



SAINT NINIAN'S HIGH SCHOOL

Holocaust 1945-2020



O Jesus through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer thee all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Thy divine heart and particularly for the intentions of Our Holy Father, the Pope.

TO BE FREE, YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF HATE

This year Holocaust Memorial Day falls on Monday 27th January 2020. The Day has a special significance this year as it is the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. There has also been recently an increase in incidents of anti-semitism.

Across the United Kingdom, events will be held to mark this milestone in history and to express the hope that such evil may never happen again. This year, the theme chosen for Holocaust Memorial Day is **“Stand Together”**. Those who are targeted by persecutors and racists find protection when others stand together in solidarity with them and challenge what is being done. During the Nazi era, Jews were saved because people who were not Jewish stood together with them, hiding them from the Nazis, giving them new non-Jewish identities or even speaking out against the genocide at the risk of their own lives. Many Jewish children escaped death because they were given refuge in the UK by families who were willing to shelter them.

Genocide does not come out of nowhere. As soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933, they began to pass laws which deliberately promoted divisions in German society. ‘Aryan’ Germans were encouraged to separate themselves from their Jewish neighbours. Jews were targeted and prohibited from taking a full part in German life. Discrimination against them became normal. By the time that war broke out in 1939, Jews were already being taken away by the SS and the German Police. A culture favourable to death camps and the Final Solution had been carefully fostered by the Nazi state.

A little Polish town, more a village really, of just a few thousand souls, called Eishyshok. Jews lived in Eishyshok and its environs for more than 900 years. They were farmers, they were trainers, they were teachers, they lived all those centuries amicably with their neighbours. They had been part of Eishyshok from the moment there was an Eishyshok. Then in 1941, the Germans came. On the 21st September, 1941, the Jews were rounded up. On the 25th and 26th September, the Jews of Eishyshok, one by one, were shot. In two days, 989 men, 1,636 women and 821 children were murdered. Only a handful survived; one of whom was a

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four year old girl who managed to run away and hide until the end of the war. Eventually she found her way to the United States, became a historian. Her name was Yaffa Eliach who spent seventeen years reconstructing the history of Eishyshok and wrote a moving book about it, called *There Once Was a World*. And this happened in village after village, town after town, until the Germans decided it was all too inefficient and they built the extermination camps of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and Sobibor and Belzack. But what puzzled Yaffa, was that no-one in Eishyshok said a word. There were no protests before it happened, none when it happened, and none after it happened.

And so it was in Bosnia amongst the Serbs and the Croats and the Muslims. And so it was in Rwanda amongst the Hutus and the Tutsis. Families who had been friends for a lifetime became enemies almost overnight and started killing one another. In Rwanda, 800,000 people were murdered in the space of 100 days.

Watch the short clip of the film, *A Hidden Life*. Based on real events, from visionary writer-director Terrence Malick: the story of an unsung hero, Franz Jägerstätter, who refused to fight for the Nazis in World War II. When the Austrian peasant farmer is faced with the threat of execution for treason, it is his unwavering faith and his love for his wife Fani and children that keeps his spirit alive.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qJXmdY4IVR0&feature=emb_title

The sheer scale of the Holocaust can sometimes overwhelm us. On September 11th, 2001, three thousand people died in the attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the worst terrorist incident in American history. During the Holocaust on average, three thousand Jews were murdered, every day, for five and a half years. If we were to observe a minute silence for each of those victims, the silence would last more than eleven years.

ANTI-SEMITISM

Holocaust Memorial Day is an opportunity to learn about those affected by genocide around the world and take action for the future. In recent years, the number of hate crime offences recorded by the police in the UK has been increasing. We have a crucial role to play in changing the unacceptable language and behaviours that stir up racist attitudes and promote hatred. Such change is brought about through actions - if certain groups are being excluded, set out to change that by finding out more about their way of life and begin a dialogue. Jesus is one who brings light to outsiders living in darkness and in the shadow of death. By standing together with those who are being excluded because they are different, we behave in a Christlike manner. Like Jesus, himself, we bring light and hope into their lives.

And let us never think it could not happen again. In some form or another, it is happening again and we are witnessing on our TV screens in one part of the world after another and tomorrow, who knows where. That is why we have to work at building bridges across the abyss that might otherwise separate people of different races and faiths. Creating communities, like our school where we celebrate, instead of feeling threatened by diversity, where we recognise the dignity of difference, where we understand that one who is not in my image is still in God's image, even if his colour is not mine, or culture is not mine, even if his religion is not mine. And we understand that the religious challenge is to see and never forget or lose sight of the trace of God in the face of all who are members of our school and local community.

To be free, you have to let go of hate. There is no other way. The appearance of anti-semitism is always an early warning sign of a dangerous dysfunction within a culture, because the hate that begins with Jews never ends with Jews. Wherever there is hate, freedom and truth dies. Which is why each of us, especially teachers, have to take a stand against the corrosive power of hate. All it takes for evil to flourish is for good people to do nothing.

“There is no greater defence of human dignity than the phrase from the first chapter of the Bible that dared to call the human being ‘the image of God’.”