Relief fund that we can directly assist our fellow Christians in the middle east. Please consider donating. <https://www.kofc.org/en/charities/christian-relief/index.html>

Vivat Jesus,

John Flanagan, PGK
Arthur J. O'Neil Goffstown Council 5112



Evening Prayer
with Benediction
of the Blessed Sacrament
in honor of
Our Lady,
Help of Persecuted Christians

Thursday, Nov. 14, 2019
6:30 pm

SAINT RAPHAEL THE ARCHANGEL PARISH

From the Pastor: Fr. Jerome Joseph Day, O.S.B.

Visit of Mary, Help of Persecuted Christians, icon highlights oft ignored crisis

Whoever devises and develops the Marian programs of the **Knights of Columbus** organization certainly can take a bow. For the past 40 years, the K of C, one of the major workhorses in most parishes, has been sending icons, prayer cards and similar to Catholic communities around the country. Each of the 18 images of the **Blessed Virgin Mary** depicts one or another aspect of Our Lady's personal relationship with the Lord or her role as a patroness of various concerns in the Church, the Mystical Body of her divine Son. This year, **Saint Raphael** was privileged to receive the icon of **Our Lady, Help of Persecuted Christians** – and like its predecessor images, it prompted prayer, reflection and liturgical celebration. That's a pretty significant achievement on any level in any place.

In the case of the Persecuted Christians icon, one sees a tall, stately and meditative Mary with the Christ Child held close. Her mantle spreads out wide, and there close to the **holy Mother of God**, huddle men and women, peasants and workers from around the world, **all seeking her maternal protection and her intercession**. The image is a development of devotion to Mary under her title **Help of Christians**, one that grew up in the 17th Century when Europe was threatened by an aggressive Ottoman Empire.

The inclusion of "persecuted" in the title gives the icon 21st Century relevance. This is obviously sad, sometimes even tragic. News reports give ample evidence of the oppression, discrimination and violence that faithful Christians, as individuals and as communities, suffer every day around the world. Americans, wrapped in the protections of the **First Amendment**, guaranteeing us freedom of speech, worship, press, assembly and governmental petition, sometimes can forget the intense and blatant suffering **fellow Catholics, as well as Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant Christians** must endure.

According to **Open Doors USA**, a group which tracks human rights violations, particularly offenses against religious freedom and freedom of conscience, the following statistics apply to 2018: more than 245 million Christians live in nations where they experience a high level of persecution for their faith; at least **4,305 Christians were killed** for their faith; nearly 1,850 Christian churches and related buildings were destroyed or attacked and damaged; and, finally, some 3,150 believers were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced or imprisoned – simply for expressing their faith. Communist states such as **China, North Korea and Vietnam** still make life for Christians difficult. An ally of the U.S., Turkey restricts the freedom of the **Greek Orthodox Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul**



and elsewhere. Hindu nationalists in India have targeted Christians. Even recent riots, aimed at government economic and social policies in **Chile**, saw protesters wreck Catholic churches.

Perhaps the most dangerous area in the world for Christians, tragically, is the **Middle East, where Christianity was born and where it first developed and flourished**. The collapse this past year of the **Islamic caliphate ISIS** is a welcome development; during the recent several years when ISIS obtained and tightened its stranglehold on territory and more than 1 million people in parts of Syria, Iraq and neighboring countries, Christians – **Nazarenes**, as the radical jihadists called them – were particular targets. They could pay a tax and possibly survive, although any resistance in speech or action could occasion immediate retribution and even death.

Regarded as outsiders and foreign agents by the jihadists, in fact, the Christians belonged to local communities **older than any Muslim population by 600 years**. During the dark years of 2014-2017, when ISIS was rampant, more than 135,000 Christians, many of them Assyrians, were forced to convert, pay a tax, driven into exile, tortured or slain. Many were



ISIS members prepare to execute Egyptian Christians

raped or sold into slavery. Firm figures on the slaughter and abuse, **identified as genocide** by the European Union, the U.S. Congress and the U.K. Parliament, finally are emerging.

Mosul, one of the major cities of Iraq, saw the vast majority of its 60,000-strong Christian population **expelled or slain**. Coptic Christians, 10 percent of the population, in Egypt have seen their people attacked by ISIS and its allies and their churches and cathedrals destroyed on a regular basis. Moreover, "lone wolves," doing the work of ISIS, have struck in Florida, Bangladesh, Germany, France, the U.K., and Sri Lanka. ISIS has struck the gates of Parliament in London and the sleepy French town of **Saint-Etienne du Rouvray**, in Normandy, where the church was invaded and an elderly priest saying Mass had his throat cut. Although President Trump boasted that the U.S. had defeated ISIS and killed its leader **Abu Bakr al Baghdadi**, the capacity of ISIS to reform and transplant itself is well known. **Christians are certainly not alone in facing such persecution; Jews, Yazidis, Hindus, Shia Muslims, gays and military units** of foes or potential foes have been attacked regularly and with deadly effect.

Rhetorical venom from ISIS, however, is directed at Christians with zeal. One post on the web and in the ISIS English-language magazine, aimed at radicalizing Muslims in the West, shows the **ISIS flag flying from the obelisk holding a relic of the True Cross in Saint Peter's Square** with the dome of the basilica rising in the background. **Why are Catholics and other Christians so hated?** Because the Church is global; speaks with a unified voice; routinely advocates for human rights, including religious freedom; rejects intimidation and exploitation of the poor; persists in belief and practice in the face of persecution and has a moral code that turns the other cheek and shows compassion toward the enemy – even as Christian militia rise to defend their communities.

Catholic believers have spiritual resources to endure and resist attacks. First, the God of love looks upon the suffering with tenderness and care. His protection is never absent for even if He asks martyrdom of the faithful, He will strengthen them. Moreover, **Catholics believe and participate in the Paschal Mystery of Christ, his dying and rising to new life**. He extends that promise to all his brothers and sisters. The richness of the biblical Word, the power of the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, solidarity with brothers and sisters worldwide, and finally the loving protection of Mary, the holy Mother of God, affords every believer help and encouragement beyond any and every persecution.

© Rev. Jerome Joseph Day, O.S.B.