

Homily for January 26th 2020: Year A Sunday 3

75 years ago tomorrow the concentration camp at Auschwitz was liberated .

It is very difficult for us, 75 years later, to appreciate the sheer horror that met those who entered the camp in January 1945. In wartime “fake news” is always suspect. Atrocity stories are commonplace. People found it hard to believe that the rumours that had spread across Europe could possibly be true.

As the story of Auschwitz, and the other camps, gradually became known it was hard to believe that a civilised country in modern Europe could have allowed such appalling cruelty.

Inevitably, historians can point to a number of factors that contributed to the terrible events of the Holocaust.

But the question remains; How was it possible?

For Christians the question is especially acute. Germany was a country with a strong Christian tradition, both Catholic and Protestant. How was it possible that so many people claimed not to know what was going on around them?

75 years after the end of the war this remains something deeply disturbing, but perhaps more urgent is the question it poses for us today.

If you look at history it is very clear that people like to create divisions. We speak of “Them” and “Us”. Civilisation demands that we respect each other. Respect means treating others as we would like to be treated. The internet seems to have encouraged people to disrespect others. We follow blogs that think as we do. We only listen to people who think like us. The last three years have been dominated in this country by the unending debate about Brexit. I say “debate”, but we have hardly had a debate.

We seem to have had two groups shouting at each other. We have seen people breaking friendship and parting company, seemingly unable to hold different opinions while still living together amicably.

What has all that to do with the Holocaust or today’s readings?

This, I think: What happened to more than six million Jews began when the Nazi’s deliberately created divisions in German society. If we stop thinking of other people as brothers and sisters we are on a slippery slope. Auschwitz stands as a terrible warning.

St Paul, even in his own lifetime, was faced with people who wanted to be exclusive. “I am for Paul. I am for Apollos. I am for Cephas”.

Paul is very clear that we must not belong to this or that faction but to Christ Himself. It was true then. and it remains true today.

“In my Father’s house there are many rooms”, Jesus told us.

Christ, and He alone, is our judge. The Holocaust was 75 years ago, but those 75 years have seen so much killing in the name of race or creed, so much discrimination for one reason or another. As disciples of Jesus we must resist every attempt to divide and conquer. We are not called to judge others, or necessarily agree with them, but to walk with them in love and trust.

