

The Year of the Word: Reflection 4

"Listen to him!
If you don't listen, you won't hear."

We are transfigured by listening...
and our actions afterwards can change anything and everything.



"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
Mt 22: 36 - 40

Surely, if everyone listened, remembered and followed these two commandments as Jesus taught, nothing bad would ever happen in our world ... and yet still it does. However, there are also people and stories of their lives that can inspire us and lead us back to following God's ways - just as Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan taught us how to behave to those who were different to us and in need.

So, this week perhaps it is pertinent to reflect on the events throughout World History that threatened whole races of people through hatred, discrimination, persecution, and extermination - just because of their differences and the rule of dictators. Yet, there were "Good Samaritans" who ensured the plans were ultimately unsuccessful, although great costs and sacrifices had already been paid.

Last Monday, the 27th January was Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD); it is the 27th of January each year. This is a time to remember the millions of people murdered during the Holocaust, under Nazi Persecution and in the genocides which have followed in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

It is a time when we can reflect and seek to learn the lessons of the past and recognise that genocide does not just take place on its own - it's a steady process which can begin if discrimination, racism and hatred are not checked and prevented. It breeds the consequences of exclusion, prejudice and intolerance. It erodes and devalues the fundamental human rights - equal rights - the freedom of thought, conscience, expression and religion and the right to asylum from persecution. It identifies certain practices, beliefs or customs as being in some way inferior to our own making the first step to normalising supremacy. It leads to conspiracy and an untruthful way of living: lies, rumours and gossip become normal - there is a growing fear or threat for our own security that plays on our minds and emotions leading to a lack of respect, trust or understanding - so treating others differently, is deserved! Yet, if we listen to the teachings of scripture we know this is not true.

We're fortunate here in the UK; we are not at immediate risk of genocide. But we should not ignore it or become immune to its subtlety or reach. The discrimination, denigration and dehumanisation of some sections of Societies throughout the World has not ended, nor has the use of the language of hatred or exclusion. There is still much to do to create a safer future for all throughout the World and HMD is an opportunity to start this process.

The theme for HMD 2020 was Stand Together. It explored how genocidal regimes throughout history have deliberately fractured societies by marginalising certain groups, and how these tactics can be challenged by individuals standing together with their neighbours, and speaking out against oppression.

An example of this can be found in the story of St Maximilian Kolbe offering us inspiration; showing what a true Good Samaritan might do. He was born in Poland and was a Franciscan Monk. He founded the Immaculata Movement devoted to Our Lady. He like the Jews was a thorn in the side of the Nazis. While imprisoned by the Nazis, in the German death camp of Auschwitz, ten men were chosen to die in reprisal for a supposed prisoner escape. He volunteered to die in place of a stranger - a young husband and father. He was the last of the ten to die after enduring two weeks of thirst, starvation and neglect, but unlike the others he had to be killed by lethal injection and he was still praying and trusting in God.

"Woe to mankind, if God's Holy Commandments are not only broken,
but if transgression is actually tolerated and permitted to go unpunished."

Readings for Reflection from the Gospels



Quotes in use in everyday life from the Gospel of St Matthew

If you have ears to hear (Mt 11:15),
Not fit to carry his boots (Matthew 3:11)
The salt of the earth (Mt 5:13)
Go the extra mile (Mt 5:41)
Don't let your left hand know what the right is doing (Mt 6:3)
You can't serve two masters (Mt 6:24)
Here today, gone tomorrow (Mt 6:30)
Don't cast pearls before swine (Mt 7:6)
The narrow gate (Mt 7:14)
Like wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt 7:15)
By their fruits you'll know them (Mt 7:20)
A house built on sand (Mt 7:26)
Like sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16)
He who has ears to hear (Mt 11:15)
He who's not with me is against me (Mt 12:30)
There'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt 13:42)
The blind leading the blind (Mt 15:14)
A millstone around his neck (Mt 18:6)
The eleventh hour (Mt 20:6)
The chosen few (Mt 20:16)
Practise what you preach (Mt 23:3)
Burning the midnight oil (Mt 25:6)
Separate the sheep from the goats (Mt 25:32)
He washed his hands of it (Mt 27:24)

The Dignity of Difference:

"The things that differentiate us are at times used
as the reasons to divide us."

"May the anniversary of the unspeakable cruelty that humanity learned of seventy-five years ago serve as a summons to pause, to be still and to remember. We need to do this, lest we become indifferent." (Pope Francis)

God of the past, present, and future,

We remember today, 75 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, the millions of other victims of Nazi persecution, and all those who have been targeted and killed in subsequent genocides.

We remember those who, having survived genocide, share their stories with us:

We give thanks to You for the lessons of human stories, both in their suffering and in their joy.

We remember those who stood up against injustice and saved lives:

We give thanks to You for their example.

Together we acknowledge the sacrifice of those that stood together with those who suffered during the Holocaust and other genocides.

And we affirm that every life is loved by You and sacred.

Yet, during the Holocaust too many failed to stand together with their neighbours. Oppression stains Your world and contradicts Your love.

So we pray that You will inspire us now as we stand together on this day in the love that we know of God in Christ Jesus.

Let us commit to remembering:

And glorify God in our words and actions.

We make these prayers in the name of Christ Jesus who through His life,

death, and resurrection, journeys with us into the eternal hope of Your

truth and light.

Amen.

"First they came for the communists,

and I did not speak out -

because I was not a communist;

Then they came for the socialists,

and I did not speak out -

because I was not a socialist;

Then they came for the trade unionists,

and I did not speak out -

because I was not a trade unionist;

Then they came for the Jews,

and I did not speak out -

because I was not a Jew;

Then they came for me,
and there was no one left to speak out for me!

Pastor Martin Niemöller

Do you pray and trust in God?
Do you look to the scriptures to guide you?
Are you ready to be a Good Samaritan to those in need?
Are you ready to make the World a better place?

"Don't be content in your life just to do no wrong,
be prepared everyday to try and do some good."

Sir Nicholas Winton,
who rescued 669 children from Nazi-occupied Europe