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Prayer for peace with the Catholic Assyrian-Chaldean community

After his encounter with the Patriarch Ilia II, the Pope transferred to the Chaldean Catholic church of St. Shemon Bar Sabbae, a Coptic saint who lived in Egypt in the mid-tenth century, known as “the tanner” (Sabbae) as he worked in a tannery. The church, consecrated in 2009, was built as a result of the contributions made by numerous emigrant donors, especially from the Chaldean Catholic diocese of St. Thomas the Apostle in the United States. It annexed to a religious, educational and cultural centre dedicated to the teaching of ancient religious traditions and Assyrian-Chaldean culture, including the Aramaic language. St. Shemon Bar Sabbae is also the parish point of reference for Assyrian Chaldeans of Tbilisi and for those who live in Gardabani and in the village of Dzveli Kanda, Georgia’s largest and most ancient Chaldean settlement.

The Assyrians and the Chaldeans, after the loss of their land, dispersed in several countries and currently live in Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria, among others. Throughout their existence they have been subjected to discrimination and persecution on account of their religion. To maintain their identity both groups have struggled to defend their language and religion. The Assyrians have a long-standing relationship with Georgia, dating from the eighteenth century, and today nearly seven thousand Assyrians live in several Georgian cities. During the Soviet period religious and spiritual manifestations were prohibited but despite this Assyrians and Chaldeans managed to preserve and transmit their faith and traditions to subsequent generations. The situation changed rapidly following the fall of the Soviet Union, when Georgia was one of the first countries to gain independence, and most of the population resumed its participation in religious life.

Upon arrival at St. Shemon Bar Sabbae the Holy Father was received by the Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, His Beatitude Louis Raphaël I Sako, and was greeted by three hundred faithful of the Assyrian Chaldean diaspora present in the temple. After a hymn and a prayer in Aramaic, the Pope recited the following prayer for peace:

“Lord Jesus,
we adore your cross
which frees us from sin, the origin of every division and evil;
we proclaim your resurrection,
which ransoms man from the slavery of failure and death;
we await your coming in glory,

which will bring to fulfilment your kingdom of justice, joy and peace.

Lord Jesus,
by your glorious passion,
conquer the hardness of our hearts, imprisoned by hatred and selfishness;
by the power of your resurrection,
save the victims of injustice and maltreatment from their suffering;
by the fidelity of your coming,
confound the culture of death and make the triumph of life shine forth.

Lord Jesus,
unite to your cross the sufferings of the many innocent victims:
the children, the elderly, and the persecuted Christians;
envelop in paschal light those who are deeply wounded:
abused persons, deprived of freedom and dignity;
let those who live in uncertainty experience the enduring constancy of your kingdom: the exiles, refugees, and
those who have lost the joy of living.

Lord Jesus,
cast forth the shadow of your cross over peoples at war;
may they learn the way of reconciliation, dialogue and forgiveness;
let the peoples so wearied by bombing experience the joy of your resurrection:
raise up Iraq and Syria from devastation;
reunite your dispersed children under your gentle kingship:
sustain Christians in the Diaspora and grant them the unity of faith and love.

O Virgin Mary, Queen of peace,
you who stood at the foot of the cross,
obtain from your Son pardon for our sins;
you who never doubted the victory of his resurrection,
sustain our faith and our hope;
you who are enthroned as Queen in glory,
teach us the royal road of service and the glory of love.

Amen".

After the prayer, the Holy Father imparted his blessing and greeted each member of the Synod of the Chaldean Church individually. Upon leaving the church of St. Shemon Bar Sabbae, Francis released a dove, symbol of peace, and then transferred to the apostolic nunciature in Georgia, where he spent the night.
