

A Prayer for the Persecuted Church

By Elizabeth Kendal

Leader: We lift up our eyes to the hills.

From where does our help come from?

Congregation: Our help comes from the LORD,

who made heaven and earth (adaptation of Psalm 121:1-2).

Leader: Let us pray . . .

Dear Father,

we know that Christ is building his Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). We know that the Holy Spirit, 'the Lord and giver of life' (Nicene Creed) is present and active in this world. We see evidence of this all around us, as people come to Christ from every tribe, language, people and nation. We praise you for your redeeming love, transforming power and gracious mercy.

Please dear Father, help us fulfil the will of Christ to become ONE Church 'in the unity of the Spirit' (Ephesians 4:3), united in love and in Christ (John 17:20-23). Transform our selfish hearts into hearts that love one another as you love us. May the Holy Spirit do a work in us so that we might see as you see and love as you love, even though it may cause us discomfort and even prove costly. Inject into our hearts a deep compassion and love for our brothers and sisters – a love that will compel us to intercede for them and bear their burdens (Galatians 6:2).

Father, we are faced with so many horrific situations that are completely beyond our ability to address: whole regions and peoples that are oppressed, nations collapsing and tearing apart due to violent conflict, mass cruelty, gross injustice and genocide.

We confess that many of these terrible situations persist because we have been unfaithful in witness, righteousness and prayer; and unwilling to speak, pray or give to alleviate suffering, challenge injustice or advance the Gospel. Too often we have selfishly washed our hands of it all and stood idly by as the devil gets a foothold.

We repent of our sin, ask for your forgiveness, and seek your mercy for those who suffer.

We pray for our brothers and sisters who suffer due to Islamic oppression and jihad; for those who live under Communist rule and cruel totalitarian regimes; for those suffering persecution on account of militant religious nationalism; and for those who suffer humiliation, ridicule, scorn, and the crippling discrimination that produces generational poverty simply because they love and follow Jesus and will not compromise for the sake of physical or financial security.

We pray for those who are in prison or forced labour camps on account of the name of Jesus (Heb 13:3). *We pray* for those who go hungry, for those who grieve and for those who have been cast from their homes and driven from their lands simply on account of the name of Jesus (John 15:21). *We pray* for all Christians who are displaced and imperilled on account of war and ethnic-religious cleansing.

We beseech you, dear Father, rise up in defence of your people (Isaiah 59:15b-19); may their enemies might 'be scattered' (Psalm 68:1), 'put to shame and confusion' and 'turned back and brought to dishonour' (Psalm 70:2 ESV).

Provide for your suffering people O LORD, just as you did when you provided manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) and water from the rock (Exodus 17); just as you did when you instructed the ravens to feed Elijah and you resupplied the widow each night (1 Kings 17). We know you rule over heaven and earth. We know that with you, nothing is impossible (Luke 1:37) -- indeed, you are willing and able to do abundantly more than we could ever ask or even imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Father, we ask that the Holy Spirit, who is present within each believer, will comfort, encourage, revive, and counsel the persecuted at their point of need. May they be assured in the depths of their hearts that nothing can separate them from your love (Romans 8:35-39). Draw them into prayer and then answer their prayers that their faith might be fanned into flame (Isaiah 42:3). May the devil have no victory over them.

Father, we pray for those who persecute the Church. We know that they do this because they do not know you (John 16:3). May the Holy Spirit fill us with compassionate love for them so that we might pray for them and be courageous and sacrificial in our witness to them. We pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit, persecutors will come under conviction of sin. We pray for many of those miracles of transformation whereby persecutors are transformed into followers of Jesus and even preachers of the Gospel (Galatians 1:23).

Father, we pray that you will raise up and establish leaders in the nations who will be committed to justice, righteousness and liberty so that Christians may live in peace and security and so the gospel may be preached freely to needy, lost and dying souls (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

Finally, we ask that the Holy Spirit might help us to prevail in prayer – not giving up, not being distracted, not fooled by the tricks of the devil, but propelled by love into prevailing prayer with hearts fully trusting you (Hebrews 12:1-2). For we know that ultimately our struggles is not against 'flesh and blood'; nor is it against governments or systems. Rather, our struggle is against rulers and authorities and powers of darkness in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:10-18). We know we cannot do this in our own strength, and so we come before you now to humbly seek your direction, your provision and your intervention.

We do not ask these things because we deserve your help, but because you are merciful (Daniel 9:18b).

So now O LORD our God,

intervene on behalf of your persecuted, threatened, and imperilled Church
so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know
that you alone are the LORD (Isaiah 37:20).

AMEN