

Taking a Stand



The Bishop Speaks

One of the things I have the pleasure of doing as Bishop is travelling to the parishes to confirm our young. During the Rite of Confirmation one by one the names of the candidates are called out and one by one they stand until all are standing. This first action in the Rite of Confirmation is not simply to “introduce” the candidates to the rest of the congregation. No, they are not standing for us. They are standing for God! It is as if each boy and girl hear God call their name and so their standing says, “Yes, here I am Lord, I am ready and I want to be confirmed. I want to live my life as a confirmed Catholic.” We say a lot with this one simple gesture.

As they stand, I can tell by their hesitation and by the look on their faces that they feel somewhat uncomfortable standing up in front of so many people. This is natural and perfectly understandable, yet they still stand. This all says something about what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ


and a confirmed member of his body the Church. To be faithful to Jesus Christ means that we sometimes have to take a stand. We sometimes have to make choices that we know will draw the gaze and unwanted attention of others upon us.

Taking a stand makes us stand out from the crowd. We feel safe in the crowd; we feel vulnerable and exposed out the front of the crowd or at odds with the crowd. And the crowd can be very aggressive against anybody who dares take a stand that is at odds with the mentality of the current time. But I remember that Saint Paul said to the Christians in Rome “Do not be conformed to this world” sometimes translated as “Do not be conformed to this century” (Romans 12:2). Rather, we are called to conform ourselves to Jesus Christ, to follow and imitate *him*, and to make *his* thoughts our thoughts.

Recently Margaret Court, one of the greatest female



Coptic Christian fathers holding photos of their missing sons



Christian refugees with nowhere to go

tennis players of all time and a devout Christian, became the victim of much public vitriol and condemnation because she took a stand and said that she believes marriage is between a man and a woman since that's what it says in the Bible. She dared to take a stand for Christ against the mentality of the current century and the world reacted.

When we take a stand for God, our faith, our Church, our neighbour, or our conscience we won't likely receive the same degree of scrutiny or resentment as Margaret Court since we don't share the same fame. But we will be scrutinised, possibly attacked, and maybe even hated. But remember Jesus said "If the world hates you remember that it hated me first" so we're not in bad company! As confirmed Catholics we must be prepared to take a stand, remembering that as confirmed Catholics we have received the Gift of the Holy Spirit who has sealed us and stamped us as his own and given us the divine gift of fortitude.

I think of the fortitude of the many persecuted Christians throughout the world. If we look at Egypt as just one example, since Holy Week this year two of their Christian Churches have been bombed killing 45 Coptic Christians, and a gunned attack upon a busload of Christians on pilgrimage to a local monastery killed 29 Coptic Christians, including children. And this follows the 2015 kidnapping and horrific beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians on a beach in Libya because they would not renounce their faith in Christ.

According to *Open Doors*, a charity working with oppressed Christians, every month 322 Christians are killed for their faith around the world. That's

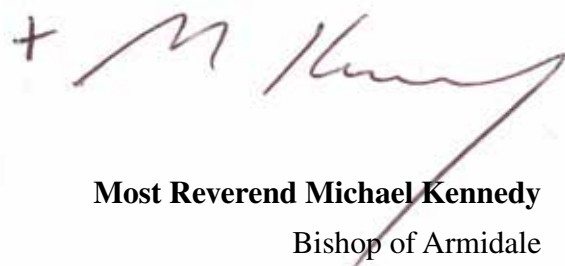
nearly 4,000 a year! *Open Doors* estimates that each month 214 church properties are destroyed and 722 acts of violence are perpetrated against Christians. Yet the Christians in these countries continue to come to Mass on Sundays; they continue to profess and live their faith; they continue to take a stand with and for Jesus Christ because they truly love him.

As I write these few words it is the feast day of Saint Charles Lwanga and his 21 companions who were martyred in 1886 in Uganda for taking their stand. They refused to consent to the Kings immoral demands upon them and rebuked him for his debauchery. They took their stand with Christ rather than with worldly powers. In the Post Communion Prayer for Mass on their Feast Day we pray "As we celebrate the victory of your holy martyrs; may

what helped them endure torment, we pray, make us, in the face of trials, steadfast in faith and charity."

From the time we take our stand at our Confirmation to the time we take our last breath we will often be called upon to make hard choices and side with Jesus Christ. Most of these times the stand we are called to take will be in little things, but occasionally it will be in big things. May the love and fortitude of the Holy Spirit assist us at these times.

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