

RUCGC WINDOW DEDICATED

A memorial window recognising the service and sacrifice of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross was dedicated by the former Archbishop of Armagh, the Lord Eames in the cathedral on Sunday 12th October. He was petitioned by His Grace, The Duke of Abercorn representing HRH Prince Charles, who is the Patron of the RUCGC Foundation. The text of the Dean's sermon follows

Thank you for supporting the RUC GC Foundation's initiative in presenting this wonderful window to the Cathedral - and on behalf of the Cathedral and the church, I thank you for your generosity.

What I want to do simply this afternoon is to place this wonderful window within the context of this cathedral and community.

This is, as cathedrals go - a recent one. There has been worship here since 1776 when Henry, The Earl of Donegall, gave this site and the Parish Church of St Anne. Anne - the grandmother of Jesus - Anne the name of Henry's wife.

Coming up to the turn of the last century, with the growth of the city it was felt that a cathedral was needed and in 1904 this main body of the cathedral was consecrated.

I want to give you five words each beginning with the letter "P" which are relevant to this occasion.

PILGRIMAGE

Cathedrals by tradition are centres of pilgrimage - and I don't know how, but this cathedral church was designed similar to the pilgrim churches of Europe - such as you would get on the pilgrim road to Santiago de Compostela. It is somewhat unique in Ireland. The idea is that pilgrims come through one door - go around behind the altar - and there could be the relics of a saint for veneration - and they would leave down the other aisle - without disturbing the worship going on in the centre.

The area behind the altar - the ambulatory - literally the walk way - is associated with pilgrims and prayer - and that is where your new memorial window is situated.

It is the final window of a series on the fruits of the Spirit - The window of Peace, preceding those of patience, charity and faith. And in the centre of this sequence is the wonderful window of the Good Samaritan - the only feature of the old Church now included in the cathedral.

PRAYER

I keep saying here - that the walls of this cathedral are washed daily with prayer. And that is a simple exercise in which I invite you to join as often as you are able. We are open from 10 to 4 mid week - come in your own time.

I want you, after you look at this window today, to go from here, thinking about this cathedral and this RUC GC window as a focus of pilgrimage and prayer. It is our hope that you will come again and again to this cathedral as a pilgrim and to say a prayer for peace; to pray for those with whom you served with honour, to pray for those whom you miss and who will always be irreplaceable in your lives, and for those who will carry injuries for the rest of their lives as a result of their service.

And I would suggest that your prayers to God will also include prayers of thankfulness for the overwhelming majority of the members of the RUC who down through the entire history of the force, day by day, regardless of provocation, insult or propaganda, upheld the law impartially and professionally, in peace, in war and in troubled times.

Pray also for those who died of natural causes during their service. Only God knows what

pressures their service placed them under. They too are missed by those who loved them.

Pray for the work of the Foundation, that this record of service by the RUC is upheld positively. Their service and sacrifice must never be forgotten, and never to be forgotten is the fact that the RUC was not disbanded, but incorporated into the new police service for this community. Prayerfully uphold this superb record.

PAIN

I think I may surprise you when I say that cathedrals are also places of pain. At the most basic and profound level, we have two interdenominational services of healing in this cathedral each week. Countless numbers of people have come here over the years bringing their own pain, or friends who are in pain, or to seek prayers for others.

In the ambulatory there is also a series of memorial books recording the names of neo-natal and still births. Hardly a week goes by without us encountering people standing there who are in pain.

And part of the history of this cathedral is about communal pain. The cathedral spans the sinking of the Titanic, two world wars, Korea, the air accidents at Kegworth and the Mull of Kintyre. Services have been held here marking each of these events. Add to that services of thanksgiving for the lives of various people including several members of the RUC.

Several parts of this cathedral are testimony to those periods and events. When you came into the cathedral this afternoon you walked through a war memorial - the west front is the memorial to Ulster's dead of the first World War, and the stone for that was laid by the grandfather of our principal guest this afternoon.

Each of the pillars in this cathedral have names - the pillar of theology, of industry and so on. There is the pillar of courage - given by the mother of a young officer killed during that terrible carnage of the first war, and to the left of the main doorways there are two more pillars carved in memory of young officers also killed. These various memorials and your window are stark testimony that in every generation peace and basic freedoms have to be defended and maintained, and that the cost of that is very high indeed.

It involves pain and suffering - not just by those killed and injured but by their comrades, colleagues and family. A son, a daughter, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, is irreplaceable. And that loss can only be enfolded. That pain will continue. I am a sceptic about the term closure.

Last week a former police officer, a member of our Cathedral community, brought me the order of service for the National Police Memorial Service held in Liverpool Cathedral. Not for the first time did I take an hour and sit reading the list of the RUC dead contained in it. Despite being involved as a parish clergyman, and as a member of the Police Authority, and as a friend of several of those listed - I still feel deeply for those I met in such circumstances.

It is not simply the loss of life - that is almost too trite, too economic, a phrase. Most weeks when I was dropping off our son at the school gate I would see another young fellow in the same form - his red hair was easy to spot. His RUC father was only 27 years of age when he was murdered. A father who never knew his son. When I reflect on the joys and the ongoing relationship of fatherhood - the boys are now 33 years old - I think of those like Brian who were robbed of their children's lives. The colleague who was also killed on that same night was laid to rest within sight of his brother's grave - another RUC officer, an IRA victim of the 1950's.

And so I could go on - pastoral conversations in such circumstances never leave you, they are deep and profound, and for that I thank God, because the people I met in such circumstances taught me more than I could practice in terms of forgiveness. And they taught me a lot about pain, deep, searing, soul-wrenching pain - visible in the eyes of wives, mothers, children, relatives, friends and colleagues.

Few people recognise that a cathedral is built as a symbol of immense pain. It is built in the shape of a cross. The pain of the scourged, mocked and crucified Christ. The pain of

the loving God who sent him. The death of goodness, when a great darkness enveloped the land.

Days like Enniskillen, Omagh, La Mon and so on - a litany of dark, dark days, in a very small community. Experiences that none should have had. Sights that none should have to witness.

Many of you here today - experienced a day like that. A day of immense pain, a day of darkness, and there have been repeats of such which caused you to relive your grief and pain.

The only thing I can say to you is that God knows what you went through and go through. And I hope as you visit this memorial window, or think about it, the knowledge of God's pain at Calvary and the pain which Jesus suffered for each of us, will continue to sustain you, and will give you comfort as you continue coping with living without a dearly loved one. A major fundamental element in this window is the base of the cross - the greatest symbol of pain.

PEACE

Last year on 9/11 this Spire of Hope was dedicated and the preacher at the service was the Bishop of New York. Earlier that day he and I robed and conducted a short service in the Foundation's memorial garden at Brooklyn. Standing around us were counter-terrorist officers from all over the free world, attending a course organised by the PSNI. They included officers who had been on duty in New York and Washington on 9/11.

The quest for peace is international and it is costly. Next month we will welcome at an annual service here, the family of the Royal Irish, and serving members who have just finished another tour in Afghanistan. Peace costs at home and internationally. And it is all part of the same struggle. 9/11 redefined terrorism in the USA, in the free world, and gave a necessary boost to the peace process here. On 9/11 terrorism in Ireland lost its false righteousness. There was no longer any room for prevarication in Ireland or Irish America. We here in Ireland are perhaps the only beneficiaries of 9/11.

This window highlighting service and sacrifice, highlighting the hope which the resurrection of Jesus brings, contains several of the key biblical teachings about the work of Christ on the cross. That work is for the healing of the nations. That work is for the turning of swords into ploughshares at home and abroad. That work is the tearing down of walls of division at home and abroad. That work is essential for the dove of peace to settle, for the covenant of God with people symbolised by a rainbow, to become a reality.

The symbols of the RUC rightly take their place against such a wonderful summary of the work of the cross and the resurrection from the dead.

Men and women who served with honour keeping the Queen's peace.

Men and women who were quietly and courageously willing to take the risks involved in doing that.

Men and women worthy of the award of the George Cross.

Men and women who were not defeated in maintaining peace, in ensuring that the rule of law prevailed.

That soul goes marching on. Their values were not destroyed by bomb or bullet. It was a high price - but the peace-makers and peace-maintainers won through. Thanks be to God.

And in that spirit, I wish simply but sincerely to pay an inadequate tribute to all those colleagues and relatives who have managed to remain free of hatred and spite. Your example is quite breath-taking in its dignity. It is of God.

Without that restraint, without that approach, peace would have been unobtainable. By your behaviour and your dignity - even though your hearts were broken - you gave an example to this and other communities throughout the world, and you honoured your dead in your enablement of the peace they died protecting.

PRIDE

Pride is seldom recommended from Christian pulpits. But there is a justifiable pride. God could say "This is my beloved son..." And God is proud of what Jesus achieved at Calvary.

When you stand before this window - stand before it in prayer, bring to it your pain, bring to it your ongoing contribution to peace, and stand there with pride. Pride in a police service which was second to none in its professionalism, in its dedication, in resisting temptations and provocations. Pride in a police service which at great cost kept anarchy at bay and by doing so, enabled political conversions to happen.

Today there are no bombs in Donegall Street. We have gathered here and worshipped freely. We have been the guests of those who in time of war and time of peace ensured basic freedoms - and foremost in Northern Ireland's record with the RIR and UDR are the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Thank God for them, and in God's name remember them with pride. Stand tall.

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