

## **A PEACE THE WORLD CANNOT GIVE**

### **Assassination of Fr Jacques Hamel**

The people of France and beyond were stunned in recent weeks when Fr Jacques Hamel was slaughtered at the altar by two young Muslims.

It was an action that affronted the Catholic world like no other. At the altar, defenceless, dressed in the white vestments of the Mass, eighty-five years old, forced to the floor and slaughtered as one would a sheep or a goat, to the cry of "Allahu Akbar", God is great.

We know that hundreds of innocent adults and children have been murdered through terrorism in recent times, and in singling out Fr Jacques we do not forget them or place him in front of them. His murder made him one in solidarity with all those who in recent times have had their lives taken away from them for no reason but to create terror. For the Catholic world, however, the death of Fr Jacques has a special significance, just as the gunning down at the moment of the Consecration of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 had for us. It is a special type of evil that chooses the most sacred time in order to perpetrate an act of horror. What more sacred time on earth than the Eucharist.

Pope Francis said, "This holy priest who died at the very moment he was offering a prayer for the Church, is only one, but there are so many Christians, so many innocents, so many children....let us not be afraid to say the truth. The world is at war, because it has lost its peace."

We know that overwhelmingly the victims of terror are Muslims, killed by fellow Muslims, often young ones. We think of Baghdad, Kabul, Istanbul, Nice, Rouen.

Pope Francis has rightly pointed out that the potential for violence lies within every religion, including Catholicism. "I don't like to talk about Islamic violence, because every day, when I read the newspaper, I see violence", the Pope said. When one reads of a Christian who has murdered someone else, remember that "they are baptised Catholics. They are violent Catholics". If we speak of "Islamic violence", then we are obliged also to speak of "Catholic violence". In every religion, the Holy Father said, there are violent people, including in Catholicism.

We are in need of a peace that clearly the world cannot give, as Jesus warned us two thousand years ago. We Christians must pray and pray. When violence occurs, the media floods us with images and repeated accounts, and after three days moves on. We must call to mind the wounded, those

horribly maimed, whose future lives are impaired through their shocking injuries received from pellets and shrapnel. We think of the families who have lost a loved one, or several loved ones, and to view a loved one who is deceased through natural causes is so different to the impact of viewing a family member ripped apart through the action of a suicide bomber. It will be a memory for every day of one's life thereafter. We think of the communities who have suffered frequent violence, how their parents must be anxious every time a child leaves the house.

We must pray for these people, pray that hearts turned to actions of evil while fooling themselves that they are works of good might indeed come to know that we are all brothers and sisters, no matter our religion, because we all have the one Father.

Injustice and dispossession are at the base of what causes young minds to become radicalised to the point where they see evil as good. Just as we do not blame Jesus or the wider Church for an act of evil committed by a Catholic, so we should regard Islam. Not to do so would indeed lead this into being a war of religions. We pray in hope, following the Lord who said, "I have come that you might have peace, a peace the world cannot give".

As Pope Francis said to the young people at World Youth Day recently, "we have no desire to conquer hatred with more hatred, violence with more violence, terror with more terror. We are here today because the Lord has called us together. Our response to a world at war has a name; its name is fraternity, its name is brotherhood, its name is communion, its name is family... I ask that we join in prayer for the sufferings of all the victims of war in the world today. Once and for all, may we realise that nothing justifies shedding the blood of a brother or sister; that nothing is more precious than the person next to us."

Bishop Greg O'Kelly SJ