

The City Church, New York

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession – Sunday November 12, 2006

In the book of Hebrews, we're told to "Remember those in bonds as if you were in bonds with them." Today, Christians mark the annual International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, a call from the Voice of the Martyrs, founded by Hebrew Christian Richard Wurmbrand who, for fourteen years, was tortured and held in solitary confinement by the Rumanian Communists.

Let us pray.

O Suffering Servant of God, Lamb of God: We worship You.

And we've been reminded again this morning that we, as believers, are to "make a joyful noise unto the Lord." We hear that that is what even Your persecuted church is doing this morning – and day after day, night after night, year after year. Hungry and humiliated, taunted and tortured in dungeons or hiding out in underground assemblies, we hear that they sing Your praises. We hear of their cries that yet mingle with their making a joyful noise unto their Lord. They know You're with them. You are their joy. We cannot comprehend such joy in suffering for You, for we don't suffer such trial. We don't understand how the persecuted ask us in the free world not to pray that their persecution would end but they ask us to pray that they might endure the sacred privilege of such persecution. Lord, do we dare to pray that prayer? Do we dare to pray the prayer they urge us to pray for ourselves – to pray that we, too, might know the joy of persecution for witness to the Savior? Grant us here and now a holy repentance for our preoccupation with precautions against even a raised eyebrow from one who might object to our bearing a witness for You. Give us all a consecrated curiosity about the discipleship of those who gladly suffer for the joy of bearing witness to Your love and who do so, while forgiving and seeking the welfare of their torturers. Lord, teach us Your ways. We pray for those in bonds, as though in bonds with them.

And now, again, we pray that, throughout this service of worship, we might be drawn closer to You, "whom to know aright is life eternal". Thank You for this precious time together in Your Holy Presence. Receive all the prayers and the praise of Your people. We ask this by Your grace and we add the words we were taught to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.