

SERMON KRIJTBERG SATURDAY, JANUARY 14TH 2023

on Isaiah 49, 3 + 5 – 6, and John 1, 29 – 34.

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Gregory Brenninkmeijer Sj

There is a war going on, my dear friends, a war between Russia and the Ukraine. It is terrible. All those lives lost; all those families ripped apart. The destruction of cities, villages, lives. It is evil. We see it, we are disgusted and powerless. What can we do?

There are containers arriving in our ports. In some of them there are drugs, cocaine. More and more of those drugs are intercepted, but great quantities get through and are being distributed. People earn an enormous amount of money through this trade. Others get hooked and ruin their life and the lives of their loved ones for ever. It is evil. We see it. We are shocked, at least I am. I hear and read about it and feel powerless. What can we do?

Fugitives from Africa, after paying a horrendous price, are getting into utterly unsafe boats to cross the Mediterranean. They search for a better life. They flee the poverty, the climate change, that makes their land uninhabitable. Some do not make it to Europe and drown at sea. Others, who make it, are not welcome. They find themselves in terrible living conditions. They are helpless, whilst others make lots of money by trafficking them from misery to misery. Evil it is! It is all around. We see it. We try to defend our good life. We even help where we can, or we look the other way. It is evil. It is everywhere.

It is not difficult to continue this litany of wrongs, of evil. If you want more, just read the papers. This is not a new phenomenon. Evil is of all times. But it is not how our world was meant. It is always humans who wreck God's plan of building a world of justice and peace. It is humans who go for their own profit, disregarding the consequences for others. It is humans who cannot resist the attraction of richer and bigger, and more powerful, more important. It is selfishness that makes people into rivals of each other and neighbors into enemies.

Evil is of all times. And in all times God is calling people. Calling people to trust Him and to follow His plan. To oppose evil. He called Isaiah. We heard it in our first reading. He called Isaiah to be God's servant and to try to bring people back to following the Lord. That

was by no means plain sailing. There was evil in his days too, and he had no army, no arms to impose the Will of God on the wrongdoers. He had the power of his word and the brightness of his vision. He saw that one-day God would send a servant that would be able to make the impossible possible: to bring peace to our world. But even this Messiah would have to confront Evil. He would suffer and be killed. But because of Him God would bring justice to our world.

When John the Baptist came and preached renewal and repentance people thought: This is it! This is the one that Isaiah foretold ages ago. But John was quite clear about that: I am not the Messiah. I am the voice that calls in the desert: Prepare for the coming of the one who is greater than me. And in today's gospel we heard that: Seeing Jesus coming towards him John said: "Look, there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world." Now king Herod, whom John criticized for taking the wife of his brother and for all the other crimes Herod committed, added a further crime to all the rest by shutting John up in prison and having him beheaded during one of his birthday parties. It is evil.

But Jesus took up God's work. He did everything all the prophets had foretold. He brought good news to the poor, proclaimed liberty to captives, gave new sight to the blind and set the downtrodden free. People recognized in Him the promised Messiah and welcomed Him into King David's city Jerusalem, shouting: Hosanna to Him who comes in the Name of the Lord! But there was evil even then and there. Those in power were not looking for a new king who would probably put an end to their privileges and conceit. Evil offered them a traitor. Jesus was taken. In a sham-process was sentenced to death on the cross. Evil triumphed! But not really.

Jesus followers experienced Jesus alive and giving them His Spirit. They brought Jesus' teaching, but more important, Jesus' Spirit to every part of the world. They were the new servants of the Lord proclaiming the Good News: God has become one of us and He challenges us to live as He did and never to give in to evil. Evil that is and will be all around. Of some people we know that they have chosen God's side. We call them our Saints. All of them encountered evil, stood up against it, and many payed dearly for doing so. We recognize them as martyrs.

The mission the risen Christ gave to his disciples is valid to this very day. Go and make disciples of all the nations and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. Some 70 years ago I heard

that call and received the grace to answer it in my own insignificant way. I have tried to follow Jesus as honestly as I could, and tried to help others to find Jesus, to follow Him and to love Him. I know that in that mission there is no retirement and I hope to receive the strength to get on with it for a few more years.

And you, who are here this weekend celebrating the eucharist, taking part in Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. I hope that you too, in whatever way of life, will feel called to be servants of Our Lord. To hold on to the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and never to give up the endless fight against evil, that remains active and menacing, and is not retiring either. Amen.