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Pope Francis speaks to visitors gathered in St. Peter’s Square during the recitation of the Angelus at the Vatican March 3, 2024. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Condemning the killing of Christians in Congo, Pope Francis said the sacrifices of modern martyrs are seeds that grow into examples of Christian witness for the church.

After praying the Angelus in St. Peter's Square June 16, the pope referenced the "painful news" of violence in eastern Congo where over 120 people were reported to have been killed by suspected Islamist rebels in recent weeks. Local officials have said the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), a rebel group affiliated to the Islamic State, were responsible for the attacks.

"Among the victims, many are Christians killed in 'odium fidei,'" in hatred of the faith, Francis said. "They are martyrs. Their sacrifice is a seed that germinates and bears fruit, and teaches us to bear witness to the Gospel with courage and consistency."

Open Doors International, a non-denominational organization supporting persecuted Christians worldwide, said that at least 80 Christians, Catholics and members of other Christians churches, were killed in the North Kivu province of Congo between June 4-8.

Francis called on Congo's leadership and the international community to "do everything possible to stop the violence and safeguard the lives of civilians."

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Before praying the Angelus, the pope reflected on the day's Gospel reading from St. Mark in which Jesus relates the kingdom of God to the image of a seed.

Just as a farmer must learn how to "wait confidently" for a seed to sprout to ensure an abundant harvest, God patiently waits "without ever ceasing to accompany us" so that the "seeds of his word and his grace" grow within Christians and bear spiritual fruits, he said.

Francis said God waits patiently and attentively for spiritual fruits to grow "because he wants nothing in his field to be lost, that everything should reach full maturity; he wants us all to be able to grow like ears of grain."

"By doing so, the Lord gives us an example," the pope said. "He teaches us too to sow the Gospel confidently wherever we are, and then to wait for the seed that has been sown to grow and bear fruit in us and in others."

He added that God's example shows Christians how to wait for their spiritual harvest "without becoming discouraged and without ceasing to support and help each other even where, despite our efforts, we do not seem to see immediate results."

"In fact, often even among us, beyond appearances, the miracle is already underway, and in due course it will bear abundant fruit!" he said.