

A REFLECTION FOR THE EUCHARIST ON THE OCCASION OF THE ASSAULT ON THE WORLD TRADE CENTRE AND THE PENTAGON

DURING THE SUMMER I had the chance to visit once more the RAF Museum at Hendon. There, in a huge hanger, an audio visual presentation on the Battle of Britain is being shown continuously. You climb up a scaffolding auditorium to take your seat, and the images are projected very cleverly on three different screens which seem to be made of something like hessian: one behind the other, and the third somewhat to the side. When the focus is on the nearest, that is all you see in the darkness, and when on the furthest, likewise. But pictures are projected on more than one at the same time. So you see and hear Winston Churchill speaking from his desk to the nation, and at the same time, at a distance, you see aerial combat.

This has a parallel with liturgy. We see our stylised rituals on the nearest screen as it were; but at the same time in the liturgy we are bringing before God the experience of our lives: of all that we have received, of all that we long for, of all that is painful, of all that we regret, of all that needs to be forgiven. Liturgy is a holy space inviting us to express all the dimensions of our journey to God. If this second screen is not present, or the second projector has broken down, our ritual can easily become empty idol worship. And so at this time I find it just impossible to join in the Eucharist without feeling acutely the tragedy of Tuesday 11th September last. And doing so makes me long to make sense of this bizarre and tragic event.

When you get really close to the detail of a painting it *doesn't* make sense: stand back and you see the full beauty of the flower, and also its setting, its full context. So I ask myself, in the year 2,500 when the attack on the World Trade Centre is very distant, what will they be saying about it in the history books? I imagine it will go something like this:

At this time there was an explosion among some Europeans of their understanding of themselves and their world, which they called "science", or simply "knowledge". And this knowledge also gave rise to another explosion: of wealth. Aiong with it communications and mobility developed, so that those who were not part of it all, experienced themselves as excluded, still sick, still hungry, still unlettered, still without dignified dwellings. This feeling produced yet another explosion, one of anger, when these realised that not only were they excluded from the benefits of these discoveries, but that much of their work was being used to help fuel the generation of all that wealth. The attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon became the iconic expression of all that frustration.

I wonder, how will the account go on from this point? I feel worried, because the reactions we are hearing seem to be coming from people who are too close up to the picture, who do not see that the root of the matter is economic inequality, who are dead set against sharing their wealth with anyone else, and determined to keep it to themselves, and

almost certainly by violent means. Some attribute the blame to religions or nations. I believe this is mistaken - it's just that those who have a serious gripe use religions or national identities as hooks on which to hang their protest. On the contrary, if we stand back and look at the "big picture", it becomes inconceivable that the violence we have seen would ever have happened if there had not been such serious economic inequality in the world.

Now, I can find nothing in the gospel of Jesus Christ that says you should fight to conserve your wealth, and that this will somehow solve the poverty of others. John the Baptist prepared the people for Jesus' coming, and when they asked him, What must we do, then? he replied, Anyone who has two tunics must share with the one who has none, and anyone with something to eat must do the same. (Luke 3, 11). And Jesus himself said, Give to anyone who asks you, and if anyone wants to borrow, do not turn away. (Mtt 5, 42).

The Cross of Christ tells us that the Son of God saved us, precisely by coming to share in all the suffering of humanity: and he is calling us to take up the same cross. Of course it is so easy to criticise when one has no responsibility for the awful and complex decisions that have now to be made, but nonetheless I think we have a real problem about how today to offer the Good News to a people that is in shock, hurt and fearful; it is exceeded only by the problem we ourselves now face as we seek to be faithful to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

This text is reprinted with permission from *Identity*, a magazine produced by pupils at Worth School. It was originally a homily delivered in the Abbey church. BEDE HILL is a monk of Worth who pioneered a rural monastic foundation in Peru.