

THE POPE

Embrace the Church under Persecution

Lourdes, France (NC) — Following is excerpted from the NC News translation of the Vatican text of the French-language homily given by Pope John Paul II at a candlelight procession and prayer vigil at Lourdes on Aug. 14.

Let our prayers unite to rise toward God, like the flame of our candles, to offer him, together with Mary, these fervent thanksgivings, and also to raise up an immense supplication together. Each brings personal intentions here, for his or her own salvation, for his or her family, for community, for country. That is good. This evening we are putting all these intentions together, in order to confide them to our Father in heaven through Mary. And we are extending these intentions to the whole world and the whole Church, seeking what corresponds to God's will and not ours alone.

Yes, for the whole world. Let them have a place in our prayer, these men and women throughout the universe who are suffering from hunger or other scourges, from the devastation of war, from the displacement of populations; those who are the victims of political and other forms of terrorism, which unscrupulously strikes at the innocent, victims of hatred, of various oppressions, of injustices of all sorts, those kidnapped, confined illegally, tortured, condemned with no guarantee of justice; all those who are suffering intolerable attacks upon their human dignity and their fundamental rights, those whose just right to freedom of thought and action is shackled, those who are humiliated in their legitimate national aspirations. May the attitude of leaders change, and may the victims receive comfort and courage. Think also of the moral misery of those who are involved in corruptions of every kind. Let us pray again for all those facing grave difficulties because of their condition as immigrants, unemployed, sick or infirm, because of their solitude. It is Christ, the son of man, who suffers in them. And if I do not undertake a further description of these human miseries, it is because I often have occasion to speak of them.

Likewise, we Christians take the spiritual needs of the universal Church especially to heart in our prayer. We all know what they are, and I often come back to them: conversion, transmission of the faith, the holiness of consecrated souls, vocations, the radiance of Christian homes. But there is a particularly flagrant spiritual distress on which we are now going to concentrate our attention and our prayer, that of those who are suffering for their faith. Here we may express our faith and our prayer without any restraint upon us. Let us take care not to forget those brothers and sisters above all at this shrine of Lourdes, toward which the entire world has had its eyes turned since the Virgin Mary made hope shine forth here. As pope, bearing solicitude for all the Churches and often being informed of their situations, I call upon you to meditate with me on this mystery of the persecution of believers by taking up Jesus' words in company with Mary.

Christ spoke on many occasions to his disciples about persecutions. He did not conceal from them that persecution would become the price to pay for giving the testimony which they should bear to men.

Let us consider in this hour certain words of the master which contain the veritable gospel of persecution: "They

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will hand you over to the courts. You will be beaten in synagogues. You will be arraigned before governors and kings on my account and have to testify to your faith before them. Nonetheless, the man who holds out till the end is the one who will come through safe."

Or again we read, in the Gospel of John: "If you find that the world hates you, know it has hated me before you. The reason it hates you is that you do not belong to the world. But I chose you out of the world...No slave is greater than his master. They will harry you as they harried me...All this they will do because of my name, for they know nothing of him who sent me." "I tell you all this that in me you may find peace. You will suffer in the world, but take courage. I have overcome the world."

Christ therefore prepared his disciples for persecutions. And, by this fact, they were pursued by persecutions from the time they began to carry out the mission entrusted to them. Already at Jerusalem the apostles and those who professed Christ suffered persecutions.

So it was again later. Persecutions against the Church have broken out over the centuries in various places, and those who believed in Christ gave their lives for their faith and suffered the worst tortures.

The Church's martyrdom was written from century to century.

Today, on this day of my pilgrimage to Lourdes, I would embrace with the thought and heart of the Church all those who suffer persecutions in our time. I would embrace them all, through the Church's heart, with the motherly heart of the Mother of God, whom the Church venerates as its mother and as Queen of Martyrs. Persecutions for the faith are sometimes like those which the Church's martyrology wrote down in other centuries. They take on various forms of discrimination against believers and the whole community of the Church. These forms of discrimination are sometimes applied even at the same time as the right to religious liberty, to freedom of religion and conscience, is recognized in the legislation of various states and in documents bearing an international character.

Is there need to go into detail? During the early centuries the usual penalties were death, deportation, exile.

Today, to prisons, concentration camps, hard labor, expulsion from one's own country, have been added other forms of punishment, less remarked upon but more subtle: not a bloody death, but a sort of civil death; not only segregation in a prison or in a camp, but permanent restriction of personal freedom or social discrimination.

Today there are hundreds and hundreds of thousands of witnesses to faith, very often ignored or forgotten by public

opinion, whose attention is absorbed by local news. Those witnesses are often known only to God. They put up with daily privations in the most varied regions of every continent.

They are believers forced to meet secretly because their religious community is not authorized.

They are bishops, priests, Religious, who are forbidden to exercise their holy ministry in Churches and public gatherings.

They are dispersed women Religious, who cannot live their consecrated life.

They are generous young people, impeded from entering a seminary or a place of religious training to realize their vocation.

They are girls who are not allowed the possibility of consecrating themselves in a common life devoted to prayer and charity toward their fellow man.

They are parents who are refused the possibility of securing for their children an education built on their faith.

They are men and women, manual workers, intellectuals or those engaged in other callings, who, by the simple fact of professing their faith, face the risk of being deprived of a future important for their careers or studies.

To these witnesses are to be added the grave and sorrowful situation of prisoners, the interned, exiles, not only among Catholic faithful and other Christians, but also among believers (cf. encyclical "Redemptor Hominis," n. 12). They constitute as it were a praise rising continually to God from the shrines of their consciences, as a spiritual offering which is certainly accepted by God.

That should not cause us to forget other difficulties in the way of living the faith. They do not come solely from exterior restrictions on liberty, from the constraints of men, from laws or regimes. They can come just as much from habits and currents of thought contrary to evangelical morals, which exert a powerful hold upon all members of society. Or it can be a matter of a climate of materialism or religious indifference, stifling spiritual aspirations, or it can come from a fallacious and individualistic concept of freedom, confusing the possibility of choosing whatever flatters the passions with concern to realize one's human vocation in the best way, one's spiritual destiny and the common good. It is not that freedom which grounds human dignity and favors Christian faith (cf. "Redemptor Hominis," n. 12). Believers immersed in such environments need great courage in order to remain lucid and faithful, and to make good use of their liberty. We must pray for them too. Fear those, said Jesus, who can cause the soul to be lost (cf. Mt. 10:28).

Let us pray for all those who are persecuted because of their faith, in whatever place and manner.

We have recalled the words of Christ himself. May our brothers and sisters find inspiration and strength in those words. May the Holy Spirit be with them, he who enlightens minds and spreads a heroic strength in the hearts of confessors of the faith. In a sense, they, in God's eyes, are those who shine as so many lights scattered throughout the world, from which the Church mysteriously receives vigor. May they all retain truly Christian interior peace and strength of spirit. May the sense of that dignity which is born through interior fidelity to conscience and truth be consolidated in them. May the Lord give them the grace to pardon their persecutors and love their enemies.

O Mother of Christ, you who stand at the foot of the cross of your son, be near to all those who suffer persecution in the world today. May your motherly presence help them to bear sufferings and carry off victory through the cross.

'Church in Dialogue' to Draw Syracuse, Rochester Together

A series of three one-day sessions, "The Church in Dialogue: Discipleship Today," will draw together members of

Birthday Rosary Scheduled

A rosary will be recited in honor of the birthday of the Blessed Virgin Mary 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Sept. 8 at the Wooded Area Shrine, 237 Rye Road, off Latona between Ridgeway Avenue and Ridge Road.

The public is invited to the devotions dedicated to Jesus and Mary.

Organizers ask participants to bring a lawn chair, if convenient.

Reunion Call

Members of the St. Agnes High School class of 1958 are planning a 25th reunion Friday, Sept. 30 at the Spring House Restaurant. Any classmate not having received notice of the celebration is asked to contact Mary Ellen Whalen, 381-3598; Sue Lang Schenkel, 924-4286; or Mary Margaret Grim Zonneville, 244-7858.

the dioceses of Syracuse and Rochester to discuss the identity of the Church in the United States, its mission in society, themselves as "faith persons," and themselves as local Church community with a mission in society.

The program is being sponsored by the Office of Vicars for Religious of both dioceses, the Regional Episcopal Vicars of Syracuse, and the Rochester Office of Continuing Education.

Participants will be 50 members of the Diocese of Syracuse invited by their regional vicars, and 50 from Rochester invited

through the Office of Vicar for Religious.

In addition, two events in the program schedule are also open to the public.

Sister Patricia Schoelles, SSJ, a doctoral candidate at the University of Notre Dame will lead a session on "Discipleship: Faith and Identity and Mission in Faith," 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m.

Sept. 17 at Stella Maris Retreat House in Skaneateles.

The second session, "The Community of Discipleship: the Modern Community of Faith," will have a public meeting 7:30-9:30 p.m., Nov. 4, at Our Lady of Mercy High School. The next day, Father John Haughey, SJ, will lead discussion of "Spirituality for

Ministry," 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m. in the motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph. Father Haughey is from the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington, D.C.

The third session will also open with a public meeting on "The Impact of Technology on the Faith Experience of the

Christian," 7:30-9:30 p.m. Jan. 13 at Maria Regina College in Syracuse. Father John Staudenmaier, SJ, of the University of Detroit will lead a discussion of "Discerning the Realities of the 21st Century: Tools for Discipleship," 9:30 a.m.-4 p.m., Jan. 14, also at the college.

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