

Donnybrook

18 November 2021

Welcome

Once, I had a student from Syria, a monk of the Syrian Orthodox Church. We became friends and one day it was possible to ask him, what do you do when you, as a Syrian, are praying the Psalms and you come across phrases such as "Lord, bless Israel". His response was forthright: we skip those bits.

You may have felt the same about this morning's first reading. Of course, it carries forward the story and of course it is a highly dramatic illustration of religious zeal, but still it leaves us uncomfortable. We are wary of extremism and we are especially and rightly wary of religious extremism in its violent expression.

Topic

Our good and necessary insistence upon tolerance can create challenges.

Steps

At least in Western culture, faith is increasingly viewed as a private matter – almost an kind of hobby, nice for you but don't let it appear in the public domain. Linked with the good insistence upon tolerance, people can feel that all religions are really the same in any case and there's no point in getting excited about one or the other.

As believers, we on the other hand, feel we have discovered something wonderful – a lasting love, victory over death, wisdom for living and a constant source of joy. My two favourite expressions of it come from St Paul, both from second Corinthians

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, ... was not "Yes and No"; but in him it is always "Yes." For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes." For this reason it is through him that we say the "Amen," to the glory of God. (2 Corinthians 1:19-20)

In other words, we believe God has acted in Jesus' teaching, life death and resurrection, and faith in that God fills our lives with love and joy, wisdom and guidance.

Conclusion

Such a conviction shapes my whole life and must come out not only in actions but also in words. Nowadays, it takes courage, of course, and a certain wisdom to know when to speak.