

My one and only visit to the Yad Veshem museum in Jerusalem, detailing all the shock and horror of what the Nazi regime had done to the Jews of Europe, was shocking for me too in another respect – for the walls themselves seemed to be shouting at me that this same efficient brutality was happening now all around me in the streets and markets of the West Bank. The IDF and the settlers were in cahoots driving Palestinian Arabs from their land. Why did the Jews not too see this, this awful comparison? Some do. In a recent article of the Tablet the American- born Rabbi and professor – emeritus of Judaism at the University of Wales, Dan Cohn-Sherbok, nails it precisely :

“ In the modern world Jews still live in the shadow of the Holocaust. Scenes of suffering and death haunt Jewish consciousness. This is the background to understanding the Jewish reaction to events in Gaza and the West Bank. Hamas’ onslaught against Israel on 7th October was perceived as another Holocaust. For the Jews what is at stake is nothing less than their annihilation. The moral framework for Jewish living, the compassionate concern for all human life has been eclipsed.....In Israel and the diaspora Jews have come to perceive Israel’s war against Hamas as a life and death struggle. And in this quest the religious heritage that sustained Jews through their earthly struggles has been left behind.”

Or earlier, in even stronger terms, as he traces the replacement of Judaism by Zionism, the concentration of all hope in the state of Israel, rather than seeing Judaism as a “ light to the nations” and God as saviour means that

“This is the end Judaism as a religious tradition.”

Now all this has been said because our readings today are telling the same story – the story of either choosing faith in ourselves to bring salvation or faith in God. We too are a pilgrim people but the temptation is always to place our hope in the magnificence of our churches, the visible growth of the Church, the everlasting nature of the Vatican, the beauty of ritual or doctrine and so on. And throughout history we fight wars to this end, only we massacre Jews as well as Muslims and even turn our insecurity onto fellow Christians – from Cathars to Protestants of all stripes – and suffer their persecution of us in reply. We too have often failed to be “ a light to the nations” – have misplaced our hope, our faith in God.

Christendom is no more an answer to the question of faith, to our true religious heritage, than is the securing of the land of Israel for the Jews. It’s a false God. Our religious heritage, as spoken by Jesus to the Jews of his day, is to be so secure in God’s hope and future for us ,that is, in God’s love for us, that we can risk all in it’s pursuit.

“Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will fail not you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it for where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

We begin with ourselves, with our neighbour, with the stranger at the door. We have faith that God, that Christ, is already at work in us, in our neighbour and in the stranger at the door. And we learn to trust, often little by little, in this greater vision so that ultimately we can have no fear and we are at home wherever we are – with no need to have a wall to keep others out. This security, this faith can only come as we learn to surrender our own insecurities to God. It’s not a state this world recognises but a state of being, a religious tradition which can make Christians as well as Jews once more a “a light to the nations”. Our home is in God wherever we are.