

## Community of the Cross of Nails International Gathering

The Litany of Reconciliation is prayed daily in Coventry Cathedral at noon, but on Fridays it is prayed in the ruins of the old Cathedral. Last Friday I was privileged to take part in that act of penitence during the International Gathering of the Community of the Cross of Nails. "Father forgive": those powerful words etched on the east wall of the chancel open to the sky resonated around the ruined sacred building which is itself a potent reminder of the destructive power of which humanity is capable but also of the love and mercy of God which we are called to share with others.

Also in the ruins is the moving statue by Josefina de Vasconcellos entitled Reconciliation. This depicts a man and a woman facing each other in an embrace. The symbolism is of a bridge, which is what reconciliation is essentially about: a bridge between people, a bridge between differences.

Throughout the time together in the Gathering we were reminded again and again that we live in difficult and challenging, even dangerous, times. This is true of so many parts of the world, not least those countries from which the delegates came or in which they were working: the difficulties facing Christians in Iraq and other parts of the Middle East; continuing tensions in Burundi; continuing struggles for reparation in post-apartheid South Africa; the challenge of extreme right-wing factions in the eastern part of Germany; political divisions in the United States and in our own country.

At the same time it was encouraging to hear the efforts of those working for reconciliation, working to break down the divisions, the barriers. This is an ongoing task often encountering setbacks and failures, and yet essential if peace is to be achieved and maintained.

One particular dilemma was raised in a number of the presentations, though. Reconciliation seeks to bring opposing parties together and the mediator needs to have dialogue with both sides in order to bring them together. In many conflict situations there is good and bad, right and wrong on both sides.

And yet there are scenarios where the views and actions of one side are so extreme as to be considered morally objectionable by right-thinking people. In such circumstances dialogue may not be possible. We see this with groups such as ISIS, but also with right-wing factions in Germany and elsewhere who are so set in their ideology that they do not wish to enter into dialogue.

The two options of advocacy, of standing up what for what is right, and of reconciliation, may appear to be mutually exclusive. And yet that does not mean we should always give up on reconciliation. It may well be a slow process with little apparent results but it is critical to creating a better world. As we heard in our Bible reading just now (2 Corinthians 5.14-21) it is also central to our Christian faith, to what we believe to be God's plan and will for his world.

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