

## Homily for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

You may have heard the news this past Tuesday that in northern France an 85-year old parish priest, Fr. Jacques Hamel, was killed by two ISIS assassins who stormed the church while he was celebrating morning. Later, upon the arrival of the police, these terrorists were then shot and killed to end the hostage situation. This is just a horrible act that makes no logical sense, apart from the wickedness that begets such hatred and malice.

Father Jacques was described by fellow priests as “very kind” and “someone whom no one could hate.” “He was a humble, gentle person.” “What really impressed people”, another said, “was that, at that age, he still had the will to serve.” However you describe his qualities, Fr. Jacques is certainly a martyr – murdered for his faith in Jesus Christ.

In case you’re not familiar, a martyr is a person who is killed or who suffers greatly for their religion or their faith. And I can’t help but notice the difference between the two views of martyrdom in this situation – between Christianity and militant, terroristic Islam. The defenseless priest celebrating Mass. The violent attackers with weapons. The celebration of the Eucharist, which is the memorial of the Crucified One, who gave His Body and Blood for our Salvation. The vicious and hateful actions of those who crucify and torture. The Lamb of God. The wolves who come to devour.

While on the plane-ride to Krakow, Poland for World Youth Day, Pope Francis was asked to comment on this tragic situation in France. The Pope said, “The real word is war...yes, it's war...for some time the world has been in piecemeal war.” The Holy Father then went on to say, “When I talk about war, I'm serious but not a war of religions. There is war for money, for resources, for nature, for dominion. This is war.”

So, it's war – that's clear. And war always has motives, as we know from World Wars I and II and from all wars in human history. But who is the enemy? Well, maybe that's not so clear. Certainly militant, terroristic Islam sees Christianity as their enemy. But, what drives them to commit the atrocities that our world is becoming all too familiar with? Evil. Satan. Sin. St. Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Ephesians that “our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits...So stand fast and...in all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Our real enemy is not people, no matter how much we rightly hate what they do. Rather, our enemy is Satan and his kingdom of darkness. And as the father of all lies and the one who sows seeds of division, if the devil can pit people against one another, it takes the focus off of him, and his victories come all the easier.

This is why Jesus preached in Matthew's Gospel, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust." And He also reminds us of the reality of what it means to be His disciples; for He declared, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you."

My brothers and sisters, our world is currently at war, and it has been ever since evil entered into existence. And as individuals, who do not determine international policy or military interventions, we must remember who our true enemy is. And how do we defeat that enemy? First of all, by identifying Satan for who he is and how he works – through lies, hatred, and division. Otherwise, the evil one can even pit faithful Christians against one another as we fight about who the real enemy is. Let it be known that the army of ISIS is an agent of the kingdom of darkness. But if we take out the commander of the soldiers, don't we thereby incapacitate the whole army? Again according to Ephesians, our weapons are "the armor of God", "righteousness as a breastplate", "faith as a shield", and "the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

One of the most important, and I mean important, things we can do is to pray and fast as individuals and as a Church for those who persecute us. This is Jesus' command, not mine. Pray and fast that the kingdom of darkness be dismantled. Pray and fast for the conversion of ISIS. Pray and fast for our government and the leaders of the world to know what to do. Pray and fast. And remember who our enemy really is. God bless you.