



The Sword of the Spirit
Week of Prayer for
Christian Unity

January 18-25, 2020

Matthew 5:10

*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness'
sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

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Imprimatur, Archbishop Georges Bacouni, Greek Catholic
Archbishop of Beirut and Byblos.

Introduction

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is actually an eight-day observance or “octave” of prayer. It has been this way since the beginnings of this international movement in 1908.

This is now the Sword of the Spirit’s 10th year of participating in this worldwide observance! Similar to last year, we want to take a special approach to the materials used in our observance based on the concept of **‘the ecumenism of blood’**.

The ‘ecumenism of blood’ is a simple concept on one level: hearing of the persecution of our Christian brothers and sisters around the world speaks directly to our hearts. As we hear of their suffering, our hearts call out in intercession; theological differences shrink in significance as we pray for their protection. The ‘ecumenism of blood’ is first and foremost an ecumenism of the heart.

There is also a deeper level to the ‘ecumenism of blood’, wrapped up in the mystery of persecution and martyrdom. The Father brings His kingdom, including the unity of His kingdom, through the seeds of his suffering church. The ‘ecumenism of blood’ is therefore a part of the larger mystery of God’s bringing salvation and unity to the world.

We want to use this year’s observance to explore these topics and let them shape our intercession for the unity of God’s people.

How will we do this? For each of the eight days we will focus on a different country or region of the world and examine the persecution of God’s people in that place. We’ll look at places where the persecution is more overt and places where it is more subtle. We’ll look at persecution from Hindu extremism, Islamic extremism and secular pressures in more first world environments. We will also have a daily scripture for meditation and two short topical essays from Dr. Dan Keating and Jean Barbara.

May the Holy Spirit lead us and give us grace as we seek to understand, appreciate and intercede for the unity of the suffering church around the world.

We have also included a short Lord's Day prayer that can be inserted in the section following the blessing of the wine which can be used like the other seasonal variations in the Lord's Day prayers.

Please use these materials in any way you find most helpful in your personal and family worship times during this season of prayer.

Note: The Psalms listed in this booklet follow the numbering of the Hebrew tradition.

Saturday, January 18: Sub-Sharan Africa

Scripture for the day: John 15:18 *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.”*

Sub-Sharan Africa: In Africa, Christianity is experiencing explosive growth. As a recent Pew report states: “By 2060, a plurality of Christians – more than four-in-ten – will call sub-Saharan Africa home, up from 26% in 2015.” This is a remarkable statistic: 40% of all Christians worldwide will reside in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite this growth and many positive examples of Christians and Muslims living together peacefully in southern Africa, there are several countries where Christians are under threat and are being stopped from exercising their religious freedoms. Some of the worst Christian persecution is taking place in Nigeria, Eritrea, Sudan and the Central African Republic. For most of these countries the persecution comes from Muslim extremists.

One survivor from the Central African Republic described an attack which occurred in May 2019:

“Several armed Islamic gunmen, wearing military fatigues and armed with automatic rifles arrived in my village and asked to see the community leaders to organize a general meeting,” says Alphonse, a survivor who was injured in the attack. “The people then gathered under a mango tree,” he said. “Then they started to tie us up. They tore my shirt to tie my arms,” Alphonse continued. “They piled us on top of each other, then started shooting. It felt like it was raining bullets.”

Similar acts of violence are occurring throughout the entire region. According to a recent report by Open Doors USA, one in every six Christians in Africa experiences high levels of persecution.

Intercession: Lord be at work powerfully in these dire circumstances. Draw all the people of the Sub-Sahara to yourself and away from retaliation. Please give wisdom, peace, protection and courage to the churches and their leaders that, as they encounter this persecution, they may continue to build the Kingdom of God in Africa.

Prayer for the Lord's Day

This prayer may be used after the Blessing of the Wine, similar to the seasonal variations in the Lord's Day Opening Ceremony.

Leader: Let us thank Him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to ecumenical life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, You are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Group: Now we live with Him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with Him in Your everlasting kingdom.

Ecumenism of Blood *by Dan Keating*

How can the 'ecumenism of blood' lead to a deeper ecumenism of heart and mind?

You might not be familiar with the phrase, 'ecumenism of blood'. It is an idea that has gained momentum among Christians especially in the past 5-10 years.

The sense of an 'ecumenism of martyrs' was widely publicized by Pope John Paul II twenty years ago around the time of the millennium. What is the vision behind this? If Christians—of whatever background and conviction—die for their faith in Christ, then they demonstrate the ultimate act of 'witness' to him. Martyrs in the modern world in fact come from all the different churches. And all of them give their 'all' to Christ in a definitive way.

The idea is that if martyrs from various churches can be joined in this common act of complete witness to Christ, then this shows a unity achieved beyond what we have been able to attain in the normal life of Christians. The martyrs, then, by their act of this complete gift of their lives, show that unity is possible and already being reached.

As we gaze on our common martyrs, we are then strengthened to pursue unity here and now—to serve together, witness together, and suffer together.

The 'ecumenism of blood' has become Pope Francis' favorite way of speaking about how Christians are called to witness together today. Here is an excerpt from his address to an ecumenical gathering of Christians in Phoenix, AZ (USA) in 2015. (In case you don't spot it, he is talking about the 'devil' in the opening sentences.)

"There is someone who 'knows' that, despite our differences, we are one. It is he who is persecuting us. It is he who is persecuting Christians today, he who is anointing us with (the blood of)

martyrdom. He knows that Christians are disciples of Christ: that they are one, that they are brothers! He doesn't care if they are Evangelicals, or Orthodox, Lutherans, Catholics or Apostolic ... he doesn't care! They are Christians. And that blood (of martyrdom) unites. Today, dear brothers and sisters, we are living an 'ecumenism of blood'. This must encourage us to do what we are doing today: to pray, to dialogue together, to shorten the distance between us, to strengthen our bonds of brotherhood."

A striking example of this 'ecumenism of blood' occurred in North Africa in 2015. A video was released showing the beheading of twenty-one Coptic Christians along the Libyan coast. Why were they killed? Simply because they were Christians and confessed to being so. Fellow Christians across the world joined in mourning their deaths but also rejoiced in the power of their witness. For these twenty-one Coptic men, 'the adventure of discipleship' ended suddenly and with great cost. It was probably not what any of them had planned. But to them was granted the great privilege to die for Christ—and so to prove themselves Christ's friends.

As we witness fellow Christians giving their lives (their blood) for Christ, we can take heart that they are forging a unity in Christ deeper than anything that divides us. May we be strengthened by their example, to live and to die for the Lord.



Dr. Dan Keating is an elder in the Servants of the Word and teaches at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit, Michigan, USA.

Sunday January 19: India

Scripture for the day: Matthew 5:10 *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

India: Hinduism is the largest religion in India followed by Islam and Christianity. According to Indian tradition, the Christian faith was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who may have reached the Malabar Coast in southwestern India in 52 A.D.

Since that time Christianity has been a small but active presence in certain parts of the country (though small in percentage terms, there are 28 million Christians in India).

Christians in India are mainly represented by the Malabar, Roman Catholic and Malankara Orthodox churches. There is also strong growth among Evangelical and Pentecostal communities.

However, India is also seeing a dramatic rise in persecution as more and more churches and individual Christians come under attack, mainly from Hindu extremists. The latest figures indicate that cases of hate and violence against India's minority Christians jumped 57 percent in the first two months of 2018. According to the Evangelical Fellowship of India, a total of 77 incidents were documented against Christians between January and February 2019. In addition to violent attacks, there are recorded cases where Christians faced social boycott and have been 'excommunicated' from their villages or forced to flee for their lives.

Here are just two examples of incidents which occurred this past summer. On July 28 while he was praying for his congregation, Pastor Raju Prasad, pastor of a small Christian fellowship in Uttar Pradesh was attacked, dragged from his house church and beaten. He was accused of converting local Hindu villagers. In August the attendees of a Christian wedding were attacked by a Sikh mob and threatened with beating and death. Police were

called but rather than arrest the attackers, several Christians were arrested for allegedly converting people.

Intercession: Let us pray for our brothers and sisters in India, that the Lord bring them safely through this persecution and that through this adversity the Lord would continue to advance the church in India.

Monday, January 20: Western Europe

Scripture for the day: Romans 8:35 *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?”*

Western Europe: In Western Europe Christians do not often face the same direct threat of violence as in other parts of the world. However, in recent years there has been a sharp rise in intolerance and discrimination towards Christians. *Intolerance* refers to cultural or social pressures which at its worst can include violent hate crimes. A recent report ranking 200 nations for social hostility to Christianity ranked the UK 17th in the world, Germany was 23rd; the USA, by comparison, was 49th.

Discrimination includes legally sanctioned interference with freedom of expression, religion, conscience, association and assembly, the rights of parents, governmental removal of Christian symbols, laws that negatively impact Christians, and unequal access to justice. The same report estimated that in the UK, government legal restrictions on Christians grew by 60% between 2000 and 2010. In Germany the figure was 23%. Pope Francis has been quoted as saying that there are two types of anti-Christian persecution. The first is overt which is clear and explicit and undeniable. The second is “polite persecution” disguised as culture, disguised as modernity, disguised as progress.

The shift away from Christian foundations in Europe has seen an array of human rights elevated in comparison to religious principles. Courts have portrayed the Christian faith as irrational, the trend being to not accommodate citizen's religious conscience. Faith then becomes a private matter increasingly expunged from public discourse and the world of employment.

In this climate an increasing amount of discrimination has been documented. Many of these incidents attack our freedom to obey established Christian teaching.

In France, a pharmacist was sanctioned for refusing to sell an IUD, the abortifacient device. In Sweden, which allows medical practitioners no right of conscientious objection, pro-life midwives who refused to participate in abortions lost their jobs and were ordered to pay court costs in appeals challenging their employment termination. A Catholic nursing home in Belgium was fined for preventing doctors from giving a lethal injection, and a Christian nursing home in Switzerland was ordered to allow assisted suicide on its premises or risk losing its charitable status.

Intercessions: Let us pray that our brothers and sisters in Western Europe would remain confident to speak and act in accordance with the law of God.

Tuesday, January 21: Southeast Asia

Scripture for the day: 2 Corinthians 12:10 *“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

Southeast Asia: China, Vietnam, Malaysia: From a little more than 62 million Christians in East and Southeast Asia in 1970, by 2015 the number of faithful had grown to more than 266 million. The World Christian Database estimates that by 2050 there will be 431 million Christians in Asia, nearly 20 per cent of the projected population.

In 2018 nearly 140 million Christians suffered high levels of persecution in Asia, according to a new report, which described the situation facing the faith in China as the worst since the Cultural Revolution. While nearly everyone is aware of the religious oppression in China, little is commonly known about the difficulties in countries like Vietnam and Malaysia.

In Malaysia, it is illegal to evangelize Malays, and Malays may not convert to another religion. In one high profile incident which occurred in 2017, a free church pastor, 63-year-old Raymond Koh, was kidnapped in broad daylight and is still missing. A recent Malaysian Human Rights Commission report, released in April 2019, claimed that Pastor Poh, “fell prey to ‘enforced disappearance by state agents’ from the national police” for his evangelistic mission.

Vietnam has a repressive Communist government which actively persecutes Christians. Even though the practice of Christianity is legal, the government still sees it as a threat. Minority tribal groups, such as the Hmong, typically face the most violent and harshest forms of persecution. Yet, the country’s churches continue to grow even while experiencing overt, as well as more subtle, forms of religious persecution. These Christians are often denied social services, utilities and education in an attempt to pressure them to reject their faith.

Intercessions: Let us pray that the Christians of China, Malaysia and Vietnam will stand firm in their faith, despite opposition. Let us pray that all Asian Christians will be free to practice their faith in Jesus Christ and that their witness in the face of persecution will bring many to Christ.

**Martyrdom and Persecution:
A Path to Unity
by Jean Barbara**

Martyrdom: By martyrdom, we normally mean dying for Christ. But the Greek word for ‘martyr’ also is the word for ‘witness’. Every disciple of Jesus is essentially a ‘witness’ (Acts 1:7-8), and thus a ‘martyr’. Traditionally, martyrdom was understood under three forms: a **witness by word**, that is, an evangelist; a **witness by life**, that is, obedience to Christ and to his will (Acts 5:24-32); and a **witness by blood**, that is, the pouring of one’s blood for the truth of the Gospel. Acts 6-7 describe how Stephen lived these three forms of martyrdom in an excellent way.

While the first two forms of martyrdom are the bread and butter of every disciple, the last form is reserved to a few. Although, saying ‘a few’ is perhaps an understatement. During the two years of 2015 and 2016 alone, there were more Christian martyrs than all the martyrs since Stephen.

But, how did men and women embrace with joy the idea of dying as martyrs? I believe the answer is because they loved to be with God in heaven more that they desired life on earth (see Philippians 1:23).

We could ask: “Why is there such a thing as martyrdom?” The answer lies in the mystery of a God who accepts the sacrifice of the life of one martyr and pours it back to bring forth new life for many. After Stephen’s martyrdom, the Good News quickly

spread beyond the borders of the Holy Land, imparting spiritual life to the gentiles. In our times, when the number of martyrs has reached unprecedented proportions, should we not expect an unprecedented spread of the Gospel and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit?

Persecution: No person in his right mind would seek persecution, but the Lord promised us blessedness and joy in it (Matthew 5:10-12). And today persecution is coming from the most unsuspecting places, from modern, so-called ‘civilized’ society that worships ‘tolerance’ but is so intolerant towards Christianity that it has enshrined persecution into national law.

Considering this, what should our spiritual posture be? Fundamentally, the same as that of the Apostles who boasted and rejoiced when they ‘merited’ persecution (Acts 5:41, 1 Peter 4:12-15). Sometimes, we must flee (Matthew 10:23), and we need to be shrewd, innocent, and on our guard, but we don’t need to be worried, because the Holy Spirit will speak and act in us in an exceptional way (Matthew 10:16-20). As in martyrdom, there is a mystery in persecution: it not only advances mission, it also hastens it (Matthew 10:23).

Unity: Perhaps there is another mystery at work when martyrdom and persecution go together, as so many Christians in the world are experiencing today: they lead to deeper unity among those who suffer. Our differences, though important, now seem petty as we come to fight together for a cause that is far more important than our differences – the salvation of the whole world – a cause for which our Lord himself suffered both persecution and martyrdom.



***Jean Barbara** is the President of the Sword of the Spirit and lives with his family in Beirut, Lebanon.*

Wednesday, January 22: Turkey

Scripture for the day: 1 John 3:13 *“Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.”*

Turkey: It is estimated that there are 194,000 Christians who live in Turkey out of a population of 81.9 million. The vast majority of Turks are Sunni Muslims.

Many Christians in Turkey are Orthodox and there are also many Christian expatriates, including thousands of refugees from Iraq and Syria. There are also between 5,000 and 7,000 Turkish believers who came from Muslim backgrounds.

Although Turkey is officially described as secular, religious nationalism has grown in recent years.

Christians from traditionally established ethnic minorities such as Greek Orthodox, Armenian and Syriac Christians experience indirect discrimination in the workplace. Religious affiliation is recorded on ID cards, so it is easy to discriminate against Christian job applicants.

Christians from Muslim backgrounds often hide their faith. If they are discovered, they will face pressure from their families. Leaving Islam is seen as a betrayal of their Turkish identity and a source of shame to the family. They may be threatened with divorce and the loss of inheritance rights. Although converts from Islam can legally change their religious affiliation on ID cards, it can be a difficult and stressful process.

Christians in Turkey have faced death and imprisonment for confessing their faith and for preaching the gospel.

In the early 20th century Christians suffered violent persecution as the Ottoman Empire systematically persecuted Armenians living in Turkey. It is estimated that over 800,000 Armenians were killed at this time. This has, of course, made a huge impact on the size of the Christian population of Turkey.

More recently in 2007 three Christian men working in a Christian publishing house were tortured and brutally killed by

Islamist extremists. Two of these men were converts from Islamic backgrounds and the third was an expatriate Christian from Germany. Another expatriate, Andrew Brunson, a Presbyterian Pastor was imprisoned for 2 years from 2016-18 after being charged with terrorism, espionage and “Christianization.”

Intercessions: Let’s pray for a rich blessing on our brothers and sisters in Turkey, that they would receive grace to remain faithful and joyful in the face of these pressures.

A personal testimony: The Challenge of Living in Lebanon

My name is Ramy, I am 32 years old and live, work and serve in Lebanon together with my lovely wife, Myriam, and 3-year old son, Andrew.

It is difficult to state all the challenges Lebanon faces. The country has not yet recovered from a 17-year civil war fueled by many foreign countries and now the war in Syria is blocking our only land access out of Lebanon. We also face constant threats of war with Israel and major socio-economic problems. This is aggravated by corruption at all levels of government and exacerbated by the presence of up to 1.5 million Syrian refugees and several hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. These refugees constitute around 50% of the Lebanese population. This has strained Lebanon’s economy, public finances and public support services. Poverty and unemployment levels have soared to unseen peaks. The risk of imminent war (ISIS, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, etc.) and economic collapse has become the daily topic of every news channel.

What did all these challenges lead to in my life and the life of my family? LIFE & HOPE!

I had no other option but to turn to the Lord. These times of difficulty have taught me to grow in humility, surrender my life and trust in the grace of God: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in your weakness” (1 Corinthians 12:9). I have grown in relying on God’s providence, my eyes have seen Him “opening his hand and satisfying the desires of every living thing” (Psalm 145:16). When everyone around me was in despair, the Lord filled my heart and soul with hope, hope that He would not lead me astray, “I am with you always, to the end of the ages” (Matthew 28:20). This particular season has motivated me to seek –in a deeper way- holiness, accepting that for me there is God and God alone, and asking for a “Christian life that is a good defense before the awesome judgment seat of Christ” (The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom from the Orthodox Church). I have come to realize the greatness of the treasure I have. How can I focus on myself when everyone else (colleagues, friends, relatives, etc.) is drowning in distress? An urge for evangelism filled my heart; I started declaring the “Good News” to my colleagues, to the youths I serve, to my extended family. What else could I offer? “Silver and gold, I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

I pray that we may continue at all times, in times of peace and in times of persecution, to lay down our life before the Lord, doing nothing but His will, knowing that “for such a time as this, we are called to give our all, to follow Christ, to spread His Light, to do not our will but His” (For Such a Time as This, by John Keating).

Thursday, January 23: University Campuses

Scripture for the day: Romans 12:14 *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”*

United States--university campuses: Though almost never violent, the persecution being experienced on college campuses throughout the US is no less menacing. According to the American Center for Law and Justice, “The rise of anti-Christian discrimination on public university campuses is astounding in its breadth and shocking in its shamelessness.”

At campuses throughout the country, outspoken Christians are regularly demeaned, debased and targeted for their beliefs. At one university in the southern US, students in an intercultural communications class are directed to write the name “Jesus” on a piece of paper and step on it as a way to explore intercultural values. Academics, social groups, and college organizations regularly ridicule Christians by calling them hateful, bigoted, and privileged, among other labels.

Dr. Mike Adams, a Christian professor of Criminology at the University of North Carolina, said “every group is protected from offensive speech on campus except for conservative Christians.” There is a case before the 9th circuit court involving a Christian fraternity and sorority at San Diego State, which declined to agree to the university’s nondiscrimination statement that membership cannot be denied to people who are opposed to Christian belief. As a result, the university rejected their applications to become officially recognized student organizations. “That means the groups cannot meet in campus buildings for free, cannot set up tables in the main mall where students walk each day,” noted attorney Jordan Lorence. “The Christian groups are in effect banished from the main avenues of communication with students and relegated to a second-class status.”

Intercession: Let us pray that all Christians on every college and university campus be compelled by charity in the face of discrimination. May they be strengthened with fortitude, patience and perseverance so that in every place the Gospel of Jesus Christ may be lived and proclaimed powerfully, fruitfully and freely.

Friday, January 24: Egypt

Scripture for the day: 1 Peter 4:16 *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

Egypt: There are 10 million Christians who live in Egypt, making up 10 per cent of Egypt's population of 99.4 million. Most are members of the Coptic Orthodox church. Egypt is home to half of all Christians in the Middle East.

Egypt is a strongly Islamic nation with approximately 90 per cent of the population identifying as Sunni Muslims. Although major political and religious leaders have spoken against radicalism and called for reform in Islamic teaching, direct and indirect persecution of Christians remain. In rural and impoverished areas in particular, radical imams and less tolerant brands of Islam are growing in prominence and followers of the self-proclaimed Islamic State have vowed to wage war against Christians in Egypt. Violent attacks are common.

Egyptian Christians are often victims of social exclusion, and face indirect discrimination in areas such as justice, education and basic social services. In rural areas, Christian women have been targeted for abduction and forced marriage. Christian believers from Muslim backgrounds face pressure from their

families and communities – they may be beaten or expelled from their homes and dismissed from their employment.

In recent years there have been dozens of attacks on churches. For example, on December 11, 2016, a suicide bomber killed 29 people and injured 47 others who were worshipping at St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Cairo. In early November 2018, Islamic State militants attacked a bus carrying Coptic Christians from a monastery in Minya, killing eight and injuring more than 13 people.

And yet, even in the face of terrible violence, Christians in Egypt have shown incredible grace and forgiveness. Coptic Christians were even nominated for the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize for their refusal to retaliate.

One of those severely injured in the 2016 attack in Cairo was *Samiha Atopi* who testified to feeling Jesus' presence close to her throughout the incident and during her time in hospital. She has stated: "If I would meet the family of the attacker, the only thing I would ask them is: 'Do you know Jesus?' I pray they will find the right way."

Intercessions: Let's pray for our brothers and sisters in Egypt that they may continue to witness for Christ in patient endurance and that the gospel would break forth as a result of their testimony of blood.

Saturday January 25: South America

Scripture for the day: John 16:33 *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*

In this our final day of the octave of prayer we will hear from a brother in South America, Alejandro Velosa, and his essay

considering the ecumenism of blood from his vantage point in South America.

If my Church suffers, I suffer with her.

If my brother is being persecuted, I am persecuted too.

Here I am writing about the suffering Church and the 'ecumenism of blood.' But, how am I supposed to do it? How can I write about a church that lives martyrdom with courage or about the suffering of my Christian brothers, if they live in countries far away from mine, being persecuted and discriminated for declaring themselves faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ?

I have two problems to be able to do this: I live in a country where I can express my faith without fearing for my life and I have never experienced persecution and suffering for declaring my faith in Christ.

Three questions come to my mind. Could it be possible that this apparent comfort has hardened my heart and made me blind to see the need and pain of my Christian brothers? Am I really that far away from the suffering church? Are there, close to me, Christians suffering for Christ?

This is what I found looking for answers to my questions: in Colombia, my country of more than 49 million inhabitants, 46 million are Christian. Despite these numbers, we rank 47th among the countries in the world where it is most dangerous to be Christian (Source: Open Doors USA).

Currently, violence against Christians in my country has two main sources. On the one hand, in the countryside, in regions where guerilla dissidents and drug dealers take control of the territory, church leaders are being threatened, extorted and even murdered. Sometimes the violence is directed toward the church leader's family or their home community to discourage anyone wanting to convert to Christianity.

In daily living, the secularized society ridicules our Christian values especially for topics concerning gender, marriage and

abortion. Political parties and ordinary citizens reject faith-based opinions and try to enforce agendas that contradict Christian values.

It is also reported that Protestant Christians often experience less tolerance and acceptance than Roman Catholic believers.

How can this be explained? How can this be happening in front of me and I didn't even notice it? How could I have thought that the violence against my church was happening far away from me?

After meditating on these questions my eyes opened and turned to the Word of God. There Peter reminded me of something I will never forget:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world (I Peter 5, 8-9).

Lord, help me understand and not forget that the suffering of my Christian brothers and the persecution of the Church is my suffering and my persecution. I pray for the unity of all Christians, unity in our suffering, unity in Christ.

Intercessions: As we close the octave of prayer, let's enter into the spirit of prayer articulated so well by Alejandro: "Lord, help me understand and not forget that the suffering of my Christian brothers and sisters and the persecution of the Church is my suffering and my persecution. I pray for the unity of all Christians, unity in our suffering, unity in Christ."

Prayer for the Lord's Day

This prayer may be used after the Blessing of the Wine, similar to the seasonal variations in the Lord's Day Opening Ceremony.

Leader: Let us thank Him this day especially for the unity we enjoy in the Body of Christ and for our call to ecumenical life in the Sword of the Spirit. May we all become perfectly one, so that the world may know and believe. Lord our God, You are bringing us into the fullness of unity through the work of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Group: Now we live with Him through the Holy Spirit, and we look for the day when we will dwell with Him in Your everlasting kingdom.



The Sword of the Spirit
Communities of Disciples on Mission