

Loving you Enemies

Two very challenging narratives are emerging from eastern Ukraine. Firstly, there are credible stories of murder and ill-treatment of civilians by Russian occupiers. Secondly, there is evidence of very low morale amongst those same occupiers. These are most likely linked to each other; modern understanding of battlefield psychology has it that badly-led, hungry and angry soldiers are more likely to break the clear international rules of warfare.

Where, then, does Luke 6; 27-31 leave us?

Jesus is standing up in front of a huge and diverse crowd, who are reportedly there seeking healing. He responds first with the Beatitudes, then with a number of stark warnings. Then comes the real challenge – we are to love those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and to turn the other cheek.

How then to cope with these injunctions when we hear daily of fresh atrocities that we never expected to encounter – this behaviour (we thought) belonged to the past, to ‘another country’?. Not eastern Europe. But if we say that we are followers of Christ, we have no option but to find a way to comply.

If we cannot yet bring ourselves to pray for the Russian rank and file, we may try one or more of the following. We can pray for a just peace. We can pray for an international justice system that will bring truth and reconciliation. We can pray for the international investigators who will look into breaches of the Geneva Conventions and of other international rules of warfare. We may be able to pray for the families of men at the front – chances are they are told very little. We can certainly pray for international peacemakers who are working behind the scenes.

And we can certainly pray for the world that will emerge from this current chaos, as it most surely will.

Finally we should reflect on the years following 1945, when the world had to confront unspeakable inhumanity. The world heard Christ's request, as any of us who have walked the streets of Tokyo or Berlin will happily attest. This is a great opportunity for the Church, particularly if God can enable dialogue with the Russian Orthodox church, which is currently very influential. Luke 6; 37-38 may hold the key. The important thing is not to give up trying.

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