

The 75th Anniversary Of the Martyrdom of St. Maximilian Kolbe

Week 44



The Role of Christians and Humanity in the Holocaust

The human family has been divided and at war with itself ever since Cain and Abel. Ever since then Man has been murdering his brother and coming up with endless excuses to justify Himself. There is however no justification and there are no excuses. Just as Cain tried to hide when he murdered his brother, so humanity tries to hide the murder of millions in the holocaust by our excuses and our ignorance and our prejudice and our rationalizations.

What does Christianity have to say to Judaism after the holocaust?

Perhaps the death of one Jew 2000 years ago can speak to the death of six million Jews 50 years ago. Just as Christians remember the death of Jesus and His darkest hour, so we need to remember the darkest hour of the human race in the holocaust. It is impossible to comprehend the suffering of Jesus in His crucifixion and it is just as impossible for us to comprehend what it must have been like to see one's parent, child or friend dragged off never to be seen again or even worse murdered before your eyes. In the suffering of those around us, we see the suffering of Christ. Even those we do not love or understand or agree with, because Christ died for all. Therefore Christ is present in all suffering and all suffering is a re-crucifixion of the Body of Christ.

In the holocaust, like Jesus, victims were stripped of their clothes before being executed. This was for the economic benefit of the executioners. The piles of luggage, garments, shoes, jewelry and eyeglasses discovered at the concentration camps bears silent witness to their plunder.

The Challenge of Forgiveness

As Jesus was dying on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Lk. 23:34

Forgiveness for stealing a pack of gum is one thing, but for murdering millions of innocent people is another and cannot be taken lightly. Jesus Himself warned of the judgment facing those who perpetrate outrages against the little ones. "It would have been better for them to have a mill stone hung around their neck and be cast into the sea!" Mk. 9:42 While God is a God of forgiveness, in the face of such horror as the holocaust is it a sin to cry out for justice instead of forgiveness? In the end, one cannot be too quick to judge another or expect them to forgive when we have not experienced what they have. The forgiveness that Jesus offered from the cross and that can be offered in the holocaust is not a human forgiveness but a Divine Forgiveness and it is a gift that is bestowed only by God. Who receives it and when they receive it and why some may receive it and others may not is a mystery only God knows and decides.

To believe in human nature or not?

To question God or to trust in Him?

To forgive or to seek revenge?

To hope or to despair?

To go on living or to die?

In the end each one of us has to face these questions in life and society.

These are the questions the Holocaust places before us!

Prayer : O Crucified Jesus, open my eyes to see the suffering not only of my friends and families but to see the suffering of strangers and enemies; of those who are different and disagree with me. For they all share in your redemptive suffering for the life of the world.

Questions and Meditations

1. Why is there war?
2. Who is my neighbor?
3. Who is suffering around me?

4. Whom do I need to forgive?
5. Where is there injustice in the world? In my city and country?