

September 13-14, 2014

***DEUS LO VULT:* GOD'S WILL AND THE CRUSADES**



Earlier this summer I read that ISIS had destroyed what was traditionally believed to be the tomb of the Old Testament prophet Jonah. I wondered what motivated them? Whenever you hear the biblical name Nineveh, recall that it is really near present day Mosul, the city many Iraqi Christians call home. Or, perhaps I should say had called home. The bible relates that Jonah was sent to preach to the Ninevites so that they would repent of their evil ways. In the 14th century, a mosque replaced a Christian Assyrian church that had stood for centuries over Jonah's tomb. Jonah figures also in the Koran, not just the Old Testament. In truth, ISIS is so radical that they reject all other interpretations of the Islamic faith, including the branch that reveres prophets. Left to their designs, they would destroy many other biblical sites to demonstrate the superiority of their religion to all others.

In 612 A.D., Mohammed claimed to have received a vision from the Archangel Gabriel, calling him to be the mouthpiece of Allah. The Koran (Arabic for "dictation") is purported to be the direct words of Allah to Mohammed. Islam was spreading rapidly. By 732 A.D., in just six generations, Christians had lost Egypt, Palestine, Syria, North Africa, most of Spain and southern France to the Muslims. These lands were lost by means of military conquest. In Arabia it was even worse—Christian presence was (and has been today) essentially eradicated. The region of North Africa that produced the towering figure of St. Augustine of Hippo (present day Algeria) is now home to arguably the smallest diocese in the Catholic world, (about 300 Catholics). Ironically, it was Augustine who largely developed the theology of a just war and its requirements.

The principal reason why Pope Urban II called for a Crusade in 1095 A.D. was in fact to come to the aid of the emperor and the Byzantine Christians, to help protect Christians who were being persecuted and killed and to reconquer the Holy Land, creating a safe passage for pilgrims. *Deus lo vult* (God wills it) was the people's cry, following Urban's plea for help. Still, it was not to load the coffers of the Church, still less a holy war against people of a different faith. Catholic school children routinely used to learn about the Battle of Tours (732 A.D.) during which Charles Martel (the grandfather of Charlemagne) turned back a massive invading Islamic army, or about the famous naval battle of Lepanto in 1572 A.D., from which followed the feast of Our Lady of Victory, now known as Our Lady of the Rosary (October 7th). If the battle of Tours had been lost, it is possible that all of Europe would have followed in its wake—it was that decisive of a victory for the preservation of Christendom. While all wars are tragic, nevertheless the Crusades did not constitute an unprovoked attack by Western Christians upon the Muslim people.

The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom is an independent, bipartisan, federal body established following the signing of the International Religious Freedom Act into law by President Clinton in 1998. It issues yearly reports. For example, its latest report on Saudi Arabia states: "Not a single church or other non-Muslim house of worship exists in the country. The government privileges its own interpretation of Sunni Islam over all other interpretations." Three years ago on the 10th anniversary of 9/11, Pope Benedict XVI issued a letter, reading in part: "The tragedy of that day is compounded by the perpetrators' claim to be acting in God's name. Once again, it must be unequivocally stated that no circumstances can ever justify acts of terrorism."

Last week, Iraqi Chaldean Patriarch Louis Sako pleaded: "These people were living in their hometowns in prosperity, pride and dignity; in the blink of an eye, they were ousted from their homes, terrified and fleeing on foot in search of a shelter. It is a scene that takes us back to the dark centuries of the past although it has become a

horrific reality of our present civilization!” It is a historical fact that there were excesses in the Crusades, especially by some unprincipled individuals who sought personal gain; no honest Catholic should deny this. But in principle, the Holy Land Crusades were a defensive campaign to protect religious freedom, a concept that was not tolerated by the conquering Islamic armies. Today, 120,000 Iraqi Christians have been uprooted from their historical homeland and up to now the world has largely remained silent. At press time for this column (Wednesday), it appears that the international silence may soon be ending. It’s about time.

- Today’s Feast of the Triumph of the Cross reminds us that ultimately the victory belongs to Jesus– the victory over sin and death. When we feel defeated or downtrodden, we ought to remember this. St. Ambrose reported that it was St. Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, who removed pagan shrines and recovered the relics of the True Cross from Golgotha and brought a fragment to Rome. Behind every good man...
- Next weekend, Catholics all throughout the Archdiocese will join in support of our great Cathedral by participating in the special collection to alleviate the roof debt. Progress has been made in the past few years, but the debt it still stands at \$4.7 million. I urge you to be generous in your support by means of a sacrificial gift. I want you to know of my profound gratitude. Archbishop Ireland was fond of saying that no one should enter these doors without being able to say “It is mine.” Envelopes are in the pews this weekend.
- You won’t want to miss the next installment in our series of Inaugural Organ Concerts. On Thursday September 25th at 7:30 p.m. Janette Fishell, Chair of the Organ Department at Indiana University, will perform an hour-long concert that is free and open to the public. Indiana is one of the nation’s great music schools.
- I received a helpful e-mail corrective from a pathologist in Rochester concerning my inconsistent use of “Muslim” and “Islamic” in last week’s column. The former term refers to individual believers, while the latter to the set of beliefs. As the term Christian refers to both, I missed this important distinction. While I’d love to return the favor to him, my diagnostic skills with esoteric pathologic specimens are a little rusty.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel

Rector