

## **Steadfastness Despite Persecution**

*By Metropolitan Saba (Isper)*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Christ is risen! Indeed, He is risen!

My beloved, today we have a great feast and a great saint – St. George, the most popular saint in the Christian world.

St. George was a great martyr. He was persecuted so much, but he remained steadfast according to his faith.

Many of the faithful, since I came to North America, ask me about persecution. They ask how Christians can face persecution. I heard from them that there is persecution even in this society. It is not easy for Christians to face all the challenges of their society.

I told them some stories from our experience during the last few years in the Middle East, just to remind them that our God is present and alive. He supports us and encourages us to overcome all kinds of persecution. It is by His grace, not by our strength.

In one story, in 2013, two young kids were kidnapped. We have a Christian village in my old archdiocese which was invaded and attacked. The kids were 13 and 14 years old. Thank God, we had them released.

One of them told me that he was so fearful, trembling. They tried to persecute him with different kinds of violence. At last, they put him in a wooden box, like a tomb. They burned him with cigarettes, put a knife against his neck, and asked him to deny Christ.

But then, he felt courage, but he didn't know how and from where. He told me that he was ready to challenge them. He told them, "You can kill me, persecute me, do whatever you want. I am a Christian. I was born a Christian. I will not deny my Christ."

He was amazed, asking me how he could have gotten all this strength and encouragement. So, I opened the gospel, and read him what our Christ said to His disciples: When you are taken to be judged, do not think about what you have to

say or what to answer; the Holy Spirit will talk through you and be with you (cf. Luke 12:11-12).

On this great feast of St. George, let us remember that our God is with us. As we chanted throughout Lent, "God is with us," let us put our feeling and thinking with him. Let us trust Him and He will help us, support us, and give us whatever we need to face all challenges.

In society, we face values that are against our gospel. We, as Christians, cannot accept them. Let us ask God to inspire us and give us the best way to face these challenges and to deal with them.

What we need first is not to fear, but to have courage because God is with us.

We say, "Christ is risen" and "Indeed, He is risen." That means He is alive, and He is with us. Let us open our hearts to Him to overcome not just some challenges and some persecutions, but to overcome the whole world. Amen.

*His Eminence delivered this sermon at St. George Church of Houston, Texas on Renewal (Bright) Monday, May 6, 2024, the celebration of St. George the Great-martyr.*