

**Homily for the Annual Mass and Dinner
of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

**The Memorial of Saint Ignatius Loyola
July 31, 2012**

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Reverend Fathers and Deacons, distinguished Knights and Ladies, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, many Christians today who suffer from increasing persecution are crying out with the prophet Jeremiah, “We wait for peace, to no avail; for a time of healing, but terror comes instead” (Jeremiah 14:19).

The persecution which they suffer is not like our own. The growing persecution which we face threatens our free exercise of religion, whereas the persecution they face threatens their very lives. The recently concluded Fortnight for Freedom sought to draw attention to both forms of increasing persecution even as we cried out to the Lord, “For your name’s sake spurn us not, disgrace not the throne of your glory” (Jeremiah 14:21).

The plight of our persecuted brothers and sisters is of particular concern for the members of our Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem. We have among the principal charges

of our Order the duty “to support the preservation and propagation of the Faith in those lands” and “to uphold the rights of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land.” Indeed, it was in the defense and protection of this very land and her people that our Order found its origins and purpose nine centuries ago.

It is, then, to the plight of the Christians in the Middle East and elsewhere that I wish to direct your attention this evening. Gathered here at the altar of the Lord we are united in Jesus Christ with our fellow Christians at this moment in a most profound way.

A recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted the growing persecution of Christians. The authors, Ben Cohen and Episcopalian Father Keith Roderick, rightly note:

Despite the increasing ferocity with which Christians are targeted – church bombings in Nigeria, discrimination in Egypt (where Christians have been imprisoned for building or repairing churches), beheadings in Somalia – Americans remain largely unaware of how bad the situation has become, particularly in the Islamic world and in communist countries like China and North Korea. ¹

What is more, they point out, “Christian leaders in Muslim countries are concerned with surviving from one day to the next.”

In his homily to conclude the Fortnight for Freedom, Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M., Cap. challenged his hearers, saying, “The only question that finally matters is this one: *Will we live wholeheartedly for Jesus Christ?* If so, then we can be a source of freedom for the world. If not, nothing else will do.”² I ask you, Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre: Are you a source of freedom in the world? Are others freer because of your adherence to Jesus Christ?

I remind you of the solemn promise you made when the one who received you into the Order said: “Receive this sword that must remind you to defend Christ’s Holy Church and to strive to guard and protect the Divine Redeemer’s earthly land, and always remember that the Kingdom of God is not conquered with the Sword, but with faith and charity.”³ Each of us must seriously consider what we are doing to secure the religious liberty of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land and throughout the world.

We might be tempted to think this grave difficulty is something beyond us and outside of our influence, but we are bound to our

fellow Christians and share in their sufferings; we must act in their behalf!

We must remember them daily in our prayers, crying out in the words of the Psalm: “Help us, O God our savior, because of the glory of your name” (Psalm 78:9)! But we must also remember the teaching of Saint James: “If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit” (James 2:16)? As necessary as our prayers are, there is more that we must do.

Cohen and Roderick are right to suggest that we can assist our persecuted brethren “not by engaging in bland dialogues but by compelling those who rule them to respect their right to worship, as well as their desire to stem the flood of Christians fleeing oppression for safer havens elsewhere.⁴”

We must continually raise to the attention of heads of state, ambassadors, diplomats, and civic leaders the plight of those suffering for the faith of Jesus Christ. We must insist that they be protected and that their religious liberty be assured; until then, we must rest. As Knights and Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre, this is our

solemn duty. These words of the Psalm must be our own: “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither” (Psalm 137:5)!

I urge you, then, to “be faithful and valiant Soldiers of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Knights of the Holy Sepulchre, strong and brave, to be one day admitted to His celestial court.”⁵ And you, Ladies of the Holy Sepulchre, I urge you to “let your actions and your mind be turned to the Land of the Redeemer and take care that His Holy Name be spread and loved everywhere, so that you may merit for yourselves the praise of the Risen Lord.”⁶

The example of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, whose memory the Church honors today, shows us the way forward. As a young man, Saint Ignatius was enamored of tales of military conquest and glory and put himself in the service of the Duke of Najara and Viceroy of Navarre. He was captured in 1521 in the siege of Pamplona after a cannonball struck one of his legs.

He spent his time recuperating by reading an account of the life of Christ and a collection of the lives of the saints. After some time he became engrossed in the lives of these knights of God who fought not with physical weapons but with a life lived in obedience to Christ.

His transition from being a temporal soldier to a spiritual one took place only gradually. After taking up the spiritual weapons of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, Saint Ignatius said: “Few souls understand what God would accomplish in them if they were to abandon themselves unreservedly to Him and if they were to allow His grace to mold them accordingly.”

May Saint Ignatius teach us to abandon ourselves unreservedly to the Lord as we seek to take up not physical weapons, but spiritual weapons. And let us pray the Lord to hear our supplications and to bless our labors, so that all generations will declare his praise (cf. Psalm 79:13).

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Ben Cohen and Keith Roderick, “The Religious Silence on Christian Persecution,” *The Wall Street Journal* (240:24), July 30, 2012.

² Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, July 4, 2012.

³ Ceremony of Investiture of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

⁴ Ben Cohen and Keith Roderick, “The Religious Silence on Christian Persecution,” *The Wall Street Journal* (240:24), July 30, 2012.

⁵ Ceremony of Investiture of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

⁶ Ceremony of Investiture of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.