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"We need your help to carry the Cross"

January 25 is the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. Gregory III, Patriarch of Antioch, has asked all the faithful to pray for peace in Syria and assistance for its refugees.

01/22/2015

Gregory III Laham, Patriarch of Antioch and spiritual leader of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, has asked for a global campaign of prayer for peace in Syria by all the faithful.

"We are tired, and at times lose hope," he said. "At times we even shout at God. Now we need a united effort to end this tragedy. We need your help to carry the Cross with us during these tragic years." He asks all the faithful to pray the following prayer:

A Prayer for Peace in Syria and Assistance for its Refugees

Almighty and merciful God, grant that just as you made yourself known to Saul on the road to Damascus, you may soon convert hearts to peace in Syria, and that its people who have fled may soon return to their homeland.

We ask your blessing on those who, like your Son, have become refugees and have no place to call their own; look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger, homeless and hungry.

Bless those who work to bring them relief; inspire generosity and compassion in all our hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pope Francis, besides stressing the need for a "spiritual ecumenism" based on prayer for Christian unity and joint initiatives, has also spoken about an "ecumenism of blood," when the "blood of Jesus is shed anew by the many Christian martyrs all over the world."

In his homily in January 2014 at the Vesper celebration in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Pope said the following:

"In some countries they kill Christians for wearing a cross or having a Bible and before they kill them they do not ask them whether they are Anglican, Lutheran, Catholic or Orthodox. Their blood is mixed. To those who kill we are Christians.

We are united in blood, even though we have not yet managed to take necessary steps towards unity between us and perhaps the time has not yet come. Unity is a gift that we need to ask for. I knew a parish priest in Hamburg who was dealing with the beatification cause of a Catholic priest guillotined by the Nazis for teaching children the catechism. After him, in the list of condemned individuals, was a Lutheran pastor who was killed for the same reason. Their blood was mixed. The parish priest told me he had gone to the bishop and said to him: 'I will continue to deal with the cause, but both of their causes, not just the Catholic priest's.' This is what ecumenism of blood is. It still exists today; you just need to read the newspapers. Those who kill Christians don't ask for your identity card to see which Church you were baptized in."

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