

*In Nomine . . .*

My text is from the Gospel, and these are the words of Jesus: *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth. (St John's Gospel, chapter 16: verses 12 & 13a)*

Today is Trinity Sunday: the church's joyful celebration of the majesty of the triune God!

I am aware of quite young members of the Choir and I don't want them to be frightened by what I have to say. Do you all know what happened on Wednesday in the street in Woolwich? (mostly nods!)

And yet: sad, but true - everybody's head is filled with the ghastly image of a dead British soldier lying in the road in Woolwich, and images of the two British Nigerians, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, one holding a meat cleaver and the other turned away, but holding a gun as we learned later.

This openly committed street murder is probably one of the most shocking acts most of us will ever see, apart from televised war atrocities. And it derives its power to shock from the fact that we identify to a degree with those we refer to, in the well-worn cliché, as 'our brave lads'. He was one of us. So the Home Secretary, Theresa May, can make the rather overblown statement that 'this is an attack on everyone in the United Kingdom.' Of course it is not, yet it has some truth. But all that remark does is to make everybody more frightened than they need be. One of the killers tried to make out that their action was an attack on the whole of the West: but it was in truth an obscene and cowardly attack on one serving soldier. The unspoken question is: when will another crazed Muslim attack another member of the armed forces? Fear now stalks the streets.

Please may I illustrate that fear from my own strange experience, and with all due respect to my very Christian and rather wonderful mother? There was an occasion when my wife and I announced we were going to adopt a child of mixed race. She burst into tears and when I gently enquired why she was so upset, she astonishingly said, 'Oh! We're all going to be murdered in our beds!' Well, when you put that emotion into context, you have to remember that she had endured six years of the last war, including an exploding bomb just outside our house, and she had been fed the racist commentary which the *Daily Telegraph* used to serve up in the seventies (and eighties), because the paper supported the racist South African régime. Thank God, that kind of racism has stopped nowadays.

But she was filled with fear: fear of unknown things and fear of being over-run by people with dark skin colour. It was a pity she could not have come with me to Nigeria, because I lived there as the only white man for miles around and never felt over-run. There is only one race: the human race, which God has created in a beautiful variety of colours, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu called 'God's Rainbow People'.

Fear has to be opposed. There is a requirement, especially among Christians, to practise bravery in the face of fear. Why Christians in particular? Because we have a 2,000 year tradition of bravery in the face of persecution. How did St Paul react while he was in prison and there was an earthquake? He was cool, calm and collected, and spoke to the Prison jailer, who was about to kill himself, fearful because he supposed the

prisoners had escaped. Paul said to him, when the building had stopped shaking, 'Do not harm yourself: for we are all here.' (Acts 16: 25-40)

Never forget Jesus own words: 'Perfect love casts out fear.' That will help you. 'Perfect love casts out fear.' The action of the two black ladies who stopped and prayed with the dying or dead man, and the action of Ingrid Loyau-Kennet who confronted one of the murderers was a wonderful example of bravery, and of how fear can be cast out.

Now, what possible connection can there be between God the Holy Trinity and a bloody murder of a British soldier on the streets of Woolwich? Well, there is a connection, because everything in the world is connected in one way or another. To understand the connection we have to appreciate the power of religion; and not only the power of religion, but the importance of understanding religion in the right way. If Drummer Lee Rigby's Muslim killers had a right understanding of Islam they would never have engaged in their plot to kill a serving soldier. If Christians in America who killed and injured doctors and nurses who worked in Abortion clinics had understood their faith better, they would not have engaged in violence and murder. Protest, yes: murder and violence, no!

But we also have to understand that religion evokes powerful and passionate feelings. God has given us passionate feelings. Let us direct them in the right path! Our Christian religion today – on this very day – has given us a very beautiful understanding of God the Holy Trinity. I can love God better as I look at the world of nature and see God as the Father, the Creator of all that is. I can love God better if I see Jesus Christ, the great teacher and Saviour of humanity, and listen to his wisdom and love. I can love God better when I detect the action of the Holy Spirit guiding me and others along the right path.

This is the great heritage of the Holy Trinity. It is what inspires Christians to do great things with and for God. Great things like Christian Aid and its world-wide work which we celebrated a couple of weeks ago: great things and little things, such as the Saturday drop-in for lonely and homeless people, which people from St James's share in the running with our Muslim friends.

But there is a big puzzle for us. We have in our society about 2 million Muslim believers. We know we must respect other religions even if we disagree, and we know that in a huge majority of Muslims there is nothing but goodness and peace, good-neighbourliness and loving-kindness. My own splendid neighbours are a constant witness to that.

Then – Bang! - comes the terrible atrocity of the brutal murder of Drummer Lee Rigby.

People will maybe start quoting the texts in the Qur'an, the Muslim Holy Book, which appear to support the killing of the enemies of Prophet Muhammad. We will overlook the hate texts in our own Bible, such as Psalm 137 in which the psalmist calls for a Jewish pay-back on the Babylonians: 'Blessed is he who takes your little ones and dashes them against the rock!' Horrible!

Our love for God the Holy Trinity will give us peace in our hearts and the ability to receive the peace-loving influence of the Holy Spirit, so that we will not harbour any hatred for Muslims, or cry for vengeance for the death of Drummer Lee Rigby. We will leave that to the Courts of Justice. Because we know that this was the act of extremists, of men who have failed to take the peaceful teaching of Islam to their hearts. Rather they have used that teaching to feed their own vicious hatred of all things Western. Of course there is much to

criticise in all things Western, but there is much to criticise in all things Eastern as well. But the response of violence and murder is a step too far, as we all know.

I am making a plea for all of us to continue to practise our Christianity in loving our neighbour as ourselves, and especially in relation to our Muslim neighbours, who are at risk of ignorant reprisals as a result of the terrible murder in Woolwich last Wednesday. They need our loving concern at this time.

But above all, in order to strengthen that resolve, I ask that we all intensify our prayer to God the Holy Trinity, as we face the fear and turbulence we see in our own society with bravery and love. Let the Holy Spirit lead us into all truth.