

Where Was Christ While ISIS Murdered Christians Yesterday?

Suicide bombers attacked two Coptic churches in Egypt yesterday, killing 44 people. It was the deadliest day of violence in the country in decades. ISIS has claimed responsibility for both bombings.

The first attack was in the northern city of Tanta at St. George's Church. The explosion killed 27 and injured 78 others. The explosive device was planted under a seat in the main prayer hall close to the altar. Shortly afterward, at St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Alexandria, 16 people were killed and 41 were wounded in a suicide bomb attack.

Where is God when such atrocity strikes?

An all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God would know the attacks would happen before they did. He would have both the compassion and the power to prevent them. Yet he did not.

We need to remember that God did not cause these attacks—terrorists did. God gave them the same free will he gives to us all. He intends us to use our freedom to love him and each other (Matt. 22:37–39). When we use our freedom for evil instead, he could remove the consequences of our sin. But this would, in effect, remove our freedom. Our purpose as humans made in God's image (Gen. 1:26–27) would be defeated.

Instead of removing our freedom and its consequences, our Lord chose to redeem them.

On Palm Sunday, Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem in direct fulfillment of messianic prophecy (Zech. 9:9), knowing the authorities would respond by seeking his arrest and execution.

On Monday, he overturned the money changers' tables, further provoking the wrath of his enemies. On Tuesday, he defeated them again and again in public debate. On Maundy Thursday, he waited in the Garden of Gethsemane as they came to arrest him. On Good Friday, the One whose power calmed raging seas and raised the dead allowed Roman soldiers to nail him to a cross.

Here's the point: our Lord entered our fallen condition and took the consequences of our freedom on himself. He did not remove our freedom—he redeemed it. As a result, by the sanctifying, indwelling power of his Spirit, human free will can be used to advance his kingdom for his eternal glory and our eternal good.

For example: As Jesus grieves with the victims in Egypt and their families, he calls us to grieve. As he ministers to their broken hearts by his Spirit, he calls us to minister to them by our intercession. As he brings spiritual awakening to the Muslim world, he calls us to advance spiritual awakening in their culture and ours through prayer, worship, and witness.

It is human nature to ask why sinful, broken people act in sinful, broken ways. Such questions are completely understandable and even biblical (Is. 1:18). But our Father then calls us to move from speculation to action, from asking why tragedy strikes to asking how we can help its victims.

When the second ISIS bomber neared St. Mark's Cathedral, a security officer saw him and tried to hug him to shield the crowd moments before the explosion. This brave man gave his life so others could live. He served the victims and emulated Jesus.

How will we do the same today? {eoa}