

Homily for 8 May 2026 – Feast of the Blessed Martyrs Christian de Chergé and his companions.

Today we commemorate our brothers of Tibhirine, who died as martyrs in Algeria in 1995.

In their circular letter sent to their families and friends at Christmas 1994 – just a few months before their death – they explained how, two years earlier, given the deteriorating security situation, they had discussed whether to leave and how they had finally decided to remain in Tibhirine, together. In this beautiful text, they explained how this choice had been shaped by all their previous renunciations (of their families, their original monastic communities, their countries). And they added that the possible death of one of them or all of them together would be merely a consequence of their choice to follow Christ.

They had made this choice after Christmas Eve 1993, during which they had been visited by a group of armed terrorists and had narrowly escaped death. It was after this tragic event that they had discussed whether to leave or stay. They then unanimously decided to stay. And what is most beautiful is the way in which they reached this decision.

It was a group of strong-willed individuals whose discussions could become quite heated. That day, after a lengthy discussion, it turned out that all but two felt they should leave. They therefore decided to take 24 hours for prayer and reflection before making a decision. The following day, without further discussion, they held a secret ballot. And the result was a unanimous decision to stay. Their unanimity had not been the result of human discussion techniques; it had been achieved through prayer.

Our brothers in Tibhirine have left us many lessons. I would like to highlight two of them this morning. The first is their conviction that the ‘witness’ or ‘martyrdom’ asked of them was simply to continue living a Christian life of brotherhood, embodied in their relationships with one another but also in their relationships with their neighbours. The second lesson is their conviction that one of the key elements of Jesus’ teaching was what Father Christian called ‘respect for difference’. God knows they were different from one another; yet they had fully embraced this difference with courage and also with humour. This respect for difference is the foundation of all community life, as well as of all ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

On this day when we give thanks to God for having given

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them to the Church, to our Order and to Algeria, let us ask them to obtain for us the same grace of mutual acceptance and respect for our differences, for each of us individually and for all of us together as a community.

Armand Veilleux