

# Mike's message . . . .

## Love is stronger than hate

I am sitting down to write this in the context of the dreadful news from Normandy of the death of a French priest, Father Jacques Hamel, martyred while he said Mass in a church in St Étienne-du-Rouvray.

It is the latest in series of dreadful events that leave us with both many questions and also fearful. The Normandy attack was the latest in the last few weeks that have also seen appalling loss of life in among other places Nice, Munich, Tokyo, Baghdad and Kabul. It's regrettable, but probable, that by the time that you read this other attacks may have been added to that list.

Behind most of the attacks we've seen over the past few years are warped ideologies. Good religious, philosophical or political ideologies that have been twisted or perverted into macabre versions of what they should be. The Munich attack, for example, was carried out by a young man who idolised Anders Breivik - the Norwegian man who massacred 77 people, many of them teenagers exactly five years before. Breivik had based his views on a twisted version of his Christian background. Other attacks have been linked to IS, a twisted version of it's adherents backgrounds in the Islamic faith. Christians and Jews share so much good in common with true Islam as Children of Abraham/Ibrahim and, as the Quran calls all three, 'People of the Book'.

It will soon be the fifteenth anniversary of the events of 9/11 when terrorists hijacked four planes to crashed them into buildings including New York's World Trade Centre. Near to the two towers that day was Rowan Williams, later Archbishop of Canterbury. He was trapped for some hours in a building where he had been giving a lecture, just one block away from the towers. In the aftermath of the events he wrote the short book 'Writing in the Dust'. In that essay he warned that if violence was responded to with violence it would result in a whirlwind of destruction. The West responded to 9/11 with invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and, especially through the shortcomings and lack of planning of the latter, the ground was inadvertently prepared in which IS would grow.

It's easy to be wise after the event of course. Situations and circumstances change and the powers that be always have more knowledge of what is going on behind the scenes. The intelligence agencies have beyond doubt saved many lives through their work. But where else can we find reassurance and encouragement that somehow the cycle of violence and hatred has to be broken.

In Matthew's Gospel Jesus exhorts his disciples to "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*" (5 .44). That is a difficult task indeed and, for many, one that seems impossible. It's so easy to be consumed with hatred and anger when we see atrocities, and the urge to strike back seems irresistible. But Jesus' teachings hold firm, "*Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*". That is a difficult task but we should be urged on and encouraged by that great prayer attributed to Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

**Goodness is stronger than evil, Love is stronger than hate, Light is stronger than darkness,  
Life is stronger than death, Victory is ours through Him who loves us. Amen.**

