

WORLD & NATION

Death penalty subject of censures



Reuters/CNS

Hundreds of Catholics process with palms and a large Christ statue through the streets of Panchimalco, El Salvador, on Palm Sunday April 16. Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' triumphant return to Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of his life on earth.

Sunday

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al maturity," he said.

At his blessing after the Mass, the pope addressed English-speaking youths, saying Easter week should be a time of "prayerful closeness to Christ, and of renewed commitment to the church's mission."

"The new evangelization needs your energies and enthusiasm!" he said. The pope also invited young people to attend international World Youth Day celebrations in Rome in mid-August.

The Palm Sunday Mass opened the most important week in the Christian calendar, and the pope, who recently returned from a historic pilgrimage to the Holy Land, spoke about the significance of Christ's last days.

On one hand, the church recalls the jubilation at Christ's entry into the holy city among a people awaiting the Messiah. But it also opened the start of the drama of Christ's passion and death on the cross.

"Sorrow and exultation: This is the key to understanding the Easter mystery, and the key to understanding the admirable economy of God, which is carried out in the Easter events," he said.

Pilgrims arriving for the Mass passed through metal detectors installed earlier in the month. Jubilee officials said hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were expected to flood into the Vatican area during Holy Week.

WASHINGTON (CNS) - The bishops of North Carolina and the Catholic peace group Pax Christi USA have issued new condemnations of the death penalty for Good Friday.

The separate statements drew connections between the execution of Jesus 2000 years ago and pending executions in the United States. Both were released April 17.

A year ago, the U.S. bishops issued "A Good Friday Appeal to End the Death Penalty." That statement asked Catholics and all people of good will to preach, teach, pray and serve as witnesses against the "tragic illusion" of the death penalty.

Pax Christi, a national Catholic peace movement, noted that more than 3,500 people are on death row around the United States, "awaiting the same fate as Jesus."

The statement said the organization bases its opposition to the death penalty in all cases on the belief that "those who are guilty, even of the most heinous crimes, are still sacred in the eyes of our loving God who embraces all sinners as sons and daughters."

It noted: "In the Gospels we see a non-violent Jesus who taught and exemplified forgiveness, mercy, compassion and justice that was restorative and healing, always seeking to convert and correct rather than to condemn."

In a press release, Tom Cordaro, chair of Pax Christi's national council, said the organization hopes "to challenge our nation to distinguish between justice and revenge. We hope to move the national conversation from punishment of criminals to the restoration of relationships."

The release said Pax Christi USA members around the country will walk in Stations of the Cross processions to call attention "to crucifixions that continue in the United States today."

Pax Christi's statement also encouraged governments at all levels to examine and address the root causes of violence and crime.

"Such root causes include a pervasive disregard for human life at all levels of our society; growing child abuse and neglect; breakdown of stable families and communities; growing gaps in income and quality of life; racism and hatred directed at minority populations; and a lack of quality ed-

ucation, work opportunities and social services for millions of citizens."

In their statement, North Carolina's bishops reaffirmed last year's national bishops' appeal.

"We call on all people of good will to join us in working toward ending this cycle of violence in our state and country," said Bishop William G. Curlin of Charlotte and Bishop F. Joseph Gossinan of Raleigh.

North Carolina has executed 15 people since the death penalty was reinstated in 1977. More than 220 people are on North Carolina's death row.

"The death penalty is not a deterrent to murder," they said. "Murder is a crime of misplaced passion, often fueled by drugs

or alcohol and made possible by ready access to guns. The possibility of the death penalty as a punishment is never thought of in most murders."

They also noted that recent evidence has uncovered cases of innocent people being convicted and sentenced to death.

"The possibility that an innocent person can be executed should be enough, by itself, to cause people of conscience to stand against the death penalty," they said.

The bishops also said they "do not call for the repeal of the death penalty at the expense of the victims, their families or loved ones. We understand the enormous pain those close to a murdered loved one must feel."

Project Rachel stirs interest

WASHINGTON (CNS) - The national advertising program for Project Rachel, the Catholic Church's post-abortion reconciliation ministry, is not aimed at "returning Catholics to the faith nor proselytizing," a spokeswoman for the U.S. bishops' pro-life efforts said April 12.

Helen Alvare, director of planning and information for the bishops' Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities, said in a statement that the purpose of the ad campaign and of Project Rachel "is to offer women and men suffering after abortion any help they need."

She said she issued the statement because widespread interest across the United States and internationally about the advertising program had prompted stories that contained some "inaccuracies which should be corrected."

Some of those who have called Project Rachel offices after hearing or seeing the ads have been practicing Catholics, some

have left the church and many are non-Catholics, Alvare said. In the Washington Archdiocese, for example, 40 percent of those who called for post-abortion counseling were non-Catholics.

"Many were referred to Protestant ministers, to a rabbi and to lay counselors, but many non-Catholics were pleased to talk to priests," she said. "Every effort was made to offer the kind of help the caller most needed and desired."

Alvare also said the ad campaign - which includes radio ads in English and Spanish, placards for buses and subways, billboards and a Web site offering information in nearly a dozen languages - "was not planned to coincide with any other event concerning abortion."

Planned more than a year in advance, the program launched in February was "timed to coincide with the opening months of the jubilee year," a traditional time for offers of reconciliation, she said.

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