



## **Terrorism Seeks to Take Away Life, the Eucharist Gives it Back, Says Iraqi Priest**

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Bari (AsiaNews) -- The Eucharist is a source of life even when one's daily experience is death. This is true for Mosul (northern Iraq), a city where residents constantly live in fear of kidnappings and car bombs, but where churches remain open and Christians go to mass in great numbers because "without the Eucharist life would be impossible".

Fr Ragheed Ganni, 33, a Chaldean clergyman from Mosul is a witness to the Eucharist's power. After leaving his city, he reached Bari (southern Italy) via Aleppo and Rome. Here, on May 28, on the eve of the Pope Benedict XVI's visit to the city, he spoke about his experience.

After seven years in Italy, Father Ragheed went back to his native Iraq in November 2003. In the last year, he has seen several anti-Christian attacks in the diocese of Mosul.

Here is what he said during Saturday's vigil.

"Mosul Christians are not theologians; some are even illiterate. And yet inside of us for many generations one truth has become embedded: without the Sunday Eucharist we cannot live." "This is true today when evil has reached the point of destroying churches and killing Christians, something unheard of in Iraq till now."

"On June 2004 of last year, a group of young women was cleaning the church to get it ready for Sunday service. My sister Raghad, who is 19, was among them."

"As she was carrying a pail of water to wash the floor, two men drove up and threw a grenade that blew up just a few yards away from her."

"She was wounded but miraculously survived. And on that Sunday we still celebrated the Eucharist. My shaken parents were also there."

"For me and my community, my sister's wounds were a source of strength so that we, too, may bear our cross."

"Last August in St Paul Church, a car bomb exploded after the 6 pm mass. The blast killed two Christians and wounded many others. But that, too, was another miracle--the car was full of bombs but only one exploded. Had they all gone off together the dead would have been in the hundreds since 400 faithful had come on that day."

"People could not believe what had happened. The terrorists might think they can kill our bodies or our spirit by frightening us, but, on Sundays, churches are always full. They may try to take our life, but the Eucharist gives it back."

"On December 7, the eve of the Immaculate Conception, a group of terrorist tried to destroy the Chaldean Bishop's Residence, which is near Our Lady of the Tigris Shrine, a place venerated by both Christians and Muslims."

"They placed explosives everywhere and a few minutes later blew the place up. This and fundamentalist violence against young Christians have forced many families to flee. Yet the Churches have remained open and people continue to go to mass, even among the ruins".

"It is among such difficulties that we understand the real value of Sunday, the day when we meet the Risen Christ, the day of our unity and love, of our [mutual] support and help."

"There are days when I feel frail and full of fear. But when, holding the Eucharist, I say 'Behold the Lamb of God Behold, who takes away the sin of the world', I feel His strength in me. When I hold the Host in my hands, it is really He who is holding me and all of us, challenging the terrorists and keeping us united in His boundless love." "In normal times, everything is taken for granted and we forget the greatest gift that is made to us. Ironically, it is thanks to terrorist violence that we have truly learnt that it is the Eucharist, the Christ who died and risen, that gives us life. And this allows us to resist and hope."

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