

“Justice” - Third Sunday of Easter

The Archbishop of Canterbury has been criticised by many, many people for saying that the way Osama bin Laden died had left him with ‘an uncomfortable feeling.’ I have to confess, I too am unhappy with the Archbishop’s words. He shouldn’t feel uncomfortable. He should be outraged. If, as it seems, bin Laden was unarmed, and this was realised, then what happened in the early hours last Monday in Pakistan was a lynching.

It is undeniable that bin Laden had the blood of thousands upon his hands and that the world is a better place because he can no longer sponsor terrorism. But when we deny any individual the due process of justice - which would have denied him the ability to sponsor terrorism - we should fear what else we might choose to do in the future.

What is justice? Well, that is a big question. But four hundred years before Jesus was born, we were told in Plato’s *Republic* (331), and Plato presumed that this definition had long been accepted, that justice is giving to each man what is his due. So before you can decide what justice is, you have to know what is due to each person or, to use the more popular language of today: what does each person have a right to that must never be denied, that is inalienable?

Arguing over what are our rights is a large part of on-going political debate but all people of good will agree upon one definite right, or as the American Declaration of Independence puts it: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life...’ That means that no one, unless in self-defence, gets to take life; only God. And, as the Book of Wisdom, addressing God, beautifully puts it ‘you are mild in judgement, you govern us with great lenience’ (12:18).

So inalienable is the right to life that when we deny it for anyone else, we are the ones who suffer most for we are made in the image and likeness of God, who is Justice, so to act unjustly is to act first and foremost against ourselves. As Plato put it in *The Gorgias* to the young Athenian Callicles, who thought that might is right:

‘...what my opinion is I have already stated several times, but it will bear repetition yet once more...to rob me or enslave me or break into my house, or generally speaking, to inflict any wrong upon me and mine brings more harm and disgrace upon the wrong-doer than upon me who suffer the wrong’ (508).

In tonight’s Gospel, the two disciples walking to Emmaus, thinking of what had been done to Jesus - the greatest act of injustice ever - ‘stopped short, their faces downcast.’ I am grateful to the soldiers who defend us and I am grateful to the American government for wanting to prevent bin Laden sponsoring terrorism but what happened last Monday was probably murder. What the victims of 9/11 deserve, however, and what we so desperately need in our world is justice.