

Foolishly, or not, I've been watching a detailed blow by blow, literally at times, account of 1933 in Berlin. It's chilling to watch the dismantling of love. Each avenue, each possibility of love is gradually and methodically shut down so that the focus becomes on only one possibility: hatred personified in the otherwise emptied shell of a person – a bitter angry man who knows exactly how to empty others of their power to love. It includes the unedifying spectacle of Hitler and the Pope of that time agreeing to a Concordat – the Church gulled into the false hope of influencing Hitler towards peace, or at least the preservation of its own interests. It's something of this contrast between a world of love and a world of hatred which is being emphasized here in today's readings: not another world to this one but the same world lived in two quite separate ways. It's there in the choice that Judas has made and in the choice the disciples make to replace him and the choice God makes of us. This choice is at every moment before us but our freedom to choose one against the other is weakened or strengthened by our line of travel by each choice we make every day. If we choose love over and over again we find it becomes part of us, an increasingly natural choice, a line of travel which determines us rather than us determining it. And equally so of hatred. But although it's up to us to align ourselves with one line of travel or the other it's not we who are filling the otherwise empty shell – it's the God of love or the absence of the God of love. There's no middle ground here – nature abhors a vacuum and if we empty ourselves of love, we allow hatred in instead. Watching all those faces in regimented lines expressing love for Hitler and hatred for all else is, however, chilling in another respect too – for we can so readily allow our love of God to become a real hatred of others also. This is where we have to be reminded that it is not our love of God that matters but God's love of us

“We ourselves have known and put our faith in
God's love towards ourselves.
God is love and anyone who lives in love lives in God
and God lives in him.”

That last “and” can seem consequential “I love and so God comes to love me”, but it's rather the other way round, God loves me and so I can love in turn – without God's love I can only hate. Love then as the sign that God lives in us and we live in God. But don't despair if you still find yourself unable to love, if bitterness and anger are still your default position: go back to the source of love and simply say it

“Lord open my eyes to your love that I may love others as you love me.”

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