



Holocaust Remembrance Day: 'Dialogue creates connection and understanding'

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As the world observes International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January, the Chair of the Committee for Catholic-Jewish relations for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, Archbishop Kevin McDonald, speaks about the importance of memory, education, and dialogue in creating mutual understanding.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day is marked annually to recall the millions of people who were killed or lived through the Holocaust. The date commemorates the liberation of the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in south-west Poland, which was liberated by Russian troops on 27 January 1945. The day also remembers the millions of people who were affected by terrible crimes committed during conflicts in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

Safeguarding historical record

The theme for this year's 76th International Holocaust Remembrance Day is "Memory, Dignity and Justice". According to the United Nations, "Holocaust commemoration and education is a global imperative in the third decade of the 21st century. The writing of history and the act of remembering brings dignity and justice to those whom the perpetrators of the Holocaust intended to obliterate. Safeguarding the historical record, remembering the victims, challenging the distortion of history often expressed in contemporary antisemitism, are critical aspects of claiming justice after atrocity crimes."

Archbishop Kevin McDonald is the Archbishop Emeritus of Southwark in London, and Chair of the Committee for Catholic-Jewish relations for the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

Memory

Speaking to Vatican News about the importance of memory, the Archbishop said, "it has a particular importance, both for Jews and for Christians and the way in which we remember is actually connected."

He went on to say, "The important thing for the Jews about remembering the Exodus is you're not just remembering a story of liberation; you're remembering how you became a people because it was in being freed and being given the law and taken to their own land the Jews become a people. So, in a real sense it's through memory that you appropriate and understand who you are as a people."

Stressing the importance of dialogue in combatting all forms of anti-Semitism, Archbishop McDonald referred to Pope Francis' views on connectedness.

"If you consider the synodal process that Pope Francis has initiated, he takes the view that wisdom will emerge from listening and through dialogue and conversation... We need to explore our connection, and in dialogue, very importantly, you actually come to know what people think rather

than operating on the basis of what you imagine they might think.”

“Dialogue creates connection; it creates mutual understanding,” he said.

Education

Speaking about the role of education in helping people learn the lessons of the past, the Archbishop noted that education is important because “often we think we know things when we don’t.”

“It’s interesting that some of the dialogues that I’ve been involved in, I realized not only do some people live with caricatures or half truths about what Catholics believe; often Catholics live with caricatures and half truths about other people. The thing about education is, it’s as much about unlearning as about learning.” It’s about unlearning false assumptions and uninformed views and being open and receptive to other people’s understanding of issues,” he said.

The Archbishop underlined that good education “is fundamental for overcoming stereotypes, false assumptions and therefore, developing a real degree of understanding.”

Indifference

In a speech to participants attending the Rome International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals in the Fight against Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Area, in January 2018, Pope Francis noted that “the enemy against which we fight is not only hatred in all of its forms, but even more fundamentally, indifference; for it is indifference that paralyzes and impedes us from doing what is right even when we know that it is right.”

“I do not grow tired of repeating”, the Pope said, “that indifference is a virus that is dangerously contagious in our time, a time when we are ever more connected with others, but are increasingly less attentive to others.”

Addressing the issue of indifference, Archbishop McDonald pointed out, “Indifference is a failure to acknowledge that other people matter, that other situations matter and they matter to us... Indifference really is a form of negativity.”

Source: [Vatican News](#).