

Passiontide

After the attack in Westminster just over two weeks ago we saw this week the terrible effects of the chemical attack in Syria in which so many innocent men, women and children were killed or seriously injured. We cannot imagine the dreadful trauma caused to those affected, their families and the medical and emergency staff who had to deal with it.

This is a terrible reminder of the extreme cruelty which people can inflict on their fellow human beings – cruelty that is heartless and indiscriminate. Our reactions may be ones of shock, of anger, of incredulity or helplessness. Yet there is a danger that because such suffering is so common we might become immune and resigned. Let us hope we do not reach that stage.

As we approach Holy Week we focus on another instance of extreme cruelty: our Lord's condemnation to a painful and humiliating death on a cross. Again there is a danger of that becoming sanitized. The crosses and crucifixes in our churches are sometimes too much objects of beauty that mask the sheer cruelty of what they depict. Perhaps our simple Cross of Nails speaks to use more clearly.

What Passiontide and Holy Week teach us is that God through his Son Jesus Christ shares in the sufferings of our world. He knows first-hand the pain human beings suffer, and the cruelty and the violence that is inflicted upon them.

Yet Passiontide and Holy Week also teach us about the love of God. Our reading just now contains those marvellous words of our Lord: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ... Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (John 3.13-17). This was God's supreme act of love, his powerful means of reconciliation.

It is of course easy to focus on human cruelty and violence. And yet so often in such terrible situations there are glimmers of hope. The best of human nature can come out: acts of kindness and care, not only amongst emergency and medical personnel but also from ordinary people.

Yes, there is some light in the darkness and for that we should give thanks. If we look we can see something of the love of God in other people. We pray that others might see something of God's love in us.

7 April 2017
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