

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. Jesus died innocently to save us, so too every martyr dies for the truth and imitates the Lord’s patience in suffering. We’ve been hearing in the Readings about how St. Peter and the other Apostles prayed and preached the Gospel for people to convert, and they died for it. But not long before, in the Garden of Gethsemane he tried to defend the Lord with a sword and cut off the high priest’s servant’s ear. At first Peter used the weapons of the world to fight evil but he came to know that the Lord was calling him to take up the weapons of prayer and the Word of God which is sharper than any two-edged sword.

More recently there are Christians being displaced from their homes, and suffering greatly throughout the world; in the Holy Land, and many African countries. The Church in Nigeria is still under regular threat from the terrorist Islamic group called Boko Haram, that burned churches and homes, and has caused massive displacement starting in 2009. This group is infamous for taking captive hundreds of schoolgirls in 2014, many of whom have not been found. But the Lord has given the people their hope as is shared by Bishop Oliver Dashe Doeme from Maiduguri, in northern Nigeria.

Bishop Doeme has a powerful story he still tells today to encourage all of us. While he was praying the rosary before the Blessed Sacrament, the Lord appeared to him. At first Jesus did not say anything but then He handed the bishop a sword saying three times “Boko Haram is no more.” As the bishop took the sword it immediately became a rosary. He said, *“I did not need a prophet to tell me what the sign meant.”* He kept the vision to himself for a year but then felt inspired by the Holy Spirit to share the vision so that his people wouldn’t lose hope. Bishop Doeme says: *“Prayer, particularly the prayer of the rosary, is (what) will deliver us from the claws of this demon, the demon of terrorism. And of course, it is working.”*

The bishop reminds that Boko Haram can try to take all that people have; homes, businesses and even lives, but they can’t take the people’s faith! Our prayers don’t end abstract evil but help convert us when we have given ourselves over to evil. It’s very difficult to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. But we must, the Lord told us to.

There was another great Apostle other than Peter whose zeal had violent beginnings. The Acts of the Apostles says that Saul was breathing murderous threats against the Church, killing and imprisoning Christians. But the early Church was praying for deliverance. So it was that on the road to Damascus, Saul encountered the risen Lord and converted. God sent Ananias to baptize Saul but at first Ananias complained *“Lord, I have heard from many about this man, what evil things he has done to Your holy ones.”* The Lord forgave Saul and wanted him to be part of His Church. He who was once an enemy of Christ became its greatest missionary. The Lord didn’t abandon the early Christians in their persecutions, and He won’t abandon the Christians now.

Our natural reaction to injustice is anger. But God knows all of us by name. He wants us all to have a change and softening of heart. As Jesus told us today: ***“I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. These also I must lead, and they will hear my voice, and there will be one flock, one shepherd.”***

God bless,

Fr. Mike

