

It has been said that, though history does not repeat itself, it certainly does rhyme. More academically and more ominously, the philosopher George Santayana is reputed to have said, "Those who do not learn history are doomed to repeat it."

Eighty years ago on the night of November 9th, there were riots in Germany. Because of the amount of broken glass on the street, the night is remembered in history as *Kristallnacht*, "the night of crystal." Synagogues were torched and Jewish business destroyed. The Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in Berlin was burned and photos of the ruins have become icons of the horrors to follow. On that night 100 Jews were killed. After that night over 30,000 Jews were arrested and government restrictions on Jews became increasingly harsher. The supposed cause for the riots was "patriots" responding to the assassination of the Nazi diplomat Ernst van Rath by a seventeen year old Polish-German Jew in Paris.

Nearly eighty years after *Kristallnacht*, an American hater of Jews in Pittsburgh brought an assault weapon and hand guns to the Tree of Life Synagogue in Squirrel Hill, Pittsburgh, PA. Shouting "death to Jews," he killed eleven worshippers, among who were three octogenarians and one 97 year old. This occurred at the end of a week in which bombs were mailed to prominent political figures in the US.

In a country where mass shootings are quite literally a weekly occurrence, it is easy to become numb to the violence and write it off as another crazy person. That would be a big mistake. Words and actions have effects. Those familiar with Nazi Germany found the torch carrying, anti-Jew shouting neo Nazi demonstrators in Charlottesville, VA, eerily similar to the Party Rallies held in Nuremberg, Germany, from 1927-1939 - torch processions and all.

Anti-Semitism is a recurring cancer in Western society and culture. Recognizing the role it played in the anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish rhetoric in the past, the Catholic Church in Vatican II rejected all forms of anti-Semitism and it has been declared a sin. Every pope since John XXIII (d. 1963) has condemned anti-Semitism.

Like any cancer, vigilance is extremely important. We can never assume that the hateful fires of *Kristallnacht* are out forever. They can tragically flare up at any time. Vigilance requires awareness. We must be aware both individually and communally that anti-Semitism is a sin. One cannot hate Jews and be a good Catholic or Christian at the same time. While one may not be able to draw a direct and casual connection between Charlottesville and Squirrel Hill, it is naïve in the extreme to consider the two events merely coincidences.

Times of great division, times of racial hatred and times of authoritarian governments throughout the world are times which have historically been fertile grounds for anti-Semitism. With Pope Francis and his predecessors all Catholics need to stand against anti-Semitism and anything which nurtures it in our communities and nation.

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