PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS AND OTHER RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN IRAQ

Given the events unfolding in Iraq, where tens of thousands of Christians are undergoing severe persecution, perhaps parishes could include the following intercession, or something similar, as part of their Prayer of the Faithful:

For Christians in Iraq and elsewhere who are persecuted for the faith; that they be freed from fear and anxiety and strengthened in their courageous witness; and that peace would come to their troubled lands. We pray to the Lord.

or

For all those displaced and persecuted because of their faith, especially for those suffering in Iraq; for an end to the blasphemy of bloodshed carried out in the name of religion. We pray to the Lord.

In addition, parishes may wish to celebrate the Mass for Persecuted Christians (Masses for Various Needs and Occasions #19) at some opportune moment. The collect used on that day may also be used to close the prayer of the faithful:

O God, who in your inscrutable providence will that the Church be united to the sufferings of your Son, grant, we pray, to your faithful who suffer for your name’s sake a spirit of patience and charity, that they may be found true and faithful witnesses to the promises you have made. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

BACKGROUND: Letter from Patriarch Sako

The ISIS militants attacked with mortars most of the villages of the plain of Nineveh, during the night of 6th-7th of August and now they are controlling the area. The Christians, about 100,000, horrified and panicked, fled their villages and houses [with] nothing but the clothes on their backs. An exodus, a real via crucis, Christians are walking on foot in Iraq's searing summer heat towards the Kurdish cities of Erbil, Duhok and Soulaymiyia, the sick, the elderly, infants and pregnant women among them. They are facing a human catastrophe and risk a real genocide. They need water, food, shelter ...

Regarding the churches and church properties in the villages now being occupied by the ISIS militants, we have reports of destruction and desecration. The old manuscripts and documents (1500) are being burnt.
As evident to all, the Central Government is incapable of enforcing law and order in this part of the country. There are also doubts about the capacity of the Kurdistan Region alone to defend the fierce advance of the jihadists. Clearly, there is a lack of cooperation between the Central Government and the Regional Autonomous Government. This "vacuum" is profited by the ISIS to impose their rule and terror. There is a need of international support and a professional, well equipped army. The situation is going from bad to worse.

We appeal with sadness and pain to the conscience of all and all people of good will and the United Nations and the European Union, to save these innocent persons from death. We hope it is not too late!

+Louis Raphael Sako

Chaldean Patriarch of Babylon

President of the Assembly of the Catholic Bishops in Iraq

**The Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako (Iraq) has personally composed this Prayer for Peace for his people:**

Lord,
The plight of our country
is deep and the suffering of Christians
is severe and frightening.
Therefore, we ask you Lord
to spare our lives, and to grant us patience,
and courage to continue our witness of Christian values
with trust and hope.
Lord, peace is the foundation of life;
Grant us the peace and stability that will enable us
to live with each other without fear and anxiety,
and with dignity and joy.
Glory be to you forever. Amen.