

# Along the track

## A Reminder

The novel *Tale of Two Cities* begins with these lines:

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...*

We live in troubled times. It is natural to be concerned, to wonder what on earth is happening. I often meet people who wonder where 'it' is all going to end. But the worst of times contains the seeds of the best, in foolishness there can be seeds of wisdom, darkness always contains a glimmer of light, hope can help overcome despair. The *Tale of Two Cities* describes a dreadful time in history but it is also a story of love, hope, courage, generosity and even resurrection.

Spiritual writer, Fr Ronald Rolheiser describes our situation:

Many of us want a God who rescues us, who intervenes actively for justice and goodness in this world, who acts visibly now in this life, and who doesn't let us get sick and die. None of us want a God who asks us to live in a life-long patience, predicated on the promise that in the end, whenever that will be, love and justice will prevail, all tears will be dried, and all will finally be well. We want life, love, justice, and consummation now, not in some distant future and only after a lifetime of heartache.

The month of the Sacred Heart, is set aside to remind us that God has not abandoned the world. We are not living in "End Times." God does not love us any the less. In very uncertain and difficult times, at a time when both the religious and political structures of His day had lost their way, in a country subjugated by cruel and oppressive occupiers where life meant little, Jesus showed us in word and in action that God was (and remains) close to every one; and that we are loved deeply, that God is both generous and compassionate.

But why doesn't God step in and rescue us NOW? Why doesn't God intervene and bring about the Reign of Justice and Peace NOW? If we think about it, God has intervened in pretty spectacular ways – God called Moses and the prophets to give us direction, to call us back when we went astray, when we went looking for peace and happiness and satisfaction in the wrong places. Their words still resonate today – the prophet Micah, for example told us that this is what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8).

God intervened in the most spectacular way possible with the coming of Jesus. In Jesus, God's love took flesh - we can see it in his actions, He 'lived' compassion – He welcomed the outcaste, the sinner, those who thought God had abandoned them. He invited the religious leaders to join with him, he sought to overturn the restrictive laws

and practices which were not the hallmarks of a loving and generous God. He told us not to put ourselves in the first place but to be ready to serve others. Jesus challenged us not to judge others but to live with the tension, and let God make the judgments. So we need to live by our own convictions, be true to ourselves and let others do the same.

God wants us to be co-workers, co-creators if you like of the Reign of God. It doesn't mean God sits idly by, watching and waiting like some giant puppeteer. If we look around, almost daily we see people in our own community and on the world stage inspired to work for justice and peace, we see people who comfort others, who work to relieve poverty and loneliness and addiction.

So much of the trouble in our world comes when people feel oppressed, unjustly treated, disenfranchised, where their rights are not respected, when they feel ostracised for their beliefs, where there appears to be no way out of grinding poverty in a world where so few seem to own just about everything. Much of the conflict comes from ancient wounds that have not been addressed, long held grudges unresolved. "Peace is not simply the absence of war, but is, 'the work of righteousness' (Isaiah 32:17)," Pope Francis said. "Justice as a virtue calls for the discipline of forbearance. It demands that we not forget past injustices but overcome them through forgiveness, tolerance and cooperation. It demands the willingness to discern and attain mutually beneficial goals, building foundations of mutual respect, understanding and reconciliation." (Pope Francis, Korea 2014.)

Peace and justice need people who will work for equality, and inclusivity. Working for peace asks us for open hearts and minds, to accept that in God's house there are many rooms and that all faiths, not least our own, are seeking God.

In Pope Francis' words, our faith ought to grow "by attraction, not by proselytising". He called on us to act towards others with graciousness, charity, and respect. "We can inspire others through witness so that one grows together in communicating. But the worst thing of all is religious proselytism, which paralyses: 'I am talking with you in order to persuade you,' No. Each person dialogues, starting with his and her own identity." the Pope said.

This could be the best of times, the age of hope and wisdom, the age of co-operation and peace but only if we start in our own homes, in our own communities, our neighbourhoods, when we reach out to find common ground, mutual understanding, when we work to overcome injustice, when we speak up against prejudice and propaganda. And let it spread from there!

Regards  
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