

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

In 1995, St. John Paul II wrote a beautiful encyclical called *The Gospel of Life*. In it, he expressed the need for the end of the Culture of Death, and a renewal of the Culture of Life. At the heart of the Culture of Life is the dignity of the human person – not based on his or her productivity, intelligence, physical beauty, or talents, but based on the fact that each person is made in the image and likeness of God. The Gospel of Life is based on the truth that each person, in some way, bears the presence of God. Jesus spoke about this when He proclaimed, “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40, emphasis added). At the heart of the Culture of Death, on the other hand, is the denial of this truth that each person is made precious by God.

In recent events in the Middle East, we have heard of so many Christians being driven from their homes, and many others being killed simply for the “crime” of being Christian. It rejects the very heart of who God made each person to be.

Pope Francis writes:

The news coming from Iraq leaves us in disbelief and dismay: thousands of people, including many Christians, brutally driven from their homes; children dead from thirst and hunger during the escape; women who are abducted; people slaughtered; violence of every kind; destruction everywhere, destruction of homes, destruction of religious, historical and cultural patrimonies.”

The Pope continues, “All this greatly offends God and greatly offends humanity. You cannot bring hatred in the name of God. You cannot make war in the name of God!”

It is time, as Catholics, for us to rise up – not in arms (for violence only begets more violence), but in prayer. Prayer stops wars, it suspends the laws of nature, for prayer is a reaching out to the Heart of God. Pope Francis appeals to families, “When you say your prayers, remember all those forced from their homes in Iraq” (#PrayForPeace Pope Francis).

Let us join with Pope Francis and Christians throughout the world, especially in Iraq, for a greater respect for the sacred dignity of each human life.