

Homily 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time (26.2.17)

Appeal for Aid to the Church in Need Christianity - The Worlds most persecuted religion

Fr Richard : Apparently it's been four years since we had an appeal for Aid to the Church in Need, and I'd like to welcome Kevin Harrison who's area secretary for ACN. One of the most important things to remember is that the most persecuted religion in the world today is the Christian faith.

Kevin Harrison : I'd like to thank Fr Carter for this opportunity to update you about the work of Aid to the Church in Need, because we've been providing help and support for over 70 years to people who are persecuted and marginalised because of their Christian Faith – not just because of their 'faith' in Christ, but because they refuse to 'renounce' their faith in Christ. The persecution they are suffering could stop immediately... all they need to do is to walk away from the cross... walk away from Christ, and simply blend into the society in which they live. We all know from our own experience, that anyone who is fully committed to Christ, will experience resistance, ridicule and rejection from the Society in which they live, and even increasingly so, from their own family and friends. So it should come as no surprise to us that some 200 million people across the world, are subjected to varying levels of persecution because of their belief in Christ.

One hundred years ago Our Lady, the Mother of Christ - the Theotokos - the God Bearer, appeared at Fatima, and her message was one of repentance and conversion of life. She told us to pray the rosary. She foretold the great wars and persecutions which would follow her appearing. Since 1917 there have been more people killed for their faith in Christ, than in all the years prior to her appearing. We have ignored her warnings, and as we look around us - we see a deliberate and concerted effort to destroy the presence of Christ in the world. This is a Third World War, as Pope Francis has said. There is a report which was produced recently about religious persecution throughout the world, and which is available at the back of church. Please take one home and perhaps read it during Lent, and pray for the Persecuted Church. We so often take our

own faith and relative freedoms for granted - our priests, our churches, our schools, our religious institutions and charities – a cursory glance through that report, and at the display in the porch, will show that such freedoms are far from universal, and are under continued attack.

Today's gospel is a continuation of the Sermon on the Mount - it is a spiritual manifesto for the Christian life. It's also about choices, and the fundamental choice we, and our persecuted brothers and sisters have to make - it is about whether we follow Christ or not. Those 200 million people, persecuted for their faith have made that choice and have decided to live and in many cases to die for Christ, rather than reject Him, and all that that brings.

So Aid to the Church in Need, has been working to support all our persecuted brothers and sisters, with spiritual and material help. We support priests, and the training of priests in over 140 different countries. We help to train some 10% of all seminarians in the world, and about the same number of Catechists. We support religious sisters and brothers at work in their schools and hospitals. We provide help, materials and expertise to restore and rebuild the churches, schools and hospitals destroyed by those who seek to eliminate the presence of Christ in the world.

So what can we as practising Catholics do to help? Well there are three things really.

Firstly, we must **never give up hope** and think that this huge worldwide problem is too difficult for us to deal with

Secondly, we must **pray**, and especially pray the rosary that the gates of hell will never overcome the Church

And **thirdly**, we can **give financial help** so that our prayers bear fruit in reborn and re energised Christian communities in those parts of the world where they are presently under threat.

In your benches, you will find an envelope for your offerings and a pencil to write your name and address - if you wish? We will then be able to send you, every couple of months, a snapshot of all the work Aid to the Church in Need is doing all over the world, through your generosity. You will see the wonderful faith and hope of our persecuted brothers and sisters - and be inspired by them – and say to ourselves,

“if they can do it- WE can do it too!”

And finally, pray the rosary as Our Lady asked. It will deepen our own faith, and bring much needed help and hope to all those we know today, who so desperately rely on our support.

Also - (and I promise to stop soon- chuckle) - please pray the prayer to St Michael, on the prayer card you were given- a most powerful prayer of protection for ourselves and the worldwide Church.

With that in mind, I'd like to thank Fr Carter and yourselves for the time, patience and support you have given today and will continue to give to Aid to the Church in Need, and our Christian brothers and sisters throughout the world. God bless you all! (Applause!!!)