

Reflection for the Fourth Sunday of the Church's Year

What is it that our TV, and entertainment media in general, celebrate? The top TV programme of recent time celebrates treachery, betrayal, backstabbing and double dealing. Its very title was 'The Traitors'. Our TV celebrates promiscuity, casual sex, shallow relationships with shows like 'Love Island' and 'Open House: The Great Sex Experiment'. Our TV celebrates violence – hit TV series like Line of Duty and Peaky Blinders, the big-name soap operas, all have plenty of violence. Our TV celebrates the self, the ego – me doing down everyone else, getting my own way and coming out on top.

On Tuesday I attended a Holocaust Memorial Day event and was chatting with the Chair of the Calderdale Council of Mosques, Nadeem Mir. It was he who used the word 'celebrate' in regard to the output of our TV and entertainment media. It is a curious word to use, but a fair one, which makes us think about the influences and values we absorb from our consumption of television and entertainment. Are these things just a 'bit of fun' or a seriously corrupting influence? And of course, even more serious concerns are raised about the internet and social media. The advent of the algorithm has accelerated access to some very unseemly materials - so much so, that beginning with Australia, governments are seeking to curtail access to these things by the youngest of our society.

What is the anti-dote to this celebration of treachery, promiscuity, violence and the ego? It is our faith and our scriptures. Clearly, Nadeem, the Chair of the Council of Mosques, will look to Islam and the Koran. We Christians need look no further than this morning's gospel and indeed the general teaching of Jesus. *"Blessed are the poor in spirit"*, that is "*blessed*" are those not full of their own self-importance, ego and personal ambitions to dominate. *"Blessed are the meek"*, those filled with a spirit of patience and gentleness who do not use forceful confrontation but possess inner strength and wisdom, choosing tact over aggression. *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"*, who hunger and thirst for the good of others, for dignity to be extended to all people, for just solutions in times of tension. *"Blessed are the merciful"*, those who do not harbour hurts, seek revenge or impose harsh solutions to degrade others. *"Blessed are the pure in heart"*, people of good nature, a welcoming and kindly disposition, who see the good and not the faults of others, who accept and embrace those different to themselves. *"Blessed are the peacemakers"*, those who seek to de-escalate and not inflame tensions and conflict and who work for just resolutions to disputes and fall outs.

I had already looked at this weekend's gospel before the chat with the Chair of the Council of Mosques. As he used that word 'celebrate' in respect to media output I knew that this was an insight into preaching the message of Jesus today. We need to 'celebrate' these beatitudes of Jesus in our words and especially in our actions as the anti-dote and challenge to those corrupting values celebrated in our media.