

A couple of weeks ago a French priest was killed while saying mass. That saddened us, but it was “over there” and it was just a couple of crazed teenagers, we are told. It was terrible but it was just one incident, right? About 10 years ago I was in Iraq near the city of Kirkuk. There were two Catholic parishes here. How many Catholics are there now - 0

What don't you hear on the news media? At least 100,000 Christians are killed every year because of their faith, which amounts to 273 per day, or eleven every hour, according to Bishop John McAreevey, the Chair of the Council for Justice & Peace of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, and that number does not include those who are “being tortured, imprisoned, exiled, threatened, excluded, attacked and discriminated against on a widespread scale.” In a sobering presentation before a Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade this past week, McAreevey said that Christianity is the most oppressed religion in the world, and the followers of Jesus are actively persecuted in some 110 countries. More striking still, he contended, according to the International Society for Human Rights, a non-religious organization, “80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination in the world today are directed against Christians.”

OK, that's a little more scary but that's still that's not happening here, right?

There is a report that earlier this week ISIS issued a list of 15,000 American and British Christians that are on their "Kill List." Our government has decided not to tell people if they are on the list so as not to cause a panic.

Are any of us on that list? Probably not, for now being out here in SE Ohio is probably a fairly safe place to be – for now. There are no gunmen at our door today, but for almost 300 Christians somewhere today, their faith will be a matter of life and death for them and that group – bigger than the folk gathered here right now – will give their lives for it.

For some folk attending mass today, it was a simple decision that there was nothing more interesting or pressing to do at the moment so we might as well go to church. And there are some who would be here no matter how dangerous that choice might be.

There aren't many occasions that force us to evaluate our lives and pick our priorities -- most of us will never be faced with the prospect of martyrdom for the sake of our convictions. Unfortunately, a lot of people will live their whole lives in the twilight zone where there is no clear purpose, no meaning, just the amusement of the moment.

"Can we really say there is something about our lives that is worth dying for?" -- nothing reveals our priorities like that question. Is there something or someone for which each one of us would be willing to sacrifice prestige, security, even our life OR would we seek to protect ourselves at any cost?

If there is nothing in my life worth dying for then we need to very seriously look at the direction of our lives, our choices, our values, the things that attract and direct our attention. If none of them are worth dying for, are they enough reason to live for?

Are they worth the price of my immortal soul? Are they even worth the price of the time and energy we give them, time and energy we will never have again?

If there are things that really matter to us, that we would find worth the cost of our life, then there is another question we need to ask? How do I usually deal with these things? Do I take them for granted or does my behavior clearly show to others the things that matter most to me? If ISIS were here rounding up Christians, would they even notice you? Jesus came to bring division says the gospel, to ask for a decision. He isn't taking an opinion poll, he asks for a decision that changes the course of my life.

Jeremiah, the prophets, the saints are all placed before us as examples of those who choose well and let the world know of their choice. Would our own children, family or friends have much idea about our choices? About what would we die for or what we live for? Are we still putting off making the decision? Are the things that hold us back worth our chance at life in the kingdom of God.

There are no gunmen today to focus our priorities, but that doesn't mean that we won't have to make our decision.

When we choose to follow the lord we don't do it alone. We have the example of all who have gone before; the support of all who gather with us; the loving forgiveness of the lord who call to us. We don't gain anything by waiting for that gunman or some other tragic event to force our decision; we gain so much by siding with the lord now and proudly telling the world of that choice.