

I was reflecting during the week with some colleagues, as we listed the litany of blood-shed and horror that has seemed to overwhelm the news reports over the last couple of weeks. And we noted two things above all else. Firstly, it seems that there is almost a hierarchy of importance to people's lives from the media's perspective. The result of this is that the killing of 9 people in Munich gained far more coverage than the 80 people who died in a suicide bomb in Afghanistan, only 24 hours later. Why? Was it because they were "western" lives killed in Munich? Or because we have become so weary and blunted to the horror in Afghanistan that it doesn't register anymore? The second thing we reflected upon was how much more difficult it must be to actually be living and working and ministering in Europe at the moment, where so many of these things are happening, and where people have a much stronger connection to places than do we, living so far away.

This was brought home to me strongly by a lament written by the Rt Revd Pierre Whalon, bishop-in-charge of the Convocation of Episcopal Churches in Europe. I share it with you today as a way in which you might join your prayers and laments with his:

*You know, God, that I am tired, I am sick and tired, of regularly writing these reflections. I do so because I am bishop for these lands. My heart goes out once again to a city battered and mauled by a kid with a gun. Last week it was a guy with a truck. Before that, with a knife, killing a mother and father in front of their three-year-old son. Before that, it was Brussels. And Paris. And Paris. And Toulouse.*

*Not to mention, Lord, what's happening in my country of origin, my homeland. Baton Rouge, Dallas, Orlando, San Bernardino. And the land I visited in 2003, that you brought me to just before the war, that stupid war. Baghdad, I want to go back, but I can't. And Turkey and Bangladesh. And the horror that is Saudi Arabia. I have friends, real friends, who are Muslim faithful, imams, even an ayatollah or two. And they are dying too. For what?*

*Everywhere, O God of my salvation, is blood. Everywhere, the wailing of families bereft of loved ones and homes. The courage of first responders who throw themselves into the breach. The fear of the rest of us. The streams of humanity, people like us, fleeing home and hearth for a life, any life, in Europe. In America. Canada. Australia. And a few who act out, like in Cologne. Or this kid in Munich.*

*Munich, Germany's most beautiful major city, where we worship you every Sunday, thanks to a Lutheran congregation that hosts us. Will the Germans now close that transit camp I visited in May, so clean and orderly as is their wont, cutting off more thousands who need to come? The shameful deal we cut with Turkey has stopped people going to Greece, but increased people coming to Italy. And our refugee centre in Rome, the only daytime centre in the Eternal City, now how many more will it have to serve?*

*Do you not hear the cries of your children, O God? Have you turned a deaf ear to our petitions? Let my cry come to you, O Lord! How long? How much longer must this so-called Islamic State continue to exist? When will you bring Boko Haram and all the other imitators to an end? What about the persecutors and the persecuted elsewhere in the world? In India and Indonesia. In Pakistan and Thailand and Myanmar. How many more million Congolese are going to die? How long, O Lord, how long?!*

*As one of the teachers you sent has said, we need to distinguish between optimism and hope. Optimism is passive, hope is active. It takes courage. The prophets of Israel, John the Baptist, and Jesus himself, were not optimists. But they looked to You in hope. So we have set our hope on you, O God, for there is none other left. We have put our trust in Jesus. We believe you have drenched us in your Holy Spirit. And therefore nothing — no terrorist, no Da'esh, no gun or bomb or butcher's knife — can separate us from your love for us in Christ Jesus.*

*Show us your love and mercy again. Please, I don't want to write more reflections like this.*

*And come to our aid. Give us courage to hope. Strengthen our faith. Empower us to overcome fear. Enable us to transform this world you have given us. To stanch the endless flow of blood. To give hope to the hopeless and to care for the helpless. To let no one, including our very selves, stand in the way of peace.*

*“Those who go out weeping, carrying the seed, will come again rejoicing, shouldering their sheaves.”*

*May it be so for us, now, O God of our weary years. For we ask this in the Name of Jesus, who lives and reigns with you and the same Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.*

If you are free this coming Wednesday in the late afternoon, you may wish to attend an historic event at St. Paul's Cathedral. At Evensong, at 5.10pm, the girls' voices of Lowther Hall will lead worship, for the first time in the Cathedral's history. This momentous occasion marks the beginning of the formal relationship between the Cathedral and their Choral Scholars from Lowther Hall, and is an occasion not to be missed

May John Baptist Vianney, Stephen, the Holy Men & Women of the Old Testament, and all the Saints walk with you this week... *Sam*