

Service for Peace
Saturday 8 February 2020
Catholic Church of the English Martyrs, Streatham

Dear friends

A week ago tomorrow this community was shaken by a senseless terrorist attack. Two people were stabbed leaving serious injuries, another hit by flying glass, and many others left in a state of shock and disbelief. We've asked ourselves, how can this have happened on our streets? How can this have happened to our people, in our neighbourhood?

Whatever its reason, terrorism never achieves anything except to wound and destroy. It's the weapon of those who want division. It's an assault by those who have nothing to offer but hatred. It's the choice of those who want to dominate by force and fear.

For anyone to claim religious justification for terrorism is quite simply blasphemous. Terrorism is an offence to God. It is not in accordance with God's will and can never be. Terrorism is an inversion, a perversion, of faith in God. At the most radical level it breaks the primary commandment shared and upheld by all religious traditions, the commandment to love every person as a fellow human being, as a brother or a sister. Whoever we are, wherever we are from, whether we are religious or not, we are members together of one human family and every person deserves to be respected.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' This is the teaching of Jesus Christ. If we do not work for peace, we cannot be children of God. If do not work for peace, we have misunderstood what it means to be human. Every decent person wants peace. Every single person must be an instrument of peace.

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Today, we come in solidarity to pray for peace in this community, for peace in our country and across our world. We remember especially those attacked last Sunday and their families. We pray for everyone involved, for healing and for unity.

This weekend, in different ways and in different places, the people of this community are standing side by side to say 'no' to violence and 'yes' to peace. Across cultures, religions, and nationalities, we say 'no' to 'terrorism' and 'yes' to reconciliation. We refuse to be dictated to by the tiniest minority. Instead, today, we give voice to the power of love, to the beauty of harmony, the blessing of peace.

Each one of us needs to be a peacemaker. If we hate another person – because of who they are, because of their religion, because of their lifestyle, because of their colour, language, or race, because they are different in any way – we have stepped onto the slippery slope of anger that ends in violence.

But we are called to be peacemakers. We can be secure in our own identity without feeling threatened by anyone who is different. We can be secure in our own identity without needing to threaten anyone who is different.

We can build bridges between our homes and on our streets. We can befriend our neighbours and create friendships. We can rejoice in our diversity, ensuring our communities are places of safety for everyone. The power is within each of us to make a difference.

Being a peacemaker begins in the heart with a desire to create a better world for ourselves and a brighter future for our children. We can bring about change: by how we live, by the relationships we establish, by the responsibility we exercise.

We will not accept that peace is impossible. We will not believe that violence is a solution. We will not tolerate racism, xenophobia, bullying or aggression.

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Here and now we commit ourselves to be peacemakers. We will not let hatred provoke us or divide us. We will never let terrorism win. The more anyone tries to push us apart, the more we will come together. The more anyone tries to sow division, we will unite with each other.

We will speak up and stand up for peace. We do this as children of God. We do this as members of the human family. We do this because every person matters, because we are all children of one Heavenly Father.

The Lord Jesus said, *'Blessed are the peacemakers.'*

We will work for the blessing of peace, for friend and stranger, for young and old.

We will be the blessing peace to one and all. Amen

*Most Reverend John Wilson
Archbishop of Southwark*

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