

TUESDAY COMMUNION

Hymn: 172. O dearest Lord,

Reading: Mark 15. 20 (b)- 32

Prayers:

Three years ago we stayed in a small town in Poland. At the time it was rather down at heel but it was interesting to see the old square with some of its buildings beginning to be restored.

Beyond the old centre was the unattractive sprawl you get in many cities in Eastern Europe. Our bus took us beyond the sprawl and we got out and walked towards the barbed wire fence with its watch towers positioned every hundred yards. We went through the gates and saw the rows of barrack blocks.

Inside one of them, the story was told of how political prisoners, gypsies, those who were gay, those who were considered "mentally defective" and many Jews were brought to this place.

Inside another, were piles of shoes left behind, a poignant reminder of the many people who, for one reason or another, were made to walk from their barrack block to a nearby hut.

Inside this hut there were shower rooms through which they passed on their way to their final room. When the door was shut, the gas capsules were slipped through a hole in the ceiling.

Up the hill were the ovens at the crematorium. We saw the incinerators and the handcarts wheeled by fellow prisoners to transport the bodies there.

Sixty years later we could only imagine the suffering in body, mind and spirit of those who were herded into that camp:

- the whimpers and the courage of the inmates,
- the questions which came from faith and doubt.

The whole site stood as a mute witness to our human capacity to be caught up in acts which are profoundly evil.

We can not quantify suffering but the place where Jesus was killed was also a place of suffering.

That day, too, the Roman soldiers were going about their routine task. Like the guards in the concentration camps they would say they were just carrying out their orders. Gambling for the prisoners' clothes was just a way of coping with the pain of it all.

This death was routine but that doesn't take away from its sheer barbarism. It was the form of death dealt out to rebels:

- the victims stripped naked and fixed immobile,
- suffering the torment of pain, thirst, insects and taunts.

On this Holocaust Memorial Day what shall we say?

First, suffering is often caused by ordinary people who do not see what they doing and do not say, "no!"

There is a blindness about them:

- a willingness to go along with the spirit of the times,
- a refusal to consider what they are doing, which enables them to be caught up in that which is evil!

The Sanhedrin, no doubt with many good men, condemns Jesus, the soldiers bang nails into his hands, the passersby taunt him.

Who is going to stand out and say, "No!"

Secondly, we Christians have too often been the cause of the suffering of others.

Richard Dawkin and Richard Attenborough both receive much hate mail from those who claim to be Christians because they do not agree with their views.

In the same way, Christian through the centuries have spread the poison of hate towards those who are Jewish and, today, often towards those who are gay!

Finally, where is God in all this?

There is a powerlessness which God has chosen for himself. It is the powerlessness which comes from giving freedom to the world and to humanity. It is a powerlessness which results in pain and suffering both for God and for ourselves.

Yet, he has chosen this way because it is also the only path by which we humans will become mature and complete people.

In Jesus, we glimpse a "powerless" God who has chosen to share fully in our suffering because of his one great strength; the power of his love for us.

We may pray that the crucified and risen Christ will:

- open our eyes and give us the courage to see,
- release his love in us and give us the courage to act for the sake of those who need us to stand alongside them, whoever they are and whatever their need.

Amen.