

Je suis Charlie?? Freedom and Tolerance

The Host Apostolate
www.thehostapostolate.org
14, Goatbeck Terrace,
Langley Moor,
County Durham,
DH7 8JJ
United Kingdom

The violent and tragic death of any one is a cause for sadness, pain and maybe even outrage or anger. This is so in the events of last month and the death of the Parisian journalists. Equally abhorrent are the deaths of so many now, in violent conflagration throughout the world, where lives have been taken and stability shattered. It is a strange irony that where whole nations are threatened or groups of people especially children, the reaction is muted because it seems that we are helpless or that it does not directly affect us. Often these events occur where the voiceless are persecuted and killed with no one to speak for them. The reaction to the events in Paris was exceptional and in terms of horror understandable, but it produced a wave of solidarity which needs to be looked at more closely.

Because by definition the men that were murdered were Journalists they already had a voice through colleagues and friends in the profession. The events happened in the part of the world with easy access to media. Oh, how quickly the protest movement exploded (and possibly died) onto our screens and reading matter. 'Je suis Charlie' (I am Charlie) became a slogan signalling freedom and freedom of the press. Clearly the responsibility and indeed right to truthfully inform all of the news is a precious right. Clearly too, it can be a way of making peace by alerting people to injustice and a way of bringing about change. Where repression exists basic freedoms are also lacking. But freedom too has its counter force which is responsibility. There is a feeling around now that any attack on any group is justified in the name of freedom. But is this true freedom? On the one hand we have laws safeguarding religious freedom and on the other hand we think that lampooning any religion is also justified. No one should be killed for expressing deeply held views but equally no one has the right to mock the views of others in a way that sets people against each other and leads to intolerance, hatred and fear of persecution. Freedom surely has to be used responsibly.

Recently we had cases of the intrusiveness of the press in tapping of phones etc. to get a better story and this was condemned. Surely no one would attempt to justify killing because it was a freedom. Freedom here was, is, curtailed by justice, love and tolerance. In other words are we permitted to make acts that provoke others and can lead to violence? Clearly not, Journalists have rights, and can choose to exercise them to the limits but does freedom require a little more than self-expression at any cost where safety of others is involved? If there is a genuine and basic need to outline fundamental differences surely this can be done in a manner that poses questions and seeks solutions or tolerates differences. Where evil is being proposed rather than good equally there is a responsibility to stop this spreading. During Nazi Germany many good men used the press to outline what the real agenda of Hitler was, the extermination of a people, Jewish people. Men such as Bl. Titus Brandsma or Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about this and paid the price. Standing up for equality and freedom is surely an essential ingredient of the Christian message. But here we have the essence of criticism and freedom. Mockery and false humour that does not bring peace and betterment cannot be justified if it brings about hatred and sadness.

Seeing the posters I wanted to say *Je suis Jesus*, not Charlie. I found that there were those on the march too, who while finding the deaths abhorrent did not necessarily agree with the satire. We live in complex and troubled times. It is easy to poke fun at the beliefs of others without thinking about the consequences that might ensue

Are we not meant to be Jesus to each other? During February we are entering Lent, the 18th is Ash Wednesday where we are called to repent and believe the Good News. We are reminded too that we are all small before the Lord but much loved.

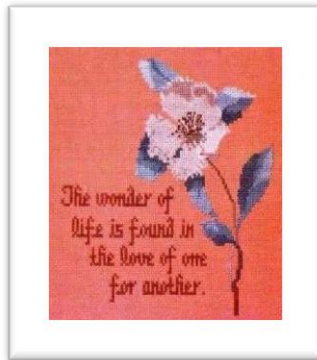
We are reminded that we have a duty to reproach and be concerned for each other but always with love and compassion 'And let us be moving **one another** at all times to **love** and good works' (Hebrews 10.24)

Again St Paul urges us with these words:

'As for you brothers you were called to be free. But do not let this freedom become an excuse for letting your physical desires control you. Instead let love make you serve one another. For the whole of the law is summed up in one commandment" Love one another as I have loved you. But if you act like wild animals, hurting and harming each other, then watch out, or you will completely destroy one another.'

The Good News is in fact this, that it is Good News that we can rise above our own desires, faults and failings by Grace and that we do not have to be driven by that which is false and destructive. Freedom is a massive gift of God. We are not puppets on strings but we have the liberty of the children of God. The greater our desire to love the greater our freedom grows as we are then not bound by merely human things but also by the ways of God.

We live in an age when too often our rights overrule our love, our reason and common sense and sometimes simple courtesy. Are we really free to insult one another at will? A writer once wrote that we are happier when we give someone a piece of our heart rather than a 'piece of our mind.' One of the greatest attributes of true tolerance is the ability to listen, really listen to the other person's point of view. However in order to do this we have to suspend judgement and be prepared to change our perspectives. In other words we have to be humble enough to accept that we may not be able to change their minds but that we can accept them as persons even if we disagree with them. Force and coercion can never be justified in getting a change if the object and purpose is peace and betterment. Tolerance and freedom go hand in hand. Where better can we see it exemplified than in the life of Jesus himself. He not only challenged the strictly formal view held by the Pharisees which made them judgemental and lacking in love but he also never forced them to change their mind. He often put out an olive branch to those seeking his guidance but let them go free if they could not 'take' His words to them. This is especially true of the rich young man who wanted to follow Jesus but could not give up his riches. We see it in his attention to the Samaritans who were so despised by the Jewish majority. We see it in the forgiveness that he



demonstrated time and time again even when the Apostles did not understand. Yet he led them to the ultimate freedom of loving and being prepared to follow his path in this regard. Freedom leads us to make choices not encumbered by earthly priorities and limiting desires but by the ultimate choices bound to our fundamental desire to do the things of love and not hate. This is true freedom for it requires of us much self-sacrifice and courage.

As Lent encroaches perhaps we could think and pray about Freedom of the Spirit and what the desire to live for God really means in our lives.

Nelson Mandela famously said: 'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate they can be taught to love for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'

Halina Holman

Pope Francis in Manila. Jan 2015

Why do children suffer so much? Why do children suffer? When the heart is able to ask itself and weep, then we can understand something. There is a worldly compassion which is useless. You expressed something like this. It's a compassion that makes us put our hands in our pockets and give something to the poor. But if Christ had had that kind of compassion he would have greeted a couple of people, given them something, and walked on. But it was only when he was able to cry that he understood something of our lives. Dear young boys and girls, today's world doesn't know how to cry. The marginalised people, those left to one side, are crying. Those who are discarded are crying. But we don't understand much about these people in need. Certain realities of life we only see through eyes cleansed by our tears. I invite each one here to ask yourself: have I learned how to weep? Have I learned how to weep for the marginalised or for a street child who has a drug problem or for an abused child? This is the first thing I want to say: let us learn how to weep. The great question of why so many children suffer, the response that we can make today is: let us really learn how to weep. In the Gospel, Jesus cried for his dead friend, he cried in his heart for the family who lost its child, for the poor widow who had to bury her son. He was moved to tears and compassion when he saw the crowds without a pastor. If you don't learn how to cry, you cannot be a good Christian. This is a challenge.

Feast days in February

2st The Presentation of the Lord... 3rd. St Blaise.

5th St Agatha 6th St Paul Miki.

11th World day of prayer for the sick and Our Lady of Lourdes. 18th **Ash Wednesday, Lent begins.**

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