

A WORD ON WORSHIP

REVIEW OF MESSAGE FROM JUNE 21, 2015

BY ELDER KEN MCAULEY, SUNRISE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Hear Sunday Sermons at www.SunriseTC.org

John 14: 2-3

2: In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

3: If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.



When we think of our Father God, it is usually in a rather distant, obscure way that is full of wonderment and awe. I think it can be more wonderful than that. In this passage, Jesus talks about His Father's house in a way in which we can relate, as if He were going home. Isn't that how we want to picture Heaven? He is going to prepare a place for us in our Father's home where we can expect to stay eternally. The Father wants the Family to be together where we can fellowship with Him in a loving, peaceful relationship, full of trust and worship.

Worship may sound kind of strange to us, but our fathers are fallible and insecure and learning as they go along, hoping we will learn from them and remember the good and the wise things they try to pass along to us. We are not expected to worship them even though they would seem to desire it from time to time. So, worship should be natural to us when it is our Father God we are looking to.

He is our Creator, Healer, Comforter, Provider, Protector in Whom we can place our complete trust because He knows all, sees all, hears all; nothing can sneak up on Him or surprise Him. He knows the BEST answer, the BEST way and we don't have to wonder if He made the right decision. I wonder sometimes if we maybe compare Him to our fathers rather than comparing our fathers to Him. Perhaps it's because we don't put enough effort into finding out a little more about Him. The Scriptures are full of references to and about Him from which we can gather a lot of information and insights.

He's not a big comfortable teddy bear that only provides comfort and cuddle. He's more like a lion. In C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch, And The Wardrobe*, the question was asked of Mr. Beaver, is he (the lion, Aslan) safe? "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." He's good and kind and loving, but also just, merciful, forgiving, righteous, holy; there's nothing wrong with Him. But we tend not to trust him because we compare Him to our own fathers. Let's make a conscious decision today to make Him our pattern of Fatherhood and encourage our own fathers to be more like Him as we love and obey Him.

Sunrise Community Church
Come acknowledge the Lord in our midst
EVERY SUNDAY BEGINNING AT 8:45 A.M.

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The slow death of Syrian Christianity

What horrors must ISIS commit before the world will stop the murderers?

By JEAN-CLÉMENT JEANBART, MELKITE GREEK CATHOLIC ARCHBISHOP OF ALEPPO, SYRIA. [HTTP://WWW.MERCATORNET.COM](http://www.mercatornet.com)

In my country Syria, Christians are caught in the middle of a civil war and they are enduring the rage of an extremist jihad. And it is unjust for the West to ignore the persecutions these Christian communities are experiencing.

Syrian Christians are in grave danger; we may disappear soon. We hope that men and women of good will, in this great nation, listen to our call and give their brothers and sisters in faith a helpful hand in relieving their miseries.

Let me give you an idea about what is happening in my part of the world:

For the past four years there has been much talk about the war in Syria. We have heard about the strategic consequences, the geopolitical influences in that region, and the violence afflicting the innocent population. Though I do not underestimate the political stakes of what is going on in my country, I must draw attention to the fate of Christians who are caught in this turbulence.

For the Church, what is most important is that peace be restored! And that, through peace, a non-confessional and pluralistic democracy is established, that guarantees all Syrians their God-given rights to live as fully fledged citizens in the country where they were born and where their ancestors are buried.

The realities in my country and in the region are complex and interwoven with many historical, social and religious nuances. Let me touch on one of the core problems which torment Christians and their pastors in Syria. Some are wondering how it is that religious leaders and bishops were not the first ones to support the rebels, who, apparently, are fighting for freedom and democracy for their country? If this were the case, it is undeniable that the Church would have been the first to become an ally of the unrest and the leader of those asking for substantial reforms in political governance, leading to a democratic transition.

But the moderate opposition never really had a chance, despite the best of intentions. As a result, hence as Christian leaders in Syria are appealing for reconciliation and peace and openness, radical Muslim factions are calling for jihad and exclusion, a kind of apartheid for all non-Muslims.

Fear and disorientation

For decades Syrian Christians lived peacefully in a society alongside a Muslim majority which was tolerant. There was a cordial atmosphere of mutual acceptance and friendship. This is no longer the case. Syrian Christians are disoriented by the implosion of a way of life that was once quiet and safe.

They are afraid to leave their houses, they avoid going out of their cities or villages, or do so only to move to other regions where they hope to find a safe refuge. In dangerous zones like Aleppo and villages close to Turkey, what terrorizes the population more than the fighting and the bombing, are the kidnappings, the snipers, car-bombs, the shelling and the looting ... all this culminating in the manifestation of ISIS.

Christians are victims of a war of destruction led by a certain foreign elements taking advantage of unrest. They have promoted a brother versus brother war. They have injected arms, money and tens of thousands of

fighters, jihadists, fundamentalists, foreigners and mercenaries, recruited from many different countries.

I do not know whether or not Aleppo has yet been designated as a "disaster zone" by international powers. But what I do know is that Aleppo is truly a disaster zone: a human disaster zone, a material and economic disaster zone. The citizens of this great and beautiful city, with its 7000 years of history, find themselves after four years of senseless war in a desperate situation. The prosperity which Aleppo enjoyed and which placed her among the most important cities of this region is lost.

Innumerable attacks-most recently the bombing of the Christian quarter over Easter weekend-have destroyed its churches, its factories and its flourishing industry, its infrastructure and social and administrative institutions, its commercial area and its legendary souks, its ancient homes, schools, and hospitals. The result: Syria has lost one of its main sources of economic growth.

Then there are the countless frustrations which the people of Aleppo have had to endure because of the siege, particularly shortages of food and other essential supplies. In a word, my flock has suffered and has been the innocent target of a war that is unjust and devastating.

Since 2011, more than one-third of Aleppo's Christians-some 40,000 people at least-have left the city. They are among the 3 million Syrians (both Christians and Muslims) who have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey; or they have joined the nameless ranks-6.5 million strong-of Syrians displaced in their own country.

Since the beginning of this senseless war, the Church-while encouraging the regime to enact the reforms desired by the majority of citizens-has called for an end to armed conflict and has called for negotiations to achieve a political solution to this crisis. The Assembly of Bishops of my country, along with the Pope, has not ceased to call believers to prayer, the fighters to lay down their arms, and nations to cease military interference.

Fighting ISIS

Of course, we are grateful that a large coalition of nations is committed to stopping ISIS. I hope and pray that this fight will be won; nevertheless, at the present time, in both Syria and Iraq, Christian communities-along with other vulnerable minorities-are defenseless against ISIS assaults, especially when they are the prime target of the "caliphate's" religious cleansing campaign. If these defenseless people are to survive, the US and its allies must provide better protection and execute a more aggressive strategy.

In the case of the fighting in northeastern Syria, the capture of several hundred Assyrian Christians could have been prevented had the US started its bombing raids earlier. The recent coordinated effort, that included Kurdish troops on the ground, proved effective in turning back ISIS, but for many Assyrians this help came too late.

Church leaders in the region have welcomed the Vatican's call for an appropriate military response to ISIS and other extremist groups threatening Christians and other vulnerable minorities-in accord with Pope Francis'

insistence that the use of force is "legitimate [when used]... to stop an unjust aggressor." The Episcopal Conference of the Bishops in Syria, in plenary session last March, issued an appeal to all nations to stop supporting the terrorists in any way and to ensure special protection for Christians so that they may be safe and continue to live in peace in their own country.

Across the region, as the fight is taken up against ISIS, the US and its allies must be aware that Christians and other minorities are often caught up in the fighting, facing calamities as they are displaced, without any provisions for shelter, food, and medical assistance. The emergency needs of vulnerable populations must be seriously considered. Just recently, disaster struck the peaceful and quiet population of the city of Idlebin northern Syria, where Christians have been executed by ISIS, many people have been displaced and the parish priest Father Ibrahim Farah has been kidnapped. And then there was the April 19 release of a video showing ISIS slaughtering 30 Ethiopian Christians in Libya.

What horrors must ISIS commit before the world will take greater action to stop the murderers?

Once-God-willing-ISIS is defeated and a measure of peace is restored to the lands, Christians must be able to count on the US and its allies for continued, long-term military protection. There has to be a kind of iron-clad system in place so that the tragedies of the past four years are not repeated.

Christian leaders need to be at negotiating table

To ensure political stability, it is essential that Christian leaders, both lay and religious, are given a voice and presence at the negotiating table. Christians bring forth a vision-inspired by democratic and humanistic values; they can act as bridge-builders between Shites and Sunnis, and they can help develop a political system that ensures the rights of all citizens.

Last but not least, Christians-like other people whose lives have been overturned by years of fighting-need practical, financial help to rebuild their lives, especially their professional lives. If Christians are not given the means to earn a living, there is no way they can remain in Syria or Iraq. The hierarchy's lamenting of mass emigration can do little good if the Churches do not give their flock concrete means to rebuild their lives. Christians in Syria need to feel secure and they want to know that they will not be left alone in the days and years to come.

Looking forward

By God's grace, and with the help of organizations like Aid to the Church in Need, we have been responding to humanitarian needs of our people, sometimes with great difficulty. But we need your continued help to look beyond the crisis at hand.

That is why I am calling for the creation of "Build to Stay," a Christian social initiative that needs to be supported by a "Solidarity Fund." This fund will allow workers-carpenters, plumbers, teachers, lawyers, craftsmen and others-to re-establish themselves professionally, to buy the equipment and supplies they need to get started again; to rebuild the city of Aleppo and their own lives.