

**Bruce Kent**, Vice President of Pax Christi, gave the following address after the Mass of Thanksgiving for the Beatification of Franz Jägerstätter at Westminster Cathedral last night.

Dear Friends

I promise not to keep you very long before we all go off to celebrate in another way in the Cathedral Hall.

The recent events in Linz and in St Radegund have been something of a miracle. Those of us who went in 1975 to St. Radegund to find out more about this brave man Franz Jägerstätter would never have believed that in what, in church terms, is a very short time he would be called a martyr and beatified. That progress is a miracle on its own if any one is looking for miracles. You all know the details of his life and of the amazing, lonely courage shown both by him and his wife. In case there are those here who don't, Franz Jägerstätter was an Austrian farmer, the father of a young family, who refused to fight for Hitler or to take the unconditional oath of obedience. He was executed in 1943.

What is his message for us today? I move at once to the wise words written recently by Bishop Schwarz of Linz and Bishop Scheuer of Innsbruck. Their perspective is the future. They do not want Jägerstätter to be seen as quaint piece of history - as happens in the case of quite a few Saints. This is what they said:

"It is your situation that is being dealt with here, it is your motivation that is at issue, it is your God that is under debate. What part does sacrifice play in your own life? How seriously do you take the question of whether there is something in your life so big that you would, if necessary, be willing to die for it?"

In other words. when does the time come for all of us to have to say 'No'?

Our 'NO' here in Britain will not lead to an execution. But it will cost promotion, popularity even some loss of liberty and certainly hard work. Why?

The world we live in today is in many respects out of step with the world of the Gospels. The two Kingdoms do collide in values and life styles.

Today it is accepted that there is no limit to personal wealth.

Not by us.

Today it is accepted that you can make and sell whatever you want.

Not by us.

Today playing the investment market without responsibility for the conditions of those who work is thought normal.

Not by us.

Today it is thought reasonable to have two or even three homes while thousands are homeless.

Not by us.

Today it is usual to believe that peace comes from threatening others with weapons of mass destruction.

Not by us.

Today it is hardly noticed that as an answer to the problem of crime we lock up and forget 80,000 people, many uneducated and mentally ill.

We notice and we care.

Most of all we are people who will not accept the militarisation of our world - which spends over a trillion dollars a year on war and its preparations - and yet still bewails the problems of poverty.

This is not peace. 'Peace' said Pope Paul VI 'is the fruit of anxious daily care to see that everyone lives in the justice that God intends.' It is towards that true peace, not bogus peace, that Jägerstätter leads us. His witness challenges our Church to rethink its attitude to war, peace, violence, and justice in practice. This means re-ordering our priorities of time, money, property, education and resources. No more statements, just action please.

By chance or providence, as I was thinking about what to say tonight someone sent me an e-mail. It was about a Turkish conscientious objector, Osman Murat -Ike, who has spent some 2 1/2 years in prison for his refusal and is now out in some kind of legal limbo despite a ruling from the European Court of Human Rights. There are about 60 others in his country in prison or awaiting trial. Turkey is not alone. There are many other countries in which refusal of military service means prison or even death.

I told the man who sent me this e-mail, and I hope he is here tonight, that I would help if I could. Then came another e-mail, this time from Osman himself. Said he 'I am delighted that you are going to commemorate Franz Jägerstätter, whose life has been an inspiration for me for many years, and I am deeply honoured by the possibility of being mentioned next to him'.

The Jägerstätter story spreads in ever widening circles.

In many parts of the world there will be those who have been inspired by his example to say their own 'No'.

Some refuse military taxation. Some refuse to take part in all wars. Some are selective conscientious objectors. Let me also praise those in the military who have, with great courage, refused to take part in illegal wars like Iraq or in illegal occupations - like the young Israelis who refuse to serve in the occupation of the Palestinian West Bank. Perhaps we should make Franz the patron of all conscientious objectors everywhere.

May 15th in the annual international day in honour of conscientious objectors. Every year in London we have a ceremony for all COs in Tavistock Square, by a great granite stone memorial to them. We list those by name who have said 'No', century by century.

I understand that May 21 is to be Franz's feast day. Perhaps we should be a jump ahead of Rome and make May 15th our own day to remember him here and in every cathedral and church up and down the country.

Too long has the reproach been that Christians have been people of war. In the spirit of Jesus Christ, who told us to turn the other cheek and to forgive 70 times 7, let's now prove the opposite. We should make May 15th a day for people of all faiths - and faith in humanity is also a faith - to come together to say collectively that we can and must live together in peace and that war belongs to a barbaric past.

'No' to the past. 'Yes' to the future.

What a wonderful way to remember the witness and courage of 'our' Franz.