

Reflections at the time of the death of Osama bin Laden

The news of the demise of Osama bin Laden has been felt to bring a measure and a form of closure for thousands affected by the acts of terror over the past decade. It is crucial that the acts of terror in any form, including those masterminded by Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda, be challenged and overcome.

However, the death of Osama bin Laden is no cause for gloating, or unthinking jubilation. The biblical record is clear in Ezekiel 18:32: "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord GOD. Turn, then and live." We are therefore not called to relish the death of anyone. We are called to grieve the fact that turning and living was not chosen in the first place by Al Qaeda, who chose the way of death, but also to grieve all deadly spirals of violence and fear, hatred and prejudice with all their various causes.

Learning to find a way of understanding the causes of the way of violence and death can, by grace, lead to a measure of God given forgiveness of enemies, as the Gospel calls us to do: Matthew 5:43-44, John 13:34, Luke 6:27-28, Romans 12:14, 1 Corinthians 4:12, Romans 12:17-21, 1 Peter 3:9, 1 John 2:9-10. We need insight under God, rather than vengeance. Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30). An eye for an eye (Matthew 5:38) and the whole world goes blind. This means jingoism and enjoyment of the death of Osama bin Laden can find no place in Christian prayer or Christian thinking.

We can do no better than end with the words of a Christian leader who gave his life for the cause of justice, freedom and abundant life for all people: "Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." -- Martin Luther King, Jr.

And we also endorse the words of Jessica Dovey: "I mourn the loss of thousands of precious lives, but I will not rejoice in the death of one, not even an enemy."

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