

They were such wonderful people that those who saw them on television, found it easy to admire them, to respect them, to love them and to want what they wanted. One team of surgeons in Germany refused to operate, saying that it was too risky. But another team of surgeons, in Singapore, said, "We will try." When they went into the operating theatre, people in every country were praying for them. The operation was far harder than the surgeons thought it would be. In 29 years, the brains had become fused together and cutting through them, blood vessel by blood vessel was very slow and dangerous work. After 50 hours of surgery, both the twins died. The world wept for them and for the death of their hopes.

We can think of death as a failure and reason for despair – but think of what these two had achieved. When they were born, two of 11 children, their parents, who were poor farmers, abandoned them. I expect they thought they would die anyway – and could not cope with them. Handicapped children have a hard time in most poor societies. They were rescued by a doctor and his family who brought them up and, later, their birth family made contact again. By that time, the lives of these two were the opposite of failures. They were educated young women. I think I heard somewhere, that they had university degrees. They developed separate and different personalities. They could express themselves well. They had a strong religious faith and nice smiles and laughs. When you and I saw them on television, they made us feel ashamed at the fuss we sometimes make over OUR problems! What were our problems compared to theirs? They have been an example and inspiration to many people. Who can say that their lives were a failure or reason for despair?

Moreover, if we believe in an after-life, it is especially happy to think of the ill and handicapped being in heaven, where there is no illness or handicap! My mother got Multiple Sclerosis, when she was in her 50s. It was an illness that meant that her legs did not work properly. She had been an active woman, delighting in

rushing around, as I rush around, and she got very frustrated when her legs dragged so slowly. She fought the illness and was only in a wheel-chair, permanently, in the last year of her life and only in bed, for the last week. She used to say, "I am looking forward to RUNNING around heaven!" She died 24 years ago and I am sure she is still enjoying running around heaven.

Let us think of these two fine young women in that way too. Let us not think of their poor bodies in the ground but their spirits with new and heavenly bodies that are not handicapped in any way. Think of their joy in being able to look at each other, face to face. Think also of the joy of all believers as they enjoy the presence of the God they have loved and obeyed in their lives. Death is part of life. We do not need to be afraid of it. We should not seek it – or risk it foolishly - but, when it comes, it can come as a friend. God bless you.



## **LEADERS – GOOD AND BAD - 1** *Assembly 96 – July 14<sup>th</sup> 2003*

Yesterday, I spoke to you about two remarkable young women – who were they? The Bijani twins from Iran, joined at the head, who wanted so much to be separated, took the great risk of a long and dangerous operation – but both of them died. You probably did not see that I was beginning to talk to you on the subject of 'Leadership'. Leaders are people who make us look upwards, who inspire us to do better, who change our behaviour, who make us think new thoughts, whom we come to respect and follow. Sometimes, they speak where many listen, in the newspapers, radio and television – and in the mosques and churches and temples. Leaders can be bad and good. They can use their power for good or evil. Some leaders are those who have authority over

businesses, groups and nations. Sometimes they have created the organization that they lead. Some have grabbed power by unfair means but some have been elected or appointed in some way. Some have come from royal or leading families who have been given certain traditional powers. Some leaders just happen – like the Bijani twins. I find leadership a very interesting subject. Many people want to be leaders but not everyone deserves to be a leader.....

One of the reasons it is very interesting to study history is to study the lives of the great people of the past who have been leaders. I grew up at a time when people were very aware of the way in which Adolf Hitler had come to power – and used it. I just remember the great speeches of our war-time Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. He spoke to us and the allies across the world through radio and he was a master of words. He gave people courage when it looked as though the evil of Naziism would spread all over the world. Remember that the people of Europe had appeased Hitler – they had let him invade certain countries. The British even signed a peace treaty with him, thinking, “Let him have another piece of another country. He will then stop.” But he did not – he wanted world power. I think that the attitude of the British – and others - to Saddam Hussein was influenced by the fear that, if we did not stop him, he could become another Hitler. Maybe we were wrong but it is very risky to do nothing about evil people – to say, “Leave him alone. It will be all right in the end.” That was not true about Hitler. He had captured the hearts and minds of the German people. Afterwards, they were full of shame for how he had deceived them. When Germany was defeated and occupied, the Allies made the people of the towns and cities of Germany that were near the concentration camps visit these camps and see, for themselves, the terrible things that had happened there and the thousands who lay dead. Some of them had said they did not know what was happening in these camps. Afterwards, none of them could say that. In Iraq now, they

are uncovering the bodies of thousands of Iraqis killed by Saddam Hussein and people are weeping for the evil he has done. Leaders can be very evil people.

Winston Churchill knew the power of words. He very cleverly used to mis-pronounce the word ‘Nazi’ – the name of the party that Hitler led. The word ‘Nazi’, when properly pronounced, sounds powerful and threatening. Churchill did not say ‘Nazi’, he said, “Narzy” – and talked about ‘the Narzy party’ which, of course, sounded very like the word ‘nasty’. Instead of imagining thousands of unconquerable soldiers high-stepping down the streets on parades, the word ‘narzy’ made us think of something nasty, crawling in the drains! This was very rude but good war-time psychology. In your own history, too, there were leaders who gave your people courage in your War of Independence and young men who gave their lives, fighting for their language and their country – people we remember and honour every year on Ekushey February 21<sup>st</sup>.

I want all of you, this week, to think about what makes a great leader. They come from all classes of society and live all kinds of lives and, of course, each one of us, in our little way, can be a leader – a good example that can help and inspire others. God bless you.



## **LEADERS - GOOD AND BAD - 2** *Assembly 97 - July 15<sup>th</sup> 2003*

This week, we are thinking of leaders – good and bad. I think that most of you already know a lot about leadership because some of the pupils in your class have a natural gift for leadership. Some of them lead you to do good things and some of them lead you to do bad things! Leadership is a natural gift but, like beauty and artistic