

MAY 24 2025, FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

Graham Staines was an Australian Christian missionary, serving since 1965 in the rural parts of the northern Indian state of Orissa. He and his family mainly worked with people affected by leprosy, but they also ministered among the local tribal communities, who lived in utter poverty.

Local fundamentalist Hindu groups accused the Staines family and their followers of luring people into the Christian faith under false pretenses. Though some people did convert, drawn by their compassionate service, there was no evidence of forced conversions. Despite repeated threats and warnings from these groups, the Staines family continued to serve the local people in every way they could.

In January 1999, Graham Staines and his two sons, aged ten and six, travelled to a nearby village to participate in a Christian festival. After a long and tiring journey, they rested for the night in their vehicle. As they slept, a local mob attacked them, torched the vehicle, and burned all three of them alive.

Ten years later, Gladys Staines—Graham's wife—publicly forgave the murderers of her husband and sons.

Sisters and brothers, in today's Gospel, after Jesus outlines the blessings that come from being His disciples, He also speaks clearly about the challenges that will accompany discipleship.

A friend of mine recently sent me a WhatsApp message that read: "Life is like a coin—pleasure and pain are its two sides. Only one side is visible at a time, but remember that the other side is also waiting for its turn."

Jesus' words about hatred became a reality soon after His ascension. As Peter and the other disciples began building Christian communities, opposition followed. Yet the good news is that those once-frightened disciples were transformed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gave them the strength and courage they needed to build the Church in their neighbourhoods and beyond.

In the coming chapters of Acts, Saint Paul will recount the many hardships and persecutions he endured in his mission. He faced each challenge with perseverance, and in the end, he offered his life as a martyr.

We know that Christians today continue to face hatred because of the values and convictions we stand for—because of the witness we try to bear. While modern-day suffering may not always be as gruesome as the fate of Graham Staines and his sons, or as intense as what Peter, Paul, and the early Christians experienced, it is still very real.

A Catholic man once told me he lost his job because he refused to assist in an abortion. A woman shared how her faith became the object of ridicule among her coworkers. Another man said he was often mocked by his own siblings during family gatherings—because he was the only one who still attended church regularly.

These may seem like small things compared to what others have endured over the centuries, yet they can still discourage us. They can still weigh heavily on our hearts.

Today also happens to be the World Day of Prayer for the Church in China. The Catholic Church in China continues to face persecution, as does the Church in many parts of the world.

So today, we pray—for ourselves, and for the whole Church. May we be blessed with the courage to withstand every trial that comes our way

because we believe in Jesus. And in spite of them, may we continue to bear witness to the life and love of Christ.

Amen.