

The Mystery of Violence

The recent atrocities committed against the Assyrian Christians of the Khabur region in northeast Syria prompt us together, as Christians believing in Jesus Christ, to take action. As Christian believers in Jesus Christ, what should we do? What should we say? What is our response as believers?

In many ways and especially now, in the immediate wake of this tragedy, the best thing we can do is to rest in the silence prayer. We read in the Old Testament that Job suffers in the way that no one ever suffered. He lost his wife, children and wealth but he knows one thing, that he is righteous. His friends came and sat with him in silence for seven days and seven nights in a kind of prayerful solidarity, feeling their lost; He knows that he doesn't deserve such sufferings so he complains to God and cries out to God the way people often cry to God and still do today. "Job's three friends heard of all this adversity that had come upon him, [and] each one came... [to] mourn with him, and to comfort him." (Job 2:11).

The best way we can do now, precisely as a believer, is to rest in silence of prayer for all people for those who died and those who are affected by it physically and emotionally with recent tragedy in Khabur.

But we are also a religion of the word. We believe in Jesus God's the word incarnate. The Word became flesh and dwell among us. God spoke to us the deepest truth about Himself... about us... and about the world. Therefore, as a religion of Word we have to speak and our revelation says something.

Hence, as we emerge from the silence of solidarity and prayer, what words can we bring to event is senseless and violence as this. We can speak about four mysteries:

1. The mystery of wickedness:

The Bible tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God, which is reflected in our intellect, free will, creativity, power and love and we are invited to make friendship with God, and we are invited to live in the life of God. But the Bible also tells us that there is the fact of Fall. There is corruption in us because of sin that has darkened our minds. The Fall has twisted the work of will and it has deviled our imagination and limited our powers. The doctrine of Fall says, although we are made in the image and likeness of God but we are seriously compromises. What we see in the present day of Syria and Iraq unconvertible evidences of Fall and corruptions.

In the past 200 years there have been many times we have been tempted to say, like politicians, social theorists and psychologists have sometimes suggested to us that deep down all is well with us. That if we just change this political situation and or that psychological situation then all will be well. However, whenever we are tempted to believe this, we are reminded of the mystery of wickedness or evil. In other words, we are reminded with the fact that sin is deep and dark.

I am not ok, and neither are you. Remember that famous book in the 70's called "I'm Ok, You're Ok" written by Thomas Anthony Harris. It made the *New York Times* Best Seller list and remained there for almost two years.

We all see the tangle web of sin. We can see how the tangle web of sin creates the conflict in the Middle East. In addition, let your imagination go back to 75 years ago during the WWI and WWII. All of those years of conflict, retributions, violence, genocide, holocaust and the long history anti-Semitism are also from the tangle web of sin.

My point is that sin is like a tangle-web; it is like a fungus that grows within itself. Whenever we attempt to underestimate the power of our sin, events like this remind us about one thing; that sin is very real and exists in some way or another in all of us.

2. The mystery of the impermanence of the world

We have here below no lasting city. Our eyes are fixed finally on the city and realm beyond this one. The world we know is made of passing things. Things are transient. They come into being and then pass away. Psalmist says "yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered" (Psalm 90: 5-7). Whenever we are tempted to rest complacently here in our achievements; financial, culture, social, political and others, we put ourselves in a very spiritual danger. We have not here a lasting city; it reminds us what happened to us on the wake of this tragedy.

3. The mystery of Salvation:

Jesus recited this parable "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lost one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost...?" Luke 15:4. Jesus Christ, during his earthly mission, was continually in the pursuit of lost souls. He was seeking lost men and women, and it was for this reason that he went down among them, even among those who were most evidently lost, that he might find them. In Mark 2: 13 we read "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him." We have heard the story 100 times and we think sometimes that the Pharisees are the bad persons and tax collectors are good. However, in Jesus' time it was the opposite. Pharisees were up-right, law abiding and God fearing people; they were the cream of the society while the prostitutes and tax collectors were the worse of the worst. Tax Collectors were like the collaborators of the Nazis period. They were the Jews collaborating with the Romans and extracting money from the Jews working for the collaborators. He searches out, yes even with the worst of sinners, says they need to repent for their evil acts and recognize Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

4. The mystery of forgiveness

Peter came and asked Jesus: "Lord how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." (Matt 18:21-22). It means you should always forgive and this is for Jesus

a way of life. While Jesus was on the Cross and while insulted and abused by all sorts of men, Jesus said "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34).

I know it is difficult, even in a personal way, it is difficult. How much difficult when for an entire nation? I know there is a feeling of retribution (vengeance). But, the attitude of non-forgiveness is broken only by forgiveness.

It doesn't mean turn back on evil... it doesn't mean deny it... it doesn't mean trifling with it. We know the black heart of evil but at the same time, because the Son of God in his moment of evil; in his moment of confrontation with it forgave, so we must forgive. Hence let us pray in compassion with the victims and as a Christian should be willing to pray for the victimizers to turn their mind and heart and release our people. Let us pray of our ability to forgive.

In conclusion, the recent conflicts in Iraq and Syria have left us stunned and speechless. Yet our tradition brings the word of God to bear on even the darkest of events. There are four mysteries that emerge from the tragedy: The mystery of wickedness, the mystery of the impermanence of the world, the mystery of salvation, and the mystery of forgiveness.