



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the Lord give you peace and Pascal Joy,

We begin with great joy and a sense of gratitude towards the Lord, the jubilee of the 15th centennial anniversary of the martyrdom of Saint Arethas and companions. It is an event that concerns all Christians in the Gulf and touches us deeply. The testimony of these martyrs has transmitted to us faith in the risen Christ, our Savior and Redeemer. Saint Arethas and his companions were faithful to Christ, they did not accept compromises. They preferred to die than deny their Christian faith.

We are part of a long history of Christians who have lived in the Gulf. We are certainly here as a Church of migrants, we come from different countries with different languages and traditions. However, by coming to live in this land we are part of the history of the Church in this region. But we cannot remember these holy martyrs without asking ourselves what their testimony means for us today.

This Jubilee Year, in fact, is an opportunity to delve deeper into the meaning of the Christian testimony that we are called to bear every day with our lives. The Second Vatican Council explained it very well, recalling that:

*“Since Jesus, the Son of God, manifested His charity by laying down His life for us, so too no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for Christ and His brothers. From the earliest times, then, some Christians have been called upon—and some will always be called upon—to give the supreme testimony of this love to all men, but especially to persecutors. The Church, then, considers martyrdom as an*

*exceptional gift and as the fullest proof of love. By martyrdom a disciple is transformed into an image of his Master by freely accepting death for the salvation of the world—as well as his conformity to Christ in the shedding of his blood. Though few are presented such an opportunity, nevertheless all must be prepared to confess Christ before men. They must be prepared to make this profession of faith even in the midst of persecutions, which will never be lacking to the Church, in following the way of the cross” (Lumen Gentium 42).*

According to these inspired words, therefore, celebrating the martyrs means venerating those, who through a particular spiritual gift, were able to conform totally to Christ and his love to the point of making the ultimate gift of their own lives. Furthermore, celebrating the martyrs means renewing our commitment to Christian testimony in the world and in the society. For this reason, I invite you to pray through these holy martyrs and to deepen the meaning of Christian testimony in this region.

The witness is not a better person than others, the witness is not a person who communicates himself, but communicates the Christian faith and the encounter with Jesus through his own life and words. Just as the martyrs gave their lives for love of Christ, so as Christians, we too must consider testimony not as a value alongside others but as the fundamental commitment of our existence: communicating the love of Christ to everyone.

Furthermore, there are areas of Christian testimony that are linked to the Sacraments we celebrate. Our baptism makes us witnesses of the Gospel to the whole world. Confirmation reminds us that it is the Spirit who inspires in us the right words and appropriate actions for testimony. The Eucharist is the celebration of the love of Christ that conforms us to him to the point of making us bread broken for others, as the martyrs did. The sacrament of reconciliation makes us witnesses of God's mercy. The Jubilee year makes it possible to receive the gift of plenary indulgence and gives us a more intense experience of mercy.

Marriage invites us to bear Christian witness in the family and towards relatives and friends. The ministerial priesthood asks for the total gift of oneself to the service of the brothers and sisters. The anointing of the sick enables us to experience illness and death as events in which to testify to our full trust in Christ the savior.



All the charisms that the Holy Spirit spreads for the common edification of the Church always have a dimension of testimony to the Gospel. I think of the many associations, ecclesial movements and prayer groups present in our Church. May the Jubilee Year be an opportunity to ask ourselves how the different spiritual gifts make us capable of true testimony and dialogue. Among the charismatic gifts I would like to mention in particular the consecrated life. The purpose of this vocation in the Church is to show the radical nature of following Christ through the Evangelical Counsels and to bear witness to God's love for all.

Finally, humble testimony also enables us to walk together with the faithful of other religions and other faiths, recognizing that we are all brothers and sisters because we are loved and desired by the one God, Father of all. Together we are called to build a more fraternal and human world.

Dear brothers and sisters, these are just some thoughts we can reflect on as we celebrate the jubilee of Saint Arethas this year. We hope in this way that this Jubilee Year will make us grow in faith and make us happy in bearing witness to the Gospel to everyone. I wish you a wondrous Jubilee full of blessings from heaven through the intercession of Saint Arethas and companions - martyrs.

Our Lady of Arabia pray for us. Saint Arethas and companions - martyrs, pray for us.



**+ Paolo Martinelli OFM Cap.**  
**Apostolic Vicar of Southern Arabia**



Given on the solemn inauguration of the Jubilee year of St Arethas and companions on this, the 9<sup>th</sup> day of November, in the year of the Lord 2023.