

Darkness and Light

Last Sunday we commemorated with the aid of powerful images and words Holocaust Memorial Day. The extermination of millions of Jewish people and others in the 1930s and 1940s was arguably one of, if not the darkest moments in human history. The elimination of so many innocent men, women and children is so difficult to take in. And the later acts of genocide in other parts of the world of which we were so powerfully reminded are equally incomprehensible. How could human beings exact such extreme cruelty and hatred on their fellow human beings.

Then on Wednesday we commemorated Charles the First, King and martyr. Whether he can be considered a Christian martyr or instead a victim of his own flaws is of course a valid matter of debate. What is unquestionable, though, is that that period of the Civil War in the seventeenth century was a very dark time for our country.

One can argue that we are living in another dark time now, with the apparently irreconcilable divisions over Brexit in both Parliament and in the country at large. I suspect that feeling of darkness, of uncertainty, of fear even, affects people on both sides of the debate.

We do indeed live in a dark world. For that is not to mention all the painful conflicts raging in many other parts of our world today. It is very easy to become despondent.

And yet as Christians we have a different perspective. Tomorrow the Church celebrates the feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, Candlemas. Our Bible reading (Luke 2.27-32) was those powerful words of the aged Simeon to Mary and Joseph in the Temple, in which he proclaims Jesus as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel”. Elsewhere throughout the New Testament our Lord is proclaimed as the light, the true light, the light shining in the darkness.

We live in a dark world, yes. But we also see light: the light of God revealed in his Son Jesus Christ. It is that light on which we gaze, that light onto which we hold, that light that sustains us and gives us hope. It is our charge as Christians to make that light of Christ known to those who see only darkness, to share our experience of that light with others.

It is the light of Christ that guides us in the task of peace and reconciliation – a light that shines paradoxically from the cross, but also in the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour. Our prayer is that that light may truly shine in us.

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