

## Thought for the Day 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2019

Good morning,

But it wasn't yesterday. As the Easter bells were ringing out news was coming in of another horrific massacre. This time in Sri Lanka. Churches and hotels, tourists and worshippers – targets of assassins. As Christians here and around the world were singing 'Jesus Christ is risen today' the blast of bombs was their antiphon. The latest toll is 290 dead and hundreds injured.

The horror of Christians slaughtered while worshipping God in their Sri Lankan churches mirrors the terror of Muslims slain in their mosques in Christchurch New Zealand. No longer is 'blasphemy' such an anomalous word in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, for to murder someone at prayer is in anybody's book a blasphemous act.

I confess that as I led the congregation in our village church in singing 'Thine be the Glory' my voice faltered on the line 'no more we doubt thee'. I wondered about the maimed and the bereaved in Sri Lanka and how they would ever be able to sing again such a conviction.

On Good Friday I led the Meditation here on Radio 4. I interviewed Gee Walker whose son Anthony was murdered with an axe to his head in a brutal racist attack. Gee got people from all over the world to pray for him. And he died. I asked her what that did to her faith. Her answer took me by surprise. She said it increased it, because now she had nobody else but God to cling to.

One of the most vivid images of the Resurrection is of the risen Jesus standing before his disciples traumatised by his death showing them the tangible scars of his torture and execution. It was not a sight for the faint-hearted. It was as if he were saying to them – with compassion and humility – this is what it has cost me, and this is the price you might have to pay for telling my story.

For Christians that story involves the naming of evil and sin. It's also about praying for those who persecute you. It takes in loving your enemies – not just in theory but in practice.

Of course, our natural reactions are to retaliate and seek revenge but that, according to other great teachers like Mahatma Gandhi, would only escalate the terror.

The teaching of Jesus takes us to another level – admittedly a supernatural one. But even though I'm a believer and biased, in the face of such horror, it has about it an ethereal ring of truth.

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