

The terrorist attacks on US soil two years ago this month were frightening. The anthrax scare only made things worse. We still do not know who was doing it, why or even how. Was a foreigner responsible? Were specific victims targeted?

At the time, I remember feeling hunted – like someone was trying to get me, even though I was a non-combatant. We learned the unbearable lesson that enemies were trying to exterminate ordinary American people, like us.

Others have had this feeling before. During the Second World War, 6 million Jews were killed; ordinary Jews lived in fear that someone was out to get them. Others have been the victim of personal crimes like vandalism, theft of property, racial prejudice or rape. The feeling of being hunted is all the more frightful if the victim has done nothing to provoke the attack. You can sort of understand why someone would attack a person who had already committed an act of violence. But when you spend your day chauffeuring kids, working at a desk or volunteering at church, why should you be a victim? Why would an enemy pick on you? It makes no sense.

Today's first reading is perhaps the most sinister passage we ever hear at church. The lector reads wicked plots against a just person. The just one had opposed the wicked for breaking the law, and claimed that they could do no harm because God would come to the rescue. The wicked say, "Let's find out what will happen. With revilement and torture let us put the just one to the test. Let us condemn the just one to a shameful death." Just to see what happens. Today's first reading presents unchallenged the argument of the wicked, and when it's over, we all say – on automatic pilot – "Thanks be to God," as if that was good news.

Today's first reading foreshadows the plot against Jesus, a just person beset by the wicked. The good news is not in the thoughts of the wicked, but in the subsequent action of God. In the end, Jesus underwent a shameful death. God raised him from the dead, but God did not preserve Jesus from being hunted, nor keep him from death.

We will sometimes suffer injustice, indignity and personal attacks. But those experiences are neutralized in the light of salvation. The wicked can rob us of what we hold dear in this life, but they cannot steal eternal life.