

Tuesday Reflection 8th February 2022

When Martin Luther appeared before the Imperial Assembly in Worms in 1521, he is alleged to have declared “Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise”. This set me wondering about what it means to ‘stand’ or to ‘take up a position’.

If we ‘take up a position’ we feel called upon to defend it against possible attack, which then leads to a confrontational mindset, as is well illustrated in the events surrounding the ‘Protestant Reformation’ and all other schisms in the Church with their often horrendous consequences. Rather than defending static positions, we are called to be a dynamic Church, a Church on the move. In today’s first reading at Mass, Solomon prays about God’s “kindness towards (His) servants when they walk wholeheartedly in (His) way” (1 Kings 8:23), and it is this kindness which we are called to exercise towards our fellow-pilgrims on our journey of faith - to walk alongside each other, to engage with each other, to support each other. All of us are part of a travelling community. In our search for meaning and truth there is far more that joins us than separates us. On a journey we have to travel light and tread lightly, not weigh ourselves down with excess baggage. In today’s Gospel, Jesus quotes Isaiah (29:13) “This people only honours me with lip service ... the doctrines they teach are only human regulations” (Mk 7:6), and in another place He criticises those Pharisees who “tie up heavy loads and put them on men’s shoulders (Mt 23:4). On our faith journey we need to get back to basics, to the “covenant of love” (1 Kings 8:23 [NIV]; this is difficult enough, without having to expend energy defending questionable positions.

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