

Homily by Bishop Anthony Randazzo

Bishop of Broken Bay

Red Wednesday 2024
Our Lady of Dolours Church, Chatswood
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This evening, we gather once more in prayer, solidarity, and compassion for our sisters and brothers who suffer persecution for their faith.

This Red Wednesday Mass is not only an occasion to remember over 300 million Christians who face daily oppression around the world, but also a call to action, a call to stand with them in their suffering and to be their voices when they are silenced.

In the letters of Saint Paul, particularly in today's reading from the letter to the Philippians, we are reminded of the noble call to live as citizens worthy of the Gospel. Paul encourages the Christians in Philippi — and he encourages us today — to stand firm in one spirit, to strive together with one mind for the faith of the Gospel, and not to be intimidated by those who would oppose us.

Indeed, The Apostle speaks of the hardship and opposition that Christians will face, but he also speaks of courage and steadfastness in the face of such challenges.

As we reflect on the realities faced by our persecuted brothers and sisters, we are confronted with the stark truth that Christian persecution is not an abstract problem, but a growing and painful reality. The threats to our brothers and sisters in the faith are not confined to distant lands but are now widespread.

Christians in places like North Korea, the Middle East, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, Venezuela, and many other regions face not only the restriction of religious freedoms but direct violence — churches burned, families displaced, lives lost.

In the Holy Land, where the very heart of Christianity beats, fellow Christians continue to struggle to remain in their homeland, enduring the weight of ongoing conflict and oppression. They are caught in the crossfire of wars, with little respite from the daily reality of fear and hardship.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks powerfully about fear and courage, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul". (Matt 10:28) He calls us to a higher perspective, one that is not fixated on worldly suffering but on eternal life. These words are deeply meaningful for those who face the most extreme forms of persecution — those who have lost their homes, their families, and their very lives because they dare to profess the name of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Their bodies may be harmed, but their souls remain in the hands of God.

We are reminded that the persecuted Church is not some distant or abstract reality. It is a part of the one Body of Christ. As Saint Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, "If one part

suffers, every part suffers with it” (1 Cor 12:26). As Christians, we are called to live as one body, to feel the suffering of our persecuted sisters and brothers, to share in their pain, and to respond with acts of mercy, justice, and advocacy.

The Church has always recognised that the freedom to worship God and to practice our faith is a fundamental human right. And yet, this right is being denied to millions of Christians around the world today. We are called not only to stand in prayerful solidarity with them but to discern, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, how we can act to defend their dignity and their rights.

The first step is prayer. Prayer is the most powerful weapon we can wield on behalf of the persecuted Church.

We pray that they may find strength in the Lord, that they may persevere in faith, and that they may experience the peace that passes all understanding, even in the midst of their trials.

We also pray for the conversion of hearts — of those who persecute, of those who oppress, and of those who turn a blind eye to the suffering of others.

We pray that the light of Christ may shine in the darkness, and that the peace of Christ may reign in places where violence and hatred are rampant.

But we must also act. We cannot allow this suffering to remain a distant reality that we only hear about in the news or read about in reports. We must discern what God is asking of us. Perhaps it is to raise our voices in advocacy, to engage in diplomatic or humanitarian efforts, or to support organisations that are working directly with those in need. Perhaps it is to give generously, to help provide for those who are displaced, or to support the rebuilding of churches and homes. Every small action contributes to a greater effort — a movement of compassion that can help alleviate some of the suffering and provide hope for the persecuted Church.

My sisters and brothers, we are not powerless. By the grace of God, we are empowered to make a difference. Through our prayers, our voices, and our acts of charity, we can stand in solidarity with our persecuted brothers and sisters.

May we never forget that the Church is one, and when one part suffers, we all suffer. And when one part rejoices, we all rejoice.

Might we, as one Body of Christ, be the hands and feet of Jesus in a world that desperately needs the love and mercy of His Sacred Heart.

As we continue with the celebration of this holy Mass, let us offer our prayers for those who suffer for the faith, and let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our response. May we have the courage to act and the wisdom to know what God is calling us to do.

And may the Lord grant peace and strength to our persecuted brothers and sisters, that they may remain steadfast in faith, knowing that nothing — no hardship, no persecution — can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.