

# MISSION INTENTIONS

JANUARY 2021 - 2022

We pray for all those suffering from religious discrimination and persecution, that their rights and dignity as members of the human family may be recognized.

## Country Focus: Turkmenistan

In Turkmenistan, a country with an estimated population of 6 million people, the Catholic Church only has one parish with about 250 parishioners. Each week, the Catholic faithful gather at the chapel of the Transfiguration of the Lord, in the Turkmenistan capital of Ashgabat, to celebrate the Sunday liturgy and share the Eucharist.

But before 2010, when the Church was recognized by the Turkmenistan government, gathering wasn't so easy. According to the Office of International Religious Freedom in the United States Department of State, Turkmenistan makes it very difficult for



citizens to worship freely. Religious groups are required to register with the government, and worship and religious education in private homes is not allowed. The government can also raid and search houses to enforce these laws. Let us pray for Turkmenistan Catholics, that they may practice their faith freely and in peace.

## Leading to Knowledge of the Faith

The Catholic Church teaches that religious freedom is a human right, as shown by this quote from Saint John Paul II. We will learn more about this right on the next page of this newsletter.

*"[Human rights]...include the right to religious freedom together with the right to freedom of conscience...the curtailment of religious freedom of individuals and communities is not only a painful experience but it is above all an attack on [a person's] very dignity...the curtailment and violation of religious freedom are in contrast with [a person's] dignity and objective rights" (Redemptor Hominis, no. 17).*

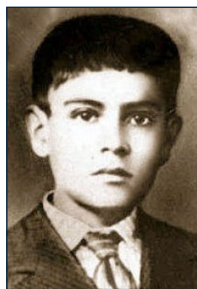
## Saint Spotlight

## St. José Sánchez del Rio

Saint José Sánchez del Rio was not from Turkmenistan, but he knew a lot about being unable to worship freely, just like Catholics in Turkmenistan.

José was born in 1913, in the western Mexican state of Michoacán. From a young age, José demonstrated a great love for his Catholic faith, and had a strong devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. When José was 13, the Mexican government passed laws restricting the practice of Catholicism, to weaken the influence of the Church in the country. Celebrating Mass and the Sacrament of Baptism became illegal, and Catholic schools and convents were shut down.

Many Catholics responded by rebelling against the government. The rebels called themselves "Cristeros" in



honor of Christ the King. Even though he was young, José wanted nothing more than to join the Cristeros and defend his faith. His mother finally allowed him to join the rebellion, but because of his young age, he could not be a soldier. So he helped the rebels by doing basic tasks to support their cause.

During one battle, a Cristero leader lost his horse. José gave the leader his horse, only to be captured himself. The government offered José his freedom if he would deny his faith. José refused, and was martyred on February 10, 1928. He was 14 years old. We remember Saint José Sánchez del Rio every year on his feast day, February 10.

## Formation for Life in Christ

What does religious freedom mean to you? For many people, religious freedom means the ability to practice their faith without interference from their government. But the Catholic Church teaches that religious freedom means more than being free *from* restrictions. According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), religious freedom also means that societies should encourage people to seek religious truth, and create space for their citizens to fully live their faith publicly and privately.

In *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Second Vatican Council declared that everyone has the right to religious freedom. This right is based on the Catholic Church's understanding of human dignity, that every person is created in the image and likeness of God and is to be valued and respected. Within each of us is the desire to get to know the God who created us, and we all have a fundamental right to satisfy this natural longing for God. As Pope Francis said on June 20, 2014, at a conference in Rome, "Every human is a 'seeker' of truth on [their] origins and destiny. In [their] minds and hearts, questions

and thoughts arise that cannot be repressed or stifled, since they emerge from the depths of the person and are a part of the intimate essence of the person. They are religious questions, and religious freedom is necessary for them to manifest themselves fully."

In this month's video, Catholic speaker and author Chris Stefanick shares a reflection on religious freedom. As you watch the video, think about your own understanding of religious freedom. How would you have defined religious freedom before reading this month's newsletter? Has your understanding of religious freedom changed as a result of reading this newsletter or watching this month's video, and, if so, how?



## Celebrating the Mystery

When we receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, we are strengthened by the Holy Spirit and are better able to carry out the Church's work. Saint John Paul II teaches us that this work includes "a commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; [and] safeguarding the created world..." (*Redemptoris Missio*, No. 37). It also includes promoting human life and dignity of all people. How do you think the Sacrament of Confirmation can better help you advocate for the religious freedom of all people?

### Teaching Prayer: Intercession

Intercession is a prayer of petition where we pray for the concerns of others, rather than our own interests. This form of prayer models Jesus' example. Just as Christ prayed for us, so too must we pray for others. This month's prayer petition is an example of intercessory prayer. Who do you want to pray for in your own life?

## Introduction to Community Life

Freedom of Religion [Click Here](#)>>



✚ What is the difference between freedom of religion and freedom of worship? How does freedom of religion help us be better citizens?

✚ How has your right to freedom of religion helped you live out Christ's call in your daily life?

Helped you become involved in your parish community?

✚ Why does the Church teach that freedom of religion is a human right?



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