

## Genocide

Tomorrow, 9<sup>th</sup> December, is kept worldwide as the International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime. The date was chosen by the United Nations as the anniversary of the adoption of the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, known as the “Genocide Convention”.

To quote the official statement: “The purpose of the day is to raise awareness of the Genocide Convention and its role in combating and preventing the crime of genocide, as defined in the Convention, and to commemorate and honour its victims.

In adopting the resolution, without a vote, the 193-member Assembly reiterated the responsibility of each individual State to protect its populations from genocide, which entails the prevention of such a crime, including incitement to it.”

That convention arose out the terrible atrocities suffered by millions of Jewish people in the preceding years. As we know all too well that convention has been flouted many times since in different parts of the world. Far from protecting their people there have been regimes that have actively sought to eliminate sections of their society of which for one reason or another they disapprove. That may be for racial, tribal, religious, political or ideological reasons.

Many are quick to point out the role of religious people in such atrocities. That we cannot deny. Indeed there are many instances of genocide in the pages of the Old Testament. We see there a sense of superiority on the part of God’s people who believed in divine sanction for the elimination of those they considered their enemies or enemies of God.

In the light of Jesus and the message of the New Testament we know that to have been wrong, a dreadful misinterpretation of the justice and holiness of God. As we heard in our Bible reading just now (Matthew 5.43-48) we are commanded to love our enemies. That includes those with whom we may strongly disagree, those who hold contrary values to what we believe to be right, those whose customs we may find difficult to accept or even tolerate.

Yet instead of being afraid of difference we need to learn to accept people as they are. Genocide relies on stereotypes, generalizations, impersonalization. Seeing others as individuals can rightly challenge our prejudices and fears. Peace and reconciliation can only win the day when we put aside those prejudices, assumptions and fears.

As Christians we are called to set an example, to live up to the Good News that it is our duty and joy to make known: the Good News of God’s love for all. With God’s help may we have the courage and resolve to do so.

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