

Homily for Sunday, September 16, 2007

Introduction

Let me begin with some history. A Lutheran theologian, Larry Rasmussen, recently published an article on his church's various responses to events as they unfolded during the 1930's and 1940's in Germany. In the article he first laid out the socio-political realities of that place and time. You will notice the striking parallels between that time and our own.

-According to Rasmussen there was in Germany during the 1930-1933 period a "surge of aggressive national pride, a national chauvinism" which arose from the national humiliation that country suffered in World War I and the harsh Treaty of Versailles. Germany had been a teacher of the world, a leader in science and technology and an economic powerhouse.

-There was, also, in the 1920's the dream, a rationale and a plan for a new German empire.

-Starting in 1933 there was a curtailment of civil liberties and the organization by the new [Nazi] government of a sophisticated propaganda machine as that government captured the media.

-There was, too, the alliance of a capitalist business with a military caste - and an alliance of this business-military connection with right-wing populism. The working class voted its interests in accord with those of a strong corporate and military elite.

He then describes the responses of the Lutheran Church to all of this.

One part of the church gave enthusiastic support to what was happening and this sector became known as "German Christians".

Among other Lutherans a stance of neutrality was taken: they maintained a distance between faith and preaching the Gospel on one hand and the realm of politics and governance on the other.

Finally there was the "Confessing Church", opposed to Nazism, saying yes to Jesus Christ and no to Adolph Hitler.

I

We have here with us this evening a representative part of the "Confessing Church" in our time - regional representatives of Pax Christi -USA, the official Catholic peace movement. We welcome you and assure you that Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish is also part of that same "Confessing Church" or at least we try to be. The witness and work of Pax Christi and Queen of Peace are so vitally important.

This week we saw why they are critical if we are to rescue the soul of America:

-a four star general and the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, together with many members jet of the Congress spoke at exhausting length about why and how the U.S. must achieve "success" and "victory" in Iraq. As they nibbled around the edges of this colossal blunder that is the Iraq War, speaking of more or less terrorist bombings, of a greater or less successful surge in numbers of troops on the ground there, of possible troop withdrawals by December, or March or next August, I couldn't help but think of the story we've all heard about people enclosed in a dark room with an elephant. Each described minor features of the behemoth but never became aware of this enormous beast was in the room with them.

-this week we commemorated the tragedy of September 11, 2001 and declared it a "National Day of Remembrance". One respected Congressperson recalled his reaction to the horrific attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon, pretending, I think, to speak for all of us. He said that his first and enduring sentiment was to wreak revenge on those who attacked us.

-this week we heard the President of the United States package his intent to continue this war with a marketing euphemism "return on success" and an "enduring relationship" with Iraq.

II

What we have in our country is what Jesus condemned in his country 20 centuries ago: "blind guides". We have, in the words of today's first reading, fashioned a molten calf called militarism and military solutions - we have worshipped it and sacrificed thousands of young Americans and millions of Iraqis to it.

III

In all of this I may be preaching to the choir - at least I hope so. But it is extremely important to speak from all of our pulpits about these matters that touch our national soul, just as it was for the "Confessing Church" in Nazi Germany.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with another story from Germany during that sorry period of its history. I had a philosophy professor during my days in our Franciscan seminary who had served as Catholic chaplain at the Neurenburg war crimes trial in the late 1940's. He came to know Herman Goering, who, as you know, was second in command after Hitler in the Nazi hierarchy. Our professor told us once of a conversation he had with Goering, who told him that he had once advised Hitler to "give the people religion" as a way of keeping them quiet.

What an indictment of religion!

It cannot be so with us, especially in the light of what we do at this altar: remember and represent Jesus' death for the "crime" of speaking out against the injustices of His time.