

Pastor's column 24th Sunday 2021

A day or so ago, two Afghan journalists Taqi Darybi and Nemat Naqdi were arrested by the Taliban for covering protests in Kabul against Taliban violations of the rights of women. They were severely beaten; graphic pictures can be seen on the internet. Nemat was told they were lucky not to be beheaded. Recent events in New Lynn underscore the truth that "None of us lives far from the jungle." We may like to anaesthetize ourselves by distance, however worse atrocities occur by our State-legitimized killing of preborn babies in Epsom and other clinics in NZ - some 30 a day. It was the philosopher Hobbes who wrote, "Homo homini lupus" man is a wolf to man. It is not hard to imagine the imprinting of that truth on the mind and imagination of the young Jesus, as he may have witnessed some 2000 rebels being crucified by the Romans after Judas the Galilean lead the Sepphoris uprising and the cities destruction by Quintilus Varus. "Tzippori" in Hebrew (word for a bird, as the city was perched bird-like on a mountain) was about 6km north of Nazareth. (The dating around these events is somewhat inexact). We have been anaesthetized to the naked brutality of a crucifixion, with its accompanying slow and agonising death, by seeing "photo-shopped" images all our lives. Imagine a 6 year old boy seeing one after another after another - PTS seeded in his psyche and then erupting in the agony of the olive-press named garden- Gethsemane. Peter's scolding of Jesus (and that is what the Greek word means) evokes an angry rebuke from Jesus. "Get behind me Satan, for the way you think is not God's way, but man's" Satan means, "a stumbling block or stone". "Get behind me, Satan.." is the rebuke Jesus gave the devil in his desert sojourn and temptations. Then extraordinarily Jesus ups-the-ante! He tells Peter, and all the disciples that if anyone wants to be his disciple, he or she must be prepared to undergo what he himself is destined to undergo. As a Jewish Rabbi, Jesus calls us to "cover ourselves in his dust." This means that a disciple enters into a relationship of intimacy with Him, as the saying goes, "What would Jesus think, say or do in this or that situation?." Even more, we are to live, "in Him and He in us!"

Catholics are not Papologists. Catholics are first and foremost follows of the Way, who is Jesus. Some Popes have invited Jesus rebuke, as did the first Pope, Peter. Some Popes have, by their words or actions, denied, like Peter, they ever knew Jesus. A Pope, as chief shepherd, is to proclaim and protect the Good News, as embodied in the Great Catholic Tradition. He is its servant, not its master. If a Pope were to stray from this, his core mission, he would become a stranger to Jesus' flock and as Jesus says, "they will never follow a stranger; in fact they will run away from him because they do not recognise a stranger's voice." We are, as the Hebrew says, "Shema!" to listen, which is the root meaning of the Latin "obedire" to obey. As Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me!"

Taqi Darybi and Nemat Naqdi are to be admired for their courage in speaking, "truth to power." In laying the gauntlet down to ideological thugs and their indifferent, cold and lonely desert deity, they paid an awful price and still may yet do so again. May their courage, spark in us, the resolve and courage to follow Jesus, no matter what the cost, even if it costs not less than everything.