

St Patrick's Day  
17 March 2011

HOMILY

Aid to the Church in Need

Important day for Faith in these lands.

St Patrick – great appeal – ‘Greening of the London Eye, Battersea Power Station, Angel of the North.

Behind glamour and rejoicing man of stature.  
Child-slave; convert to Christianity; courageous missionary; charismatic bishop.

Man who helped fashion a Catholic culture which influenced many countries far and wide through missionaries, inspired by same Gospel.

Rejoice in this Saint today and all associated with him.

Today our gaze is set wide for another reason.

Welcome Archbishop Bashar Warda from Erbil, Northern Iraq.

Aid to the Church in Need Report ‘Persecuted and Forgotten?’

Gospel reading:

Disciples are not assured welcome; expect trouble, rejected, persecution.

That is true today in circumstances that are complex and profoundly differing: North Korea, China, Venezuela, Iraq, Egypt and many others.

Thank Aid to the Church in Need for its report.

Deference to answer question in title.

No – our Persecuted brothers and sisters are not forgotten.

Hold them in prayers  
Give them loving attention  
Speak up for them

Holy Father Pope Benedict gives strong lead

2 speeches:

1<sup>st</sup> January World Day of Peace

10 January Address to Diplomatic Corps

Key issue is promotion of Religious Freedom

We must do so because

- i) human beings are essentially religious and denial of religious freedom is a denial of essential dignity
- ii) such denial undermines moral dignity and integrity and weakens moral structures of societies
- iii) religious freedom is fundamental to social justice and stability
- iv) religious freedom is essential to building peace.

So our concerns are widely set:

Yes, to speak up for persecuted brothers and sisters

and

To speak up for all who are persecuted for religious beliefs and denied these freedoms.

This is greatest good which Church seeks to serve in its words and actions.

As Pope Benedict XVI said on 1 January, "Religious freedom is not the exclusive property of believers but of the whole family of the earth's people. It is the litmus test for the respect of all the other human rights."

We thank, today, ACN for their work.

We thank Archbishop Bashar Warda for his presence and for the courageous witness of his Christian people in Iraq.

We receive his blessing at the end of this Mass with humility and gratitude.

And we resolve not to forget so that we who enjoy a peaceful and essential freedom in this country may support all who seek to follow their faith elsewhere with our prayers and practical support.

And may St Patrick, that great missionary of his day, look down on us all and pray for us today.

Amen.

✠Vincent Nichols

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