

An Enduring Hope at Easter

Of the many images that were transmitted of the devastating fire which consumed Notre Dame Cathedral two in particular stood out for me. The first was the crumbling of the famous spire, eroded by flame which fell through the roof of the church and into its the transept. The second image, hours later, was the sight that met the fire fighters as made their way into the building: the large cross above the altar, shining resplendently in the smoke and embers of the still smouldering Cathedral.

This image - to take the words of John's Gospel – of the light that shines in the darkness and which the darkness cannot extinguish – has become the iconic representation of the tragedy of Notre Dame. Just as with Coventry Cathedral and its own Charred Cross, which was discovered in the bombed-out ruins in November 1940, the image of the Notre Dame cross represents both a symbol of grave destruction and also one of abiding hope.

The fire at Notre Dame is a reminder not only of the journey taken by Christians during Holy Week but also of its ultimate destination. In the days before Easter we commemorate the journey made by Jesus from his celebrated entry into Jerusalem – welcomed by the crowds chanting his name – through to the days of betrayal by one of his closest friends, condemnation by the crowd who had cheered him on, abandonment by his followers who fled in fear, crucifixion by an unjust ruler and ultimately the triumph of love and hope in His resurrection.

For those disciples who followed Jesus the day after his death on Good Friday must have seemed like a time of uncomprehending despair. Having left their homes, their families and devoted themselves for three years as Jesus' closest companions, they found themselves not only in mourning but in utter bewilderment, searching for meaning in the midst of the darkest tragedy. It's a place known to many who have suffered bereavement, long term illness, personal tragedy or who have seen the suffering of those they love.

But the final word did not belong to Death. In being raised from the dead on the day we now celebrate as Easter, Jesus Christ showed that love, God's love for us, is stronger than death and that no situation, however seemingly tragic or hopeless is beyond redemption, or can sit outside the transforming love of God. The symbol of the cross – once a byword for shame and criminality, an instrument of torture and humiliation – had become recast as a symbol of enduring hope.

Two thousand years on the sight of the cross at the very heart of the ruins at Notre Dame is a reminder that at those times when it seems darkness is rising – whether in our nation or in our lives – the light and hope provided by the sure and certain promise of the resurrection shines through. Or as the message of Easter has it: in the midst of tragedy, when all seems lost, the resurrection of Jesus means that Love wins.

A blessed, peace-filled and joyous Easter to you all.