

## **HOMILY – 24<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 17 SEPTEMBER 2017**

A week ago today, I departed from Russia after a week's pilgrimage with hundreds of people, from all over the world, seeking by True Life in God, to build bridges of peace amongst peoples divided by culture, tradition and religion. Did you know 27 million Russians died in WW11. One of the beautiful moments of hope, of signs of forgiveness was when the Jewish Rabbi was helping the Palestinian Archbishop of Haifa up the stairs, into the Russian Orthodox Church.

A spirited discussion took place in Moscow's Central Synagogue one afternoon, about how we can make it happen, that is, peace among world religions. The key word seems to be 'attitude'. What is my attitude to other people who are different from myself? If our attitude is of others, only token acknowledgment, then it will go nowhere but if it is an attitude of genuine desire for friendship then the possibilities are endless. Friendship does not mean renouncing our Faith in God.

Hatred and resentment feeds off differences and distinctions. If we seek to be a champion of goodness, justice and truth, then you will be hated.

Archbishop Romero was assassinated in 1980 in El Salvador because he spoke out against the torture and oppression of the poor, by the ruling classes. Each year, about 35 priests are murdered in Mexico.

Jesus reminds us, if you choose to be a follower of mine, you will be hated and despised because you come in my name, to teach the mercy and love of God, to speak the truth.

You see, those caught up in sinful or corrupt lives, will always see God as a threat to their existence. That is why we witness the aggression when people, last Lent, were praying the Rosary outside the abortion unit in Edinburgh. Nobody wants to be found wanting. To be exposed for who they are.

But, and this is very important, the teachings of Christ are not about destroying and humiliating the sinner but instead, presenting them with the hope and mercy of forgiveness, to have a genuine desire of befriending the sinner and restoring them to life.

Passions and prejudice run high in the world. I said to a Polish Priest recently, would you like to visit Russia and see the beautiful Orthodox churches and hear their monastic choirs singing the Psalms? He said "I can't, not after how the Soviet Union tried to destroy Poland in WW11, with the Nazis". Members of his own family died in terrible torture and imprisonment. How difficult to move on. Our memories are long, especially when the victims are those we love dearly.

But what of the future? How long can we hold to ransom the present generation for the sins of their forebears? It is often the great acts of mercy, against all the odds, as in today's Gospel, that set the marker by God. Jesus's Parable states, be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful. This is the way to destroy hatred, love your enemies and disempower the culture of evil, that the conscience of a sinner changes to true sorrow and a desire for repentance.

Let me leave you with a lovely image of hope for world peace that I saw in Moscow. The Muslim Iman from Lebanon standing outside the Catholic Church, wrapping his arms around a Catholic priest from Nigeria, in friendship. With God, all things are possible. Our rescuer from all that divides our world. Imagining the unimaginable, that those of different faiths or no faith can be our friends.