

21 December 2014

Like many of you, I was transfixed by the hostage situation in Sydney on Monday. I spent most of the day in the car driving around to different appointments getting updated reports on the radio. Seeing the evening news was another thing completely; the distressing scene of the hostages with their hands against the glass window of the chocolate shop; the look of horror on the faces of the two young women who escaped; the intensity of the situation as the day wore on. Despite the desperate situation, by late evening I was greatly encouraged by the fact that religious and community leaders had begun gathering in Sydney mosques to be together and to pray for a peaceful resolution to what had become a critical situation.

Like many of you, I went to bed Monday night praying for a peaceful resolution to the situation. The morning news at 6.00am on Tuesday revealed a very different story entirely. Lying in bed listening to the radio, they played the rapid gun-fire that brought the situation to a head; to me, it sounded like a war-zone which we normally associate with the Middle East, but this had happened in the heart of Sydney. The gun-fire went on and on; and then I found myself crying. I thought to myself, 'But it's a coffee shop, a happy place, a gift shop at Christmas time. Now it has become the place of unparalleled violence and horror.' What a dreadful thing to occur at any time but especially in this festive season. And as this tragedy was unfolding in Sydney, dozens of young children were killed in a terrorist attack in Pakistan. And last night brought the tragic news of that shocking and horrific stabbing of young children in Cairns. We are left ask the question, 'Has the world gone completely mad?'

As a priest and a human being, I have very few words to explain this violence and horror. And yet, in the face of such tragedy we see signs of hope; the community's sense of solidarity with the victims and that great floral tribute; the mother of Tori Johnson, the hero of the moment, issuing a statement about the loss of her son with the message, 'peace on earth to people everywhere'. At a moving memorial Mass at St Mary's Cathedral on Tuesday, Archbishop Anthony Fisher stated, 'Hell has touched us today'. At the conclusion of the service, Malcolm Turnbull was in tears, so moved did he feel. Because of the potential back-lash

against the Muslim community, social media went wild around the world with the message, 'I'll ride with you'.

As Christians, we have a very specific task. We stand in solidarity with those who are broken, those who suffer, those whose trust has been shattered and those who now feel unnerved by this event. We pray for healing and for courage. And, four days out from Christmas, we turn to Jesus the Prince of Peace, and ask him to bring this gift of healing and peace, to transform hearts that are broken and to give us the grace to always work for peace and unity in our local community, our nation and our world.

Peace, that precious gift is not beyond our reach. Now more than ever, let us pray for this wonderful gift.

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; it is in dying that we are born again to eternal life.