

Cardinal Wuerl celebrates the Epiphany of the Lord

Posted by [TBN Editor](#) On 01/04/2015

Washington, DC - Cardinal Donald Wuerl, archbishop of Washington celebrated Mass Sunday, Jan. 4 for the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.

"Just as the star of Bethlehem led the wise men, symbols of the Gentiles, to Christ so we are reminded every Epiphany that we are also to be a light to those around us – a light reflecting Christ by reflecting our discipleship – our commitment to him," Cardinal Wuerl said as he began his homily. "Today I ask you to reflect with me and pray for those who see the light of their Christian faith being challenged and in some instances violently extinguished."

The Cardinal cited the institutional oppression from governments, forced conversions, mass beheadings and executions that have dramatically reduced the number of Christians in the Middle East. He recalled other examples throughout the world where the light of faith is also challenged: Nigeria, Sudan, West Africa, India – where 'a veil of darkness' has descended over whole communities that once were alive in the light of Christian faith. "In ancient Christian communities that have for centuries lived side by side with their neighbors who come from a variety of faith commitments the darkness of violence intrudes."

Referencing Pope Francis' message for the World Day of Peace (observed January 1), the cardinal echoed the Holy Father's call to pray for and speak up on behalf of those who are oppressed and persecuted, those "whose light that began to shine at Epiphany is being forcefully but really and truly extinguished. But the darkness or the effort to extinguish the light of faith is not confined just to those faraway lands where the preferred instrument of conversion is force," cautioned the Cardinal. "Here in our own country we see increasingly the use of much more subtle weapons to put out the light of faith and to silence the Gospel."

Elaborating, he explained, "Weekly we read about government directives and court cases to deter or even prohibit the Christian community from speaking in defense of Gospel values such as the dignity of human life, the nature of marriage and a more equitable distribution of the goods of the earth," said the cardinal. "Employees can be fined for wearing a cross no matter how small and references to the events portrayed in Sacred Scripture and celebrated in our lives over centuries are now considered politically incorrect. Meanwhile, in a variety of ways, Christian employers are told that they must act against their mission, in ways that are contrary to their faith, that they must acquiesce in things that are injurious to their interests," said the cardinal, referencing the federal government's HHS mandate which the archdiocese of Washington is challenging in court.

"This year when we rejoice in the light of faith, let us also remember that our brothers and sisters in various parts of the world are paying an extremely high price to keep that candle of faith lit," said the cardinal as he concluded his homily.

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