

The title of my sermon this morning is “The Dignity of Human Beings.”

What we are witnessing in our region today is something scarcely to be believed, the brutal killing of innocent people in different parts of the Middle East, whether in Iraq or Gaza, Syria or elsewhere. In Syria and Iraq, ancient Christian communities, churches and clerics have all come under fire and persecution by radical Muslim groups and, unfortunately, by insurgents who slaughter human beings indiscriminately: be they Christian or non-Christian.

Persecution is not new to Christianity. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus, aware of the earthly hardships his followers would face, tried to prepare them by saying:

I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. Be on your guard against men [...]. (Matthew 10:16-17)

One image that we have seen in the Bible shows the human person as the highest form of God’s created order, created in dignity, respect and, indeed, in the very image of God. Therefore, our concern and focus today

will be on a right relationship with God as the power and strength for our right and active relationship with our neighbours, our brothers and sisters. We shall reaffirm our dignity created by God, and our dignity revealed by God in Christ.

In the first article of the Apostles Creed, we confess, “We believe in God the Father, Creator of Heaven and Earth.” To make this confession with radical seriousness, is to challenge the lens through which we see our neighbours. Do we see them as undesirable, poor, marginalized, black, brown, non-believers – or do we see them as created in dignity by God? What we are witnessing now is a humanity that has lost the image of God to sin, along with its own humanity. God is not present at all in their midst; there is only the absence of good, falsehood, oppression, sickness or error of nature. It reminds us that humanity is separate from self, neighbour and God.

I believe that the conflict between races, religions and classes, is fundamentally centered in the treatment of the human being. Do we treat other human beings properly? Is the human being a person or a pawn?

Radical groups treat people as things, rather than as persons. However, each life is sacred, as created by God, and redeemed by Christ.

The question that we should ask today is: where is the prophetic voice? What does the Church have to say in these critical and difficult times?

The relevance of the Christian faith to politics is deeply rooted in the Gospel. It is indeed not a new thing to find the church speaking to the issues of the day. Christ addressed the issues of his time and, certainly, he would be considered a revolutionary; he was, after all, the One who was crucified for his concern for the oppressed masses and the dignity of humanity.

Last Sunday, I watched an interview with an Iraqi Syrian Bishop, who spoke strongly about the fate and the oppression of his people, and the fact that the world is not listening to the cries of the oppressed, whether Christians or non-Christians.

The Bible does not separate the sacred area of faith from secular life. It tells us that God is the God of all life. Throughout the Scriptures, God demonstrates a concern for the application of his will everywhere. We have to condemn all those who make laws whose price is human misery.

We as Christians see God's grace freely given in Christ and, once received by faith, shared in love with others. This love is the means for the redemption of God's created world. We can only close the gap on broken communities by meeting hate with love and by supporting the oppressed. Therefore, the dignity of the person can be fulfilled only in the context of the community and by the cooperation of all human beings.

Although Jesus knew that his believers would face hardships in life, he reassured them by telling them to be at peace, for he had overcome the world. In our witness, faith and steadfastness, we can overcome evil and evil forces.