

# Kindness, gentleness and love

AT SEA, I hear that a French priest has been killed in a terrorist attack. I also learn that terrorism has taken its toll in Germany in a number of atrocities. Each time I turn on the radio there has been yet another terrorist strike and even more innocent people have been killed or received life-changing injuries, and all of this is claimed to be in the name of religion. This resonates with those who have a prejudice and reinforces their own beliefs.

All too often such xenophobia expresses itself in hate crimes and racism. Ignorance of that which is different leads to worry; worry leads to suspicion; suspicion becomes fear and fear quickly turns to hate. Irrational though this is, it seems to be a feature of modern life that as the world becomes more globalised and integrated, the more we are exposed to that which is different and the less, it seems, that some are able to cope with the thought that others are different, have different political ideas, different social customs and different beliefs.

Jesus taught that as far as God is concerned there is no difference. In biblical times there were those who were Jews and the rest who were Gentiles. In other words, Jews were thought to be the chosen people of God and then there was the rest of humanity, the Gentiles, or those who were without God. This is one of the reasons why Jesus was viewed with so much suspicion,

because he argued that all were the same, and that all were the children of God with no preferential treatment.

This went against the received thinking of the day and challenged the Jews in their view that they were somehow special. Jesus taught that all of humanity is special. I believe this is right and so when anyone is hurt in the name of God because of a particular religious adherence, I question why the people perpetrating the violence are so insecure in their faith as to wish to quash those who disagree with them.

Within Christianity there is one heritage that seeks to understand the tenets of belief, using three tools of enquiry. These are the scriptures, reason and tradition. Seeing scripture as the word of God we can discern its meanings by applying our reason and setting this in the context of the tradition of the church that has matured through two millennia of context and usage.

With this heritage we can help each other to understand what is required of us by God. So when I hear of yet more horrors perpetrated on innocent people, a theme of the Christian scriptures comes to mind. In Matthew 7:12 and also in Luke 6:31 we read: "in everything do to others as you would have them do to you".

We don't need tradition or reason to understand that the world needs kindness, gentleness and love.