



TRAUMA AND ITS LONG TERM EFFECT – A REFLECTION

During the months of August, September and part of October 2017 I supplied in four parishes in Belfast, Northern Ireland. I have been supplying for a number of years now. In my recent visit I worked in two parishes that I had not worked in before which would be seen as the poorer areas of Belfast. In these two parishes I celebrated a number of funerals where the issue of "the Troubles" came up in each place. What also came up were the issues of alcohol, drugs, poor health, suicide with the number of deaths of people relatively young. It was clear to me that "the Troubles" period of the seventies, eighties and early nineties was an extremely traumatic period for so many with bombs exploding in both the Catholic and Loyalist areas accompanied by many shootings and killings that made people feel unsafe each day of their lives.



When the "Peace Accord" was signed by all the parties in 1997 and then acted on in 2007, it clearly made a big difference to all parties involved in the conflict, leading to people being able to go about their lives in relative safety apart from extremists doing all they can to keep conflict going at all costs. My purpose in writing this is not to look at who was right or who was wrong in the terrible conflict that has been in Northern Ireland. What I have said about being a priest in the Catholic areas of Belfast would also be true of Loyalist areas as well. It is clear to me that after twenty years of relative peace that a number of people on all sides of the conflict remain very traumatised because of what has occurred to them.

As I mentioned earlier this trauma was strongly evident when discussing with families the loss of loved ones as we were preparing for funerals. Families are helped at these times through Priestly Ministry and the Bereavement Teams that are part of every parish. This kind of Ministry brings healing to families, but the quest now is to help people work through trauma in their daily lives and there are no easy answers. Answers will only come with decades of ongoing work in this area to help people work through trauma in a life giving way.

There is another reason I have written this and that is to help us all to see if we act in destructive ways towards other people, the ongoing effects can be so life destroying for others. It is important in my view that when we have a deep respect for others and their lives, then it becomes unthinkable that we act destructively towards them, simply because we respect them as much as we respect ourselves thus fulfilling Jesus' commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. If we act like this we will not hurt others, hence we will help them make a good contribution to the lives of others, which is also a good contribution to one's society as well.

Fr Denis Ryan

*Photo of a peace line in Belfast, separating a Protestant and Catholic neighbourhood from each other.
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