

Sermon: In the Name of the Father and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Recently, in the USA the Republican president Donald Trump, ordered to ban, seven Muslim-majority nations, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Iraq, with dual nationals included in the ban. President has also advocated building a wall along the USA / Mexican border, to keep immigrants out; this ban, quite exceptionally, provoked Pope

Francis, therefore, in response he advocated, that rather than erecting walls between peoples and Nations politicians, should be finding ways, of building bridges. Some of us are still struggling, with the question, should the United Kingdom remain part of the European Union or not? Whether it does or it doesn't, what should be our future relationship with Europe and the rest of the world? And very much bound up with these questions, what should be the relationship between the constituent geographical, and sociological parts of the United Kingdom? Let's put Donald Trump aside, what is our attitude towards mass migration into Europe by those, who are fleeing persecution, in their own country? Are we a bridge builder or an erector of walls? Perhaps the honest answer to this is that it depends on the context and the perspective from which we are viewing issues. Nothing illustrates this, better than the twin issues of the refugee crisis, and security. Just imagine if someone is fleeing from persecution or a war Zone, of course he wants to get himself and family to a place of safety. If someone is fleeing from an economically poor area, of course he wants to get himself and family to a place of opportunity. If someone is a people smuggler, he wants to perpetuate myth, that keeps people coming to certain countries, and will keep his business, in human trafficking flourishing. If someone is a terrorist he wants to take advantage of any opportunity, that enables him to get, to the soft underbelly of his enemy to cause maximum damage. If someone is already living in a country, that people are desperate to come to, just as the Archbishop of Canterbury himself has acknowledged recently, it is so natural that he will feel a certain amount of concern, as to whether his community will cope with this influx of people or not. Walls, borders, and boundaries can preserve the status quo, and in so doing enable people, for right reasons or for wrong, to feel secure in their collective and individual identities. But sometimes there is a perception that these issues need to be challenged. For example, the wall erected between Jew and Palestinians seems to those of us, here in the West, a desecration of the Holy Land. To Jews, living in the West Bank, it is viewed somewhat differently. The line running from east to west, dividing Cyprus, from Turkish occupied Northern Cyprus, does not make sense to the rest of the world, and has been viewed differently by Turkey. The so called 'peace line' dividing Protestant and Catholic communities in Belfast might prove a temporary solution, to the problems, but again to the rest of the world views, there does seem to be a sense, in which the erecting of walls represents a form of oppression, and the breaking down of walls, liberation. The breaking down of the Berlin wall was an iconic moment, marking the end of communism, but the unification of Germany put a huge financial burden on former West Germany, as it sought to support its former East German citizens. The breaking down of the walls of suspicion and the striving to erect bridges of understanding, is certainly not the easy option. It must be worked at, and it comes at a cost. In the early church the first organisational problem had to deal with, was, whether to allow Gentiles to become Christians without also becoming Jews first. The physical implication of this was whether male Gentile followers of Christ, should be circumcised or not? In other words, should a bridge be built between Jew and Gentile believers, or should a wall, be erected to preserve Judo-Christian purity? St Peter's experience of his vision in which all those foods previously perceived by Jews, as unclean, were now, declared, clean, at Cornelius' house, what Peter interpreted, as nothing less than a Gentile Pentecost when he preached the Gospel, Gentile converts were just as authentically Christian as Jewish converts. Now we might think, that although its interesting point in the history of the church, this has little relevance to us today. But this text used by those advocating women's write of ordination

and by those people who spoke against racism. It is a text that was, is and will remain hugely relevant to break walls and barriers. Christianity really is about building bridges and not erecting walls. In terms of our faith, the bridge builder is Christ himself. In his ministry, he sought to minister to those, who were shunned, by the religious authorities of the day. He sought to empower the powerless, and challenged the powerful. In death, his own powerlessness, was rooted in unconditional, selfless, sacrificial, limitless forgiving love. And that is the love he commands his followers to live their lives, by example, a love which shapes everything we do, everything we say and everything that we are. It is, and will not be easy, nothing ever worthwhile comes easily. But it is Christ's way of preaching, teaching and practicing, and therefore it must be our path and way too, which we undertake, not in our own strength, alone, but empowered by God's Holy Spirit. In his death and resurrection, Christ has built the greatest bridge of all, on the cross of Calvary, at the moment of his death, the veil of the temple was torn apart, from top to bottom so that all can enter in the most holy place. Let us give thanks to Jesus for helping us to build bridges within family, friends and nations too, let's ask for His help as we have a few moments of silent reflection