

Democracy

Today, the 15th of September, has been designated by the United Nations as the International Day of Democracy. To quote from the official website:

“This year's theme of democracy and conflict prevention focuses on the critical need to strengthen democratic institutions to promote peace and stability. A more integrated approach to foster resilient societies calls for effective and inclusive democratic governance with respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Resilient societies are able to mitigate disputes through mediation, dialogue and a reasonable degree of legitimacy of their institutions. Developing effective conflict prevention mechanisms and infrastructures provides a foundation to resolve grievances and sustain peace. Processes, such as peace agreements, elections and constitutional reforms, can help maintain equilibrium between competing interests and reduce fragility and the likelihood of organized violence.

Strong leadership to support democracy, strengthen civil society, empower women and uphold the rule of law are conditions that preserve stability and peace.”

Sadly many countries do not enjoy real democracy, and in others democracy is quite fragile and under threat. Many regimes strive to suppress any dissent or opposition. Those of us who write letters on behalf of prisoners of conscience for Amnesty International find that most of the cases relate to those who despite that threat speak out for justice and for the protection of the weak.

Of course democracy does not always work perfectly. And there is a fine line between democratic decisions and mob rule. Yesterday was the feast of the Holy Cross. On one level one can see the condemnation of Jesus as the will of the crowd, of the people, urged on by the Jewish authorities – not exactly a good commendation of apparent democracy.

However, as our Bible reading just now, the Gospel for Holy Cross Day, makes clear (John 3.13-17) our Lord's death was part of God's plan for salvation – for the salvation, the freedom of the whole of humanity. That is why we call that momentous day *Good Friday*. For out of hatred and cruelty came goodness and victory. And we pray that the same will happen for those parts of our world striving for true democracy.

15th September 2017
Kingsley Boulton