As I see pictures and statues of your martyrs, however, I am concerned that you young people should have a bigger understanding of what is a martyr. Bangladeshi martyrs of recent years tend to be young men, in the streets, often carrying guns or other weapons – and they die violent public deaths, fighting.

But martyrs die in many ways. They are those who are prepared to die rather than accept something evil. They stand up for truth and goodness and for others. Martyrs know that you cannot let evil have its own way – you have to confront it – and that always means a risk. This takes a lot of courage, even in small and personal ways. If you are the only person in your class who speaks up for someone or something and all the others are laughing at you, it is not easy. It takes courage. And, in some situations, if you stand up for your beliefs, you will die, that is, you will make the final sacrifice. To build a character, to build a society, to build a nation – takes the courage of people who are prepared to stand up for what is right and know that this can mean suffering. This week, I want us to think of some of them, including some that I have read about in the newspapers, since I have been in Bangladesh – people of real courage who laid down their lives for something that was good and true and honest. God bless you.

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SOME MODERN MARTYRS

Assembly 28. February 24, 2003

Let us continue to think about martyrs. The word 'martyr' comes from a Greek word for 'witness' – when someone dies for what they believe in, they are witnessing to that belief. I told you yesterday that some martyrs were indeed, men with guns and other weapons, fighting in the streets for their country and its

language. But the word 'martyr' can be given to many other sorts of people, who witness to what is right and good in more personal and lonely ways – and suffer for it. I find their stories more challenging because they are nearer to my own life.

Every nation and every century has its official martyrs but I have here a few stories of Bangladeshi men and women whom I read about in our newspapers here. They all died because they chose to confront evil rather than surrender to it and run away.

In a village called Nasingdi, the people had been troubled by thieves so they appointed a guard. His name was Farid Ali and he did his job well. He caught many thieves and handed them over to the police. In May 2001, he was killed by thieves, who did not want him to do his job well.

Again and again, there are stories of girls and women who suffered crimes against themselves, reported them to the police, gave the names of the criminals and they were killed so that the case could not go forward and their persecutors could not be brought to trial.

A businessman was one day asked by extortionists for a toll. He refused and was shot dead.

A young trainee dentist was visiting his parents in their village home. It was attacked by thieves, and, trying to defend them, he was killed.

None of these people wanted to die but they were ready to take the risk of dying rather than do nothing in the face of evil. A martyr does not want to die. In the early years of the Christian era, there were a few Christians who decided they wanted to be glorified by the title of 'martyrs' and threw themselves in front of the Roman soldiers, saying, "Kill me, for Jesus' sake!" What could the church do with such people? The leaders of the churches met and decided such people could not be given the name of 'martyr' because people who wanted to die were not normal or healthy people – they were unbalanced. Life is good.

Life is a gift from God. It is not our job to organize our own death. To be accepted in the church as an official martyr, it has to be proved that the person did not look for death but was ready to die when the call came. He or she was a normal and healthy person who loved life.

We, who may not be so ready to die, give thanks for such examples, pray for their souls and pray for guidance as to what WE should do to make the world a better place by doing what we can to confront evil and to know what to do if WE are faced with difficult challenges and choices. God bless you.

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LIFE – THE UPHILL WALK

Assembly 29. February 25th 2003.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that our sports department is developing. The swimming season is here and you are invited to sign up for Friday and Saturday swimming. Also, our Sports teacher has now got his certificate as a handball coach so we are offering both boys and girls this extra sport, also at the weekends, for no extra charge! There are very few opportunities for girls in sport in Dhaka and handball is very suitable for women. Most of us need exercise so please make use of these opportunities.

We have been thinking this week of the martyrs, the witnesses – those whose lives were offered up because they faced up to evil and did not run away. This is all part of the bigger subject of 'sacrifice' – the hurt and hardship it takes to achieve anything in life. Most of you know this already. You do not get any satisfaction out of your studies unless you put your heart and mind into them – and, even if it is boring to begin with, once you get into a good work routine, your studies become much more interesting. Many of you have surely worked out that you cannot

enjoy anything, from a hobby to a relationship, unless you give it some time and discipline.

Being rich does not protect us from the ways life can be difficult. In both rich families and in poor families, people fall ill and die – people you love very much. Rich and poor alike have accidents, their relationships fail, and some members of the family bring disgrace to it. Money can buy a certain amount of comfort but cannot protect anyone from suffering - from having to face the hard fact that *life is difficult.*

'Life is difficult'. This was the opening sentence in a book that has had a great influence. It was written by an American about 40 years ago but it has been read all over the world. It is called 'The Road Less Traveled.' In it, the author, M Scott Peck, warns that, if you believe that life is, or should be, easy, then you get the wrong ideas. He says that living your life responsibly and well is like walking uphill. If you give up and start walking downhill then you find, very soon, that you are in a mess. He says that sin is, basically, laziness. If we refuse to accept that life is difficult, we will be always moaning and complaining about every difficulty, blaming others when things go wrong and refusing to accept responsibility for what we can do ourselves. Life is difficult and, because of this, a good home and school will send you out into the world, with the sort of skills and character that will mean that you can manage.

Sometimes people talk to me and ask if I can help them to get a visa for England. The way they talk, and the stars in their eyes, tell me that they think that there life will be easy, the streets will be paved with gold and someone is waiting to put money into their hands! I usually inform them that they do NOT want to go to England – that it is very cold, very expensive and that there is a lot of "'Bye 'Bye!" Jobs are difficult to get and even more difficult to keep. If you do not do your job well, if you do not reach your targets – then "'Bye 'Bye." Life is difficult in every country – it is just difficult in different ways. No country is easy.