

Commonweal

Persecution from Without and Within

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In his homily this morning at Santa Marta, Pope Francis spoke of persecution faced by Christians. He said:

"All the people whom the Holy Spirit chooses to tell the truth to the People of God suffer persecution." Jesus "is precisely the model, the icon." The Lord took upon Himself "all the persecutions of His people." The Holy Father went on to note that Christians continue to suffer persecution even today. "I dare say," he added, "that perhaps there are as many or more martyrs now than in the early days, because they tell the truth and proclaim Christ Jesus to a worldly society in love with ease and desirous of avoiding problems."

"There is the death penalty or imprisonment for having the Gospel at home, for teaching the Catechism, today, in some parts of the world. A Catholic from one of these countries told me that they cannot pray together. It is forbidden. People can only pray alone and in secret – but they want to celebrate the Eucharist and how do they do so? They throw a birthday party, they pretend to celebrate the birthday there and [have Mass] before the 'party'. It has happened. When they see the police arrive, they just hide everything and [continue with the birthday party-cover]. Then, when [authorities] leave, they finish the [Mass]. They have to do so, because it is forbidden to pray together: in this very day."

But he also commented on those who suffer from opposition within the Church:

"Many thinkers in the Church were persecuted, as well. I think of one, now, at this moment, not so far from us: a man of good will, a prophet indeed, who, in his writings reproached the Church for having lost the way of the Lord. He was summoned in short order, his books were placed on the index, they took away his teaching positions – and thus, this man's life ended – and it was not so long ago. [Now] time has passed, and today he is Blessed. How is it, though, that he, who yesterday was a heretic, is today a Blessed of the Church? It is because yesterday, those who had power wanted to silence him because they did not like what he was saying. Today the Church, who, thanks be to God knows how to repent, says, 'No, this man is good!' Moreover, he is on the way to sainthood: He is a Blessed."

I suspect that the Pope is speaking of the 19th century Italian priest and philosopher, Antonio Rosmini, whose book, *The Five Wounds of Holy Church*, had been placed on the Index for a time. Rosmini was praised in John Paul II's encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, and beatified under Benedict XVI.