

Address of HRH The Prince of Wales to the Chaldean Community in London

9th December 2014

Church of the Holy Family, Acton West

Ladies and gentlemen I just wanted to say what a great delight it is to be with you on this brief occasion, and I know that many of you have come from different parts of the country to be here today and I am so grateful to you for that.

I must say that having heard some of the accounts and stories of unbearable suffering before I came into the church from members of your community, I feel extraordinarily inadequate in trying to express how much I feel for what all of you are forced to go through. Such indescribable agony. And the fact that I can be here with you just briefly on this occasion is merely a way of trying to show how much we feel for you.

I also must say that it was an enormously special treat to hear the choir singing this morning, but also to hear the Lord's prayer said in Aramaic because somehow it connects us even more closely with our Lord more than 2000 years ago. And the fact that your community has been in Iraq, practicing for your faith, for all these hundreds of years, and the fact that now that very faith which has been there for so long is under threat of complete removal is beyond all belief. Certainly, as far as I am concerned.

Ladies and Gentlemen in this season of Advent I particularly wanted you to know, that as Christmas approaches my heart goes out to all Christians who are being persecuted on account of their faith.

As some of you may know, throughout my life I have appealed for greater understanding between people of faith, for greater tolerance and for harmony between the great religions of the world.

Therefore, for me it is utterly inconceivable that a person of one faith could find it in themselves to persecute a person of another faith. Surely to do so brings nothing but dishonour on the faith of the persecutor?

Like so many of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been deeply distressed by the horrific scenes of violence and persecution coming out of your beloved Iraq. I know that many of those who have been killed or forced to flee are members of your own families. I've heard about that today. The pain and grief for you must be quite unimaginable as you see them persecuted because of their faith.

It seems to me that all faiths to some extent shine a light on the divine image in every human life. If that is so, then surely to destroy another human being is to desecrate the image of the Divine, and to do so in the name of faith is nothing less than a blasphemy?

As these truly dreadful images of executions and beheadings are transmitted around the world via the Internet I cannot help but feel that we are in serious danger, in this so-called modern age, of descending into the dark ages of public executions.

We hear much at present about "the duty of care". Then, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am bound to ask, whether there is not a duty of care towards the victims of violence and their families who, like you, are daily distraught by the graphic transmission of violent images of their loved ones?

But to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, whose brothers and sisters are suffering at this terrible time, to you whose families have lived, as I was saying, in the biblical lands since biblical times, I can only say from my heart that I thank God for your astonishing courage, faithfulness and perseverance.

The Apostle Paul who went from being a persecutor to being persecuted encourages us to be steadfast in faith. And, at this most agonising time we have to struggle not to forget that Our Lord called upon us to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute. As you and your families know only too well, that is easier said than done.

But by being with you this Christmas time I wanted to assure you of my constant thoughts and sympathy, and those of my family. As you know, the story of the Nativity ends with the Holy Family fleeing for refuge from persecution. You and your families are quite literally following in the footsteps of the Holy Family.

My prayers, then, go with you that, like them, you too will one day be able to return to your own country, and to the place that has nurtured both your life and your faith.

In the meantime, you can have no idea how much I feel for those who, as I speak, are suffering for their faith in such terrible circumstances.