

# Christian Martyrdom is Act of Love

Pope Benedict XVI highlighted Wednesday to thousands of pilgrims that the deaths of Christian martyrs in the past and present are an act of love.



“We should always note that this is a distinctive characteristic of the Christian martyr – it is exclusively an act of love, towards God and towards men, including the persecutors,” said the Pope to crowds in St. Peter’s Square, according to Reuters.

“Christian martyrdom reminds us of the victory of love over hatred and death,” he said.

He spoke from his study window in the Vatican the day after Christmas, when the Roman Catholic Church celebrated the feast of Saint Stephen – the first Christian martyr, according to Indian Catholic news agency.

Stephen, a deacon in the first Christian community in Jerusalem, was stoned to death by a mob in Jerusalem as Christianity began to spread in the region. He was recorded in the Bible as praying for God to forgive his persecutor as he died.

The pope’s speech drew attention to the fact that Christians in many parts of the world still face persecution, torture and death.

“It is not rare even today that we receive news from various parts of the world of missionaries, priests, bishops, monks, nuns and lay people persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, deprived of their liberty or prevented from exercising it because they are disciples of Christ and apostles of the Gospel,” he said.

He did not name any specific events of persecution to prevent aggravating the situation. But recently, there have been several notable incidents. Among those are the stabbing of an Italian Catholic priest in his church in Turkey less than two weeks ago, and the burning and destruction of twelve churches by Hindu extremists in India, beginning Christmas Eve, killing at least one person.

The German Pope concluded by inviting pilgrims and Catholics to pray “for those who suffer because of their fidelity to Christ and to his Church,” according to Indian Catholic. <<

*Ethan Cole, Christian Post Reporter*