

## NOVEMBER 19 FATHER VIJAI AMIRTHARAJ

On Easter Sunday morning in 2019, three Catholic churches in Sri Lanka were targeted in a series of coordinated ISIS-related terrorist suicide bombings, killing more than 300 people.

On the Christmas Eve of 2023, suspected Fulani militants attacked 21 Christian villages in Nigeria, killing more than 300 people and injuring hundreds more.

And on February 12, 2025, militants from Allied Democratic Forces attacked the village of Mayba in North Kivu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, abducting 70 Christian civilians. They took the civilians to a close-by Protestant church in a place called Kasanga and beheaded them there.

Now, sisters and brothers, these are only three of the many places where Christians are persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. Most of us partaking in this Mass live in safe and secure countries, and therefore, it is very easy for us to be oblivious to the extent of the violence and persecutions taking place in countries where Christians are minorities.

Can you imagine people being massacred as they gather together to celebrate their faith on Christmas Eve or on Easter Sunday morning, days when many of us take for granted with the blessing of multiple Mass options?

In our first reading today, we heard of the mother and her sons who endured untold pain and suffering because of their faith in the living God. However, this is not just an event of the past. It is

very much a lived reality for many of our Christian brothers and sisters in many parts of the world today, in 2025.

Therefore, today's commemoration of Red Wednesday, an initiative by Aid to the Church in Need, is a powerful reminder for us to be in solidarity with our persecuted and forgotten Christian brothers and sisters around the world. And this year's national theme, "You Are a Voice for Persecuted Christians," calls each and every Christian to stand up for those who no longer have the freedom to express themselves, to pray, or even to live their Christian faith without the risk of reprisals.

The colour red, which I'm wearing today, in general, symbolizes blood. In our Christian circles, the colour red symbolizes martyrs who shed their blood in witness to their faith in our Lord Jesus. There are many martyrs whom we celebrate in the Church, St. Ignatius of Antioch or St. Cecilia, for example. However, there are so many more others who have died for their faith or who continue to die and suffer because of their faith in the Lord Jesus.

Today, on this Red Wednesday, we give thanks to God for all of the less known martyrs, we pray for all those who face religious persecution today, and we pray for ourselves that we may not take our religious freedom for granted.

Amen.