

Mission Intention

March 2016 - 2017

Persecuted Christians
That persecuted Christians may be supported by the prayers and material assistance of the whole Church.

This month we turn our attention to those in our world who face discrimination, exile and violence because they are Christian. During the season of Lent, when we recall Jesus' way of the Cross, we can pray and offer support to those who face the cross today because of their faith in Jesus.

Country Focus:

Syria



Syria is a very ancient land in the heart of the Middle East. It is also part of the Holy Land where Jesus and the first Christians walked. St. Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus while intending to persecute Christians.

However, St. Paul did not baptize Syrian Christians. Rather, they baptized him. They also had to forgive Paul for his former ways of persecution when they welcomed him into the Church.

Today, Syria is in the midst of a violent civil war that has gone on for over six years. Christians are a religious minority in Syria and are finding it difficult to remain due to regional conflict and Islamic extremist groups. They are getting caught in the middle of intense fighting and many are losing their homes forcing them to leave the country. Youth are being drafted into the military and many young women are being forced into marriages with Muslim polygamists. Priests are also leaving due to the struggle and chaos.

War in Syria has also weakened the ties of families, the bedrock of safety and community. Since 2011, the number of Christians in Syria has gone from 1.25 million to under 500 thousand. Christians in Syria need prayer and support.

God's Word for Mission

Promoting Knowledge of Faith

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, theirs is the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10).

St. Paul said, "I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was unknown personally to the churches of Judea that are in Christ; they only kept hearing that 'the one who once was persecuting us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy'" (Gal. 1:21-24).

A Saint for Mission: St. Margaret of Antioch

Education for Community Life



Margaret lived in the 4th century in Antioch of Syria. Her mother died soon after her birth so Margaret was nursed by a pious woman.

Margaret was the daughter of a pagan priest, but she became a Christian and consecrated herself to God as a virgin. Her father disowned her and Margaret was taken in by her nurse maid.

One day while she was engaged in watching the flocks of her adopted mother, a man approached her and tried to make her his slave or wife. When she refused, he brought her before a public trial for being a Christian. She was threatened with death unless she renounced her faith and worshipped the gods of the Roman Empire. Margaret refused and was sentenced to death. Miraculously, she survived several attempts to kill her. Finally, Margaret was beheaded for her faith. Despite the threat of persecution many people became inspired by her witness and courage and embraced the Christian faith. Margaret was canonized a saint and is widely recognized as the special patron of women who are pregnant.

Her feast day is July 20th.

Power of Forgiveness/Human Dignity

Catholic Social Teaching



Christians throughout the Holy Land, which includes Syria and Iraq, are facing discrimination and violence as they are caught in the middle of a terrible civil war and Islamic extremism. Many families have lost homes and ways to make a living and have been forced to flee. They have become refugees. Amazingly, there are many Christians who can still hold their values of love and forgiveness; meet Mariyam.

Mariyam is an Iraqi Christian whose family was forced to flee their home of Qaraqosh because of war. Her father, mother and sister now live in a small two bedroom trailer in a refugee camp in Erbil, Kurdistan.

What is remarkable, is that Mariyam does not hate or hold anger in her heart for those who forced her family to flee. “The Bible is God’s love story for humanity...I pray that the peace of God will come all over Iraq and that He will forgive ISIS (Islamic extremists),” says Mariyam. She forgives ISIS who caused her family to become refugees and claims her words and inspiration are only those of the Holy Spirit.

See a video about Mariyam on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ILdJ9QYT0g>

Power of Forgiveness

Moral Formation

After watching the video, think about the questions below and discuss.

1. Mariyam forgives ISIS, those who forced her family to flee. Do you hold anger in your heart for someone and can you forgive them?
2. How does forgiveness reinforce the dignity of Mariyam and show dignity to ISIS?
3. Can you imagine losing your house and your parents losing their jobs and having to flee to a new city to live in tents or small trailers? What would it be like?
4. Can you see everything that happens to you during the day as reflecting God’s plan for you, as Mariyam does?



Petitions for Mission

Liturgical Education

- ✚ Let us pray that persecuted Christians may be supported by prayer and material support.
- ✚ Let us pray for peace in the Middle East, especially in Syria, and the power of forgiveness.
- ✚ Let us pray that human life will be respected at all stages from the womb to natural death.
- ✚ Let us pray that all have the opportunity to participate in family life, work and have freedom to worship free from harm or coercion.
- ✚ Let us pray for all those who have given their life for Christ.



CENTER for MISSION

Society for the Propagation of the Faith / St. Paul and Minneapolis

Daily Offering

Missionary Initiative

Dear God, I offer you my joys and sorrows, my work and my play, and all that I am this day. Help me to be an instrument of your love and peace with all I meet along the way of life. Help me to always know you are with me to lead me and guide me to your Kingdom. I ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.