

***THY KINGDOM COME CELEBRATION***  
**COVENTRY CATHEDRAL: 25 MAY 2017**

*You are witnesses of these things.*

We have just heard the account in St Luke's Gospel of our Lord's Ascension. It is now forty days since Easter and in another ten days we shall be celebrating the great feast of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles. Once again this year we have been invited to come together as brothers and sisters in Christ from different Christian traditions across the city to pray the Lord's Prayer as part of the initiative called *Thy Kingdom Come*.

I am very grateful to Bishop Christopher and to the Dean and Chapter for welcoming us to Coventry Cathedral this evening and for hosting this joint celebration on the 55th Anniversary of the consecration of the new cathedral in 1962. This is a powerful sign of our commitment to continue praying and striving for the unity of the Church and it offers us an opportunity to demonstrate the measure of unity in faith which we believe we already enjoy together.

As we gather in the heart of Coventry we continue to hold in our thoughts and prayers the city of Manchester. At 11 o'clock this morning a minute's silence united us with those who died or were injured on Monday, and we pray tonight in solidarity with their grieving or anxious families. When we pray *thy kingdom come* in the Lord's Prayer it is with the conviction that the justice and peace of God's reign can truly enter into such terrible situations, strengthening and upholding those who suffer.

The ways of destruction and violence have no part in God's loving plan for mankind. They can never arise from a genuine expression of faith in God and this is a conviction that we share with all the faith communities. Evil and cowardly acts of terror, such as we have witnessed this week, seek to undermine the stability that only mutual understanding, respect and loving acceptance can bring to our cities and our own neighbourhoods.

Coventry Cathedral been a witness for many years to the power of the Holy Spirit to enter into the darkness that evil and sin draw down upon us and to shed the light of Christ, bringing healing and reconciliation. I also witnessed this very powerfully last week in Eastern Germany, in the city of Erfurt where Martin Luther joined the community of the Augustinian Friars and where he became more and more convinced of the need for reform within the Church. As you know, this year is the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Reformation and the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (known as ARCIC) had chosen to meet in Erfurt in recognition of this important anniversary.

One of the remarkable things about the Reformation in Erfurt – a result of the city's system of civil governance - was that from the beginning Catholics and Lutherans lived side by side, relatively peacefully, with the forty churches of the city equally divided between them. Furthermore, forty years of soviet-style atheistic communism brought all the churches closer together and ecumenical links and friendships are strong across the city today.

(I am glad to say that the ARCIC meeting in Erfurt managed to produce the final draft of an Agreed Statement - on the Church as local and universal communion – and that we now hope that the Anglican and Roman Catholic authorities will agree to its publication next year.)

ARCIC visited the Augustinian Friary in Erfurt. It is now a Lutheran conference centre which became a member of the Community of the Cross of Nails some years ago. Parts of the friary had been destroyed in a bombing raid during the Second World War but in a crypt that survived there is a replica of the Cross of Nails. The Coventry Litany of Reconciliation is prayed there week by week and the friendships that grow from reconciliation continue to flourish and to bring peace.

Today, as we reflect on our own experience of faith, we have a fresh opportunity to stand together in the presence of the risen Christ and hear him say to us: *you are witnesses of these things*. Our ecumenical journey has enabled us to come face to face and witness to the presence of Christ in one another and in each other's Christian way of life. The Scriptures and our common calling to evangelize also demand that we trust one another enough to follow the Lord side by side.

A growing understanding between our traditions and a deepening affection in Christ have enabled us to come together and pray. Fifty years ago it would have been impossible to imagine Anglicans, Catholics and Christians of many traditions meeting here at Coventry Cathedral and witnessing joyfully to our faith on the streets of the city.

In his letter *Evangelii Gaudium - The Joy of the Gospel* – Pope Francis recognised the unity that comes from witnessing together to the risen and ascended Christ and the Pentecost gift of his Holy Spirit:

*How many important things unite us! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us...Through an exchange of gifts, the Spirit can lead us ever more fully into truth and goodness.*

If we allow ourselves to be transformed, with and through each other, we can give a more credible witness to Christ and we can respond more faithfully to his parting words: *that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations.*